Obama's Middle East Foreign Policy: Decline or Rise of the Middle East Importance

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Abstract

When Obama became the U.S. president, new policy toward war in Afghanistan and Iraq, that costs the U.S. dearly, was declared to respond to American's needs and interests. The "Pivot" or "Rebalance" of power moved toward a larger region instead of the Middle East, e.g. the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region. In this light, the paper's main question is "What is the importance of the Middle East in Obama's foreign policy? And the response is "Obama's policy toward Middle East is in decline for the rise of East Asia importance." During Obama administration, the decline of the U.S. power and the precieved threat of china and muslim radicalism forced him to deal with Iran as a regional power in the Middle East, and China as a regional power in the East Asia. Therefore, in a coherent strategy, Obama insisted to keep negotiations with Iran as the greatest strategic challenge in the Middle East. Accordingly, nuclear talks with Iran and also talks with Persian Gulf countries through Camp David in 2015, can be regarded as the U.S. willingness in GCC– Iran engagement. Simultaneously and more importantly, *pivot to Asia* is a "full spectrum force" i.e., utilizing a smaller and more agile and advanced military force posture along side with economic strength to fulfill U.S. economic need i.e., jobs, export and investment in order to sustain U.S. global leadership in manage the rising China. Pivot to Asia is a formula for the 21th century that will empower U.S. in 22th century.

Keywords: Obama, national interest, leadership, pivot to Asia, the Middle East, the East Asia.

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Introduction

When Obama became the new U.S. president, one of the primary concerns for many observers was restoring America's image in the eyes of the world. During the eight years of the Bush administration, the favorability ratings of the United States had declined dramatically. According to U.S. declaratory policies, politicians were fatigue of war in Afghanistan and Iraq that costs U.S. dearly. Thus, Obama announced his new policy, a larger and long-term role, which was turning its attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region, as the world's fastest growing region, and home to more than half the global economy, to create jobs and opportunity for the American people.

In this light, it is very important to know Obama's foreign policy toward the Middle East, a place full of conflicts and several wars. In order to analyze this issue, the research's main question is "What is the importance of Middle East in Obama's Foreign policy?" And minor questions are "What is the U.S. historical view toward the Middle East? And "What are the components of Obama's foreign policy toward the Middle East? Is there a strategic shift or a tactical move from the middle East to the East Asia?" In order to respond these questions, defensive realism Theory through Qualitative Content Analysis Method will be applied. Layne argues "preponderance" is a realist strategy that subsumes two distinct approaches: offensive realism and defensive realism. Offensive and defensive realists define U.S. interests identically and agree broadly about the threats to them. Offensive and defensive realists disagree,

however, about the relative salience of "hard" versus "soft" power in the strategy of preponderance, and consequently, they have disparate views of the means required to sustain the strategy. Defensive realists assume that the international system provides incentives only for moderate, reasonable behavior. They argue that states seek to maximize their security, not their power, and that security is actually plentiful in the international system. The spread of democracy, economic interdependence, and the development of international institutions can help accomplish this task. In contrast, offensive realists believe that states should attempt to maximize their relative power to gain security. They believe that in a harsh, competitive world, security rests on hard power (military power and its economic underpinnings) and it is best to be number one (Layne, 1977).

According to Stephen M. Walt, in the balance of threat, states' alliance behavior is determined by the threat they perceive from other states. Walt argues that the more other states view a rising state, the more likely they are to view it as a threat and balance against it (Rendall, 2006). Defensive realism predicts greater variation in internationally driven expansion and suggests that states ought to generally pursue moderate strategies as the best route to security. Under most circumstances, the stronger states in the international system should pursue military, diplomatic, and foreign economic policies that communicate restraint (Taliaferro, 2000-2001). As noted, some defensive realists argue that there is an offence–defense balance which almost always favors the defense, and thus works to dampen security competition. As such, that balance is a force for peace. Some defensive realists, however, allow for significant variation in the balance between defense and offence, and argue that offensive advantage is likely to result in war, while defense dominance facilitates peace (Mearshimer, 2006).

The methodological approach of the paper applies is content analysis, which is refers to the implied meaning of expressed words. Out of two kind of content analysis, qualitative & quantitative, the

paper implements a qualitative approach. Content analysis may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective analysis of message characteristics. As a matter of fact, content analysis summarizes rather than reports all details concerning a message set. (Neuendorf, 2002, pp.1 & 15) In my paper the "Middle East" and the "East Asia" are the key words and the related ideas of Obama administration would be pinpointed and highlighted through his speeches and interviews since 2007. Then the relation between these words and concepts will be analyzed to find out the main ideas of Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East.

I- Historical Review

The growing involvement of the United States in the affairs of the Middle East is a consequence of America's increasing global power. In the first four decades of the 20th century U.S. interests in the Middle East were almost entirely missionary, philanthropic, educational, and commercial. After 1945, the Middle East became vital to U.S. security, as a staging area for a possible war against the Soviet Union. After the demise of the Soviet system in the early 1990s, the sole remaining superpower, the United States wields unparalleled power and influence over Middle Eastern affairs. However, in Iran and the Arab world of the 1950s and 1960s, secular nationalists resisted American pressure to side with the West in the Cold War, while Arab nationalists in particular tried to defeat or contain Israel. By the 1970s, secular nationalism was a declining force in Arab and Iranian affairs, increasingly giving way to political Islam, whose rejection of Western influence was far more profound (Yaqub, 2003).

Taking the dramatic events of 1979 and the early 1980s, the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Camp David peace accords, Israel's invasion of Lebanon, and the rise of Hezbollah-as its starting point, a sea change occurred in the politics of the region, from secular Arab nationalism to Islamist-based politics.

Thus, the politicians in the US came to the conclusion that the Middle East's problems cannot be solved and "must be managed or endured" instead (Kurtzer, 2008).

After 1945, America's primary objectives or national interests in the region were securing Western access to Middle Eastern oil, preventing the Soviet Union from reaping political or strategic advantage in the area, and ensuring Israel's security (Yaqub 2003, Corm 1998, Hudson 1996). Other U.S. interests are continued commitment to lead Israel's integration into the region (Chomsky, 1987); preventing the region from becoming a sphere of influence to any other developed nation (Brotka, 2014); to limit Arab radicalism and sustain the moderate and pro-Western regimes in the Middle East and the [Persian] Gulf (Shlaim, 1988); the avoidance of major regional war (Jabber, 1980); Moreover, Puritan concept of Palestine, the first Promised Land, and "faith factor", has made American public opinion more sympathy toward Israel and against Islam which is regarded as the world's most violent religion (Lawrence Davidson, 2002; Baumgartner, Francia & Morris, 2008); and the Middle East geographic location importance and U.S. military bases in the region (Hahn, 2005, pp.1 & 137).

In this light, the United States' energy security policy was preventing a major disruption in world oil supply by building and maintaining a large emergency oil inventory, the strategic petroleum reserve (SPR) and military protection- some say the "sanctuarization"- of the [Persian] Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia, (Hudson, 1996) and for growing concentration of world oil supply on the Middle East reenergize a policy of "access to non-Middle East oil" (Noel, 2006-7). It meant Obama would have to use the new U.S. flood of shale gas as a political weapon in his Middle East approach (Cooke, 2013).

Hence in our historical review, since the World War II there are two U.S. trends toward the region: a pro-Arab and the pro-Israel policy; Truman, for instance, took a consistently pro-Zionist line;

Eisenhower took a pro-Arab one. Kennedy like Eisenhower and Nixon regarded Israel as a strategic asset. Johnson moved closer to Israel. Carter moved to pro-Arabs and Reagan took both. George Bush moved to Israel's enhanced security. Clinton was the pro-Israel lobby. Bush (Jr.) undertook a pro–Zionist policy (Noel, 2006-7; Shlaim, 1988; Hahn, 2006; Kuniholm, 1987; Hudson, 1996).

In sum, the growing involvement of the United States in Middle East is a consequence of America's increasing global power, and now with a relative decline of power it is recommended to rebalance the policies based on national interests. In assessing the policies of different U.S. presidents till 2007, two areas are of special importance: Arab Middle East and Israel–Palestinian conflicts and the importance of Israel's security and the different approaches of the US Administrations in this regard. And [Persian] Gulf countries and the importance of the secure and free flow of, without any disruption, and independent from the region's oil. In this light, the first threat was Soviet Communism and revolutionary Arab Nationalism and after the Cold War, rise of political Islam and terrorism such as Al-Qaida. The key point in threat assessment in the region is Security rather than Economy.

II- The Obama Administration

Hass and Indyk reviewed the history of the Middle East and U.S. behavior and offered recommendations to Obama for further actions. Based on their assessment, the U.S. influence in the region is in decline and U.S. policymakers need to avoid two mistakes, while seizing two opportunities: the first mistake would be an over reliance on military force and the second mistake would be to count on the emergence of democracy for pacifying the region. The opportunities, according to Hass and Indyk, are: more intervention in Middle East's affairs with nonmilitary tools. In this approach Iran is a difficult case. Accordingly, the U.S. government should open, comprehensive talks, without preconditions, to address Iran's nuclear program and its

alleged support of terrorism and foreign militias. Diplomacy also needs to be revived in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The goal at this point would be not to bring the parties to Camp David or anywhere else but to begin to create the conditions under which diplomacy could usefully be restarted. The second opportunity involves the United States' insulating itself as much as possible from the region's instability. This would mean curbing U.S. oil consumption and U.S. dependence on the Middle East's energy resources, goals that could best be achieved by reducing demand (Hass, 2006).

> "Meanwhile, rather than abandoning the effort entirely, the Obama administration should strike a more sustainable balance between U.S. interests and U.S. values. Of course, getting Russia to support what the United States regards as its vital interests in the Middle East may require tradeoffs on issues that Moscow considers vital. And with China to make Chinese leaders understand that a crisis with Iran will have adverse consequences for China's economy and, as a result, the country's political stability" (Hass & Indyk, 2009).

Mead argues that "the economic crisis of 2008 and the country's unhappiness with the Bush administration gave Obama an opportunity to be heard by populist voters. It seems reasonable to infer that Obama's foreign policy instincts, like his domestic policy ideas, are rooted in the New England tradition that blends a form of moralism tempered by pragmatism, a faith in strong government, and a commitment to leading by example" (Mead, Foreign Affairs, 2010).

Obama behavior is like Carter in the 1970s, coming from the old fashioned Jeffersonian wing of the Democratic Party, and the strategic goal of his foreign policy is to reduce America's costs and risks overseas by limiting U.S. commitments wherever possible. At this strategic level, Obama's foreign policy looks a little bit like that of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. In Afghanistan and Iraq, he hopes to extract U.S. forces from costly wars by the contemporary equivalent of the "Vietnamization" policy of the Nixon years. He looks to achieve an opening with Iran comparable to Nixon's

rapprochement with communist China (Mead, Foreign Policy, 2010). Obama in his speech in Iowa in 2007 gave a warning shot that his whole approach to diplomacy was going to be completely different from George Bush: "Direct diplomacy, without preconditions. ... Not the Bush-Cheney diplomacy of talking to our friends and ignoring our enemies. Real, direct, and sustained diplomacy." Then, in 2008 speech on foreign policy at the Wilson Center in Washington, Obama echoed a "new era of international cooperation." He said "It's time to deepen our engagement and to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, so that we help our ally Israel achieve true and lasting security, while helping Palestinians achieve their legitimate aspirations for statehood" (Obama, Foreign Affairs, 2007; Orfalea, 2008).

The main point of Obama's Doctrine is a pragmatic international engagement and taking leadership other than hegemony of the world and also to have "Economic Outlook" and then security one to the world's phenomena's; somehow to make a sound relation between the two. Despite what its critics say, the Obama administration has two strategies: the first strategy, multilateral retrenchment, was designed to curtail the United States' overseas commitments, restore its standing in the world, and shift burdens onto global partners. The second is focused on counterpunching. More recently, the Obama administration has been willing to assert its influence and ideals across the globe when challenged by other countries, reassuring allies and signaling resolve to rivals (Drezner, 2011). In his December 2009 address on Afghanistan Obama stated that, "Our prosperity provides a foundation for our power. It pays for our military. It underwrites our diplomacy." "Second, the United States was overextended in all the wrong places, fighting two counterinsurgencies and a war on terrorism in the Middle East while neglecting other parts of the globe" (Obama, 2009). Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, explained the administration's strategic vision to The New Yorker. "If you were to boil it all down to a bumper sticker,

it's Wind down these two wars, reestablish American standing and leadership in the world, and focus on a broader set of priorities, from Asia and the global economy to a nuclear-nonproliferation regime" (Drezner, 2011).

Scholars have discussed such a grand strategy and naming it offshore balancing. Layne argues that there is an emerging consensus among realists that the US should abandon its hegemonic strategy and adopt an offshore balancing strategy. Related to Middle East increasingly, it is recognized that US aims in the [Persian] Gulf /Middle East - and the American military presence in the region - have fuelled terrorism, and caused Iran to self-defensively seek to acquire a nuclear weapons capability (Layne, 2009).

Obama in the first presidential primary in Iowa in March 2007 concerning Middle East said: "I'm not running to conform to Washington's conventional thinking. I'm running to challenge it…" He went-as a part of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, not on an AIPAC junket. He insisted on seeing several Arab countries over ten days -Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, as well as Israel. Obama stressed two things he had learned: the strange congruence of Jews and Arabs in their needs and wants, and the primacy of empathy: "What keeps striking home to me is how similar everyone is, and yet the degree to which we can find differences to fight wars over." Not earth-shaking, but it is another example of Obama's modest attempt to get Americans to try on Palestinian shoes, to even admit that Palestinians have shoes, in fact, have feet (Orfalea, 2008).

He attended an AIPAC dinner in New York and said:

> "One of the enemies we have to fight-it's not just terrorists, it's not just Hezbollah, it's not just Hamas--it's also "Cynicism". Our Middle East policy lives and dies on that word. Obama in Amman gave his solution to this cynicism; an ultimate resolution is going to involve two states standing side-by-side in peace and security and that the Israelis and the Palestinians are going to both have to make compromises in order to arrive at that two-state solution" (Ibid).

Moving forward, though, Obama said that we are going to continue to work with both parties to recognize what I think is ultimately their deep-seated interest in a two-state solution in which Israel is secure and the Palestinians have sovereignty and can start focusing on developing their economy and improving the lives of their children and grandchildren (Obama, Time, 2010; State Department, 2011). He added for the Palestinians, efforts to delegitimize Israel will end in failure:

> "Palestinians will never realize their independence by denying the right of Israel to exist. As for Israel, our commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable. But precisely because of our friendship, it's important that we tell the truth: the status quo is unsustainable, and Israel too must act boldly to advance a lasting peace. The fact is a growing number of Palestinians live west of the Jordan River. Technology will make it harder for Israel to defend itself. A lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples. I'm convinced that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians would rather look to the future than be trapped in the past" (Ibid).

In National Security Strategy in 2015, depicts the road map for settlement of Middle East issues and commitment to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution that ensures Israel's security and Palestine's viability:

> "In the Middle East, we will dismantle terrorist networks that threaten our people, confront external aggression against our allies and partners, ensure the free flow of energy from the region to the world, and prevent the development, proliferation, or use of weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, we remain committed to a vision of the Middle East that is peaceful and prosperous, where democracy takes root and human rights are upheld. Resolving these connected conflicts, and enabling long-term stability in the region, requires more than the use and presence of American military forces. For one, it requires partners who can defend themselves. We are therefore investing in the ability of Israel, Jordan, and our [Persian] Gulf partners to deter aggression

> while maintaining our unwavering commitment to Israel's security, including its Qualitative Military Edge" (National Security Strategy, 2015).

In this light, the stability and peace in the Middle East and North Africa is required by reducing the underlying causes of conflict i.e., Iran:

> "America will therefore continue to work with allies and partners toward a comprehensive agreement with Iran that resolves the world's concerns with the Iranian nuclear program. We will support efforts to deescalate sectarian tensions and violence between Shi'a and Sunni communities throughout the region. We will help countries in transition make political and economic reforms and build state capacity to maintain security, law and order, and respect for universal rights" (Ibid).

Obama's early actions indicated the likely importance of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Shortly after the formation of the new Israeli government headed by Netanyahu, George Mitchell announced that the Arab Peace Initiative would be incorporated into the Administration's peace policy (Peleg & Scham, 2010). Congress, which is strongly represented in the Republican Party, has served as a brake on presidential peace initiatives for decades. However, this factor seems to have moderated thus far in Obama's term for several reasons: a) the economic crisis has forced all parties to put greater emphasis on pocketbook issues; b) significant elements of the American Jewish community are dismayed by the current Israeli government and may not be as opposed to peace initiatives involving Israeli concessions as they were in the past, as indicated by the surprisingly quick ascent of the liberal Jewish group J-Street to prominence; c) the evangelical Christian community is much less cohesive than it has been for the last decade and a half, and some of its parts, especially its youth, are questioning the old verities; d) evangelicals, though not the Jewish establishment, are far less influential in a Democratic administration (Ibid).

Despite of this trend, there was a friendly visit by Vice President Biden to Israel in order to emphasize the strong US-Israel relationship. While Biden was in Jerusalem, the Interior Ministry, announced the construction of 1600 new housing units. Instead of accepting Netanyahu's partial apology, Obama issued a stern warning to the Israeli Prime Minister and demanding that he take 'specific actions' to show he is 'committed' to the U.S.-Israel relationship and to the peace process itself (Ibid). This was repeated in 2015; Netanyahu speech in congress that was demonstrating a great conflict between Obama Administration and Israeli government & Majority Republicans in Congress.

Obama in its new posture towards the Middle East, has paid attention to the America's core national interests, and even has supported pro-American autocratic rulers, like Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. (Gerges, 2013) In his "Audacity of Hope" book Obama describes himself as a "realist-idealist" that because of "Strategic Restraint" and "U.S. relative decline" has to act in concert with a host of national and international actors (Celso, 2014). Cooke argues that Obama's talks with Iran's new President Hassan Rouhani point to a possible new direction in U.S.-Middle East policy. "Iran is the regional arch-rival of the Saudis and Israelis, who for decades have shared the mantle as the main U.S. allies in the Middle East. The Arab Spring has, along with the ascendance of Russia and China, shifted the geopolitical ground of the region, and the U.S. is trying to maintain a dominant position with a new strategy. This shift, if successful, has the potential to create a political crisis within the U.S. government as well as abroad. Israel and Saudi Arabia, for example, won't quietly accept a diminished role in the Middle East. Israel gave a thunderous response to Obama's Iranian talks. The Saudis, too, have fired missiles, though of the diplomatic type, aimed at the U.S. by refusing a seat at the UN Security Council. The Saudis have also threatened a fundamental break from their long-standing U.S. ally, which in reality means a shift towards Russia and China" (Cooke,

2013).

But Obama in remainder of his term in office put emphasis on finalizing the Iranian nuclear program in order to create a lasting breakthrough in the seemingly intractable Israeli-Palestinian dispute (Gvosdev, 2013) and to have bargaining chip at the presidential election in 2016 for Democrats. In this light, along with his policy of direct talks with Iran without preconditions concerning its nuclear issue, Obama invited [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council leader in 2015 to Camp David. The meeting's statement is very important and should be considered properly. The main points are as follow:

> "1) the leaders underscored their mutual commitment to a U.S.-GCC strategic partnership to build closer relations in all fields, including defense and security cooperation, and develop collective approaches to regional issues in order to advance their shared interest in stability and prosperity; to deter and confront external aggression and threat. 2) The United States and GCC member states oppose and will work together to counter Iran's destabilizing activities in the region and stressed the need for Iran to engage the region according to the principles of good neighborliness, strict non-interference in domestic affairs, and respect for territorial integrity, consistent with international law and the United Nations Charter, and for Iran to take concrete, practical steps to build trust and resolve its differences with neighbors by peaceful means" (Camp David Joint Statement, 2015).

In sum, with the new developments in Middle East and wane of U.S. influence, scholars like Hass recommended Obama to avoid military intervention; more using nonmilitary tools and talk to Iran as a more difficult case; Meanwhile, revive diplomacy to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and insulating U.S. on dependence on the Middle East's energy resources and pivot to the Asia. Obama Administration considered these recommendations.

Apparently, Obama's foreign policy has changed; while formerly the US had to deal with the threat of communism-nationalism, currently threat of Sinologism-Islamism, is regarded as a prevalent

danger and thus requires perceiving Iran as a key player or regional power in the Middle East. And the same treatment should be applied to China as a regional power in East Asia in order to make it a peaceful and constructive player in international scene. Obama's policy is "Smart Leadership", a combination of realist – idealist and Jeffersonian - Hamiltonian approach, which connects national security and economy. It combines fierce policy of protecting interests with pragmatism. He does not retreat from the international scene or bullies countries into submission. He says that we must lead the world, by deed and by example. So, his grand strategy is multilateral retrenchment or offshore balancing and counterpunching, i.e., abandoning hegemonic strategy and have a soft balancing.

In the Middle East instead of keeping the status quo he has chosen changing policy toward a lasting peace in Israel-Palestinian conflict without cynicism. But to achieve security, he is insisting to face Iran as the greatest strategic challenge to the U.S. and Israel in the Middle East and also underlying causes of all conflict. Moreover, in Obama view there are a lot of Arab countries, which are more concerned about Iran developing a nuclear weapon. The recent Camp David gathering in 2015 meant that the GCC and Iran would take a policy of engagement. In this approach the military solution is not an option; using diplomacy, as continuation of Obama's approach, can be considered as "Dual Engagement" in which Iran and GCC (let say Saudi Arabia) need to talk with each other. Obama expected that Camp David forum would eliminate regional obstacles in nuclear talks with Iran, and his regional design also with key regional and rational power like Iran as a serious and underlying threat to the national interest of U.S. and also a threat to Israel. In this light, decreasing tension and solving problem with Iran in the Middle East gives a great chance in transition period during which the US will simultaneously move to the East Asia to manage the rising power of China. Keeping relation with both is like rival-enemy, Iran and China must be cautious not to be defeated by U.S.

III- Strategic or Tactical Shift from the Middle East

China's leaders usually view the Middle East in the larger context of global strategies that can advance national wealth and power. "They see the Middle East as part of a wider region including Central Asia that borders China and shares cultural and religious ties with China's vast Muslim population. From this perspective, Central Asia is China's backyard and the Middle East is a neighbor's neighbor. Equally important, Middle Eastern ports connect with China across long sea routes spanning the Indian and Pacific Oceans where navigation is controlled by American warships that can disrupt Chinese commerce at several choke points in case of hostilities. Thus, by land and by sea, China's lifelines pass through the length and breadth of the Islamic world with the Greater Middle East—including Caspian and Central Asian pipelines—and the Indian Ocean Basin at the centre" (Bianchi, 2013).

American military and diplomatic strategists are acutely aware of the dangers of a more integrated Eurasian landmass, particularly if it is fashioned to suit China's economic and political preferences. Many in Washington fear that China's Eurasian vocation goes far beyond rivaling Russian influence in Central Asia. They suspect that Beijing also seeks to pull the European Community further away from a divided Atlantic alliance, to exploit America's self-inflicted wounds in the Middle East, and to corner the market on Africa's minerals and development projects. Obama's foreign policy team would like to disengage from the string of Middle Eastern failures that has sapped American prestige and influence for more than a decade and shift to the more urgent task of parrying China's expansion in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. (Ibid)

This narration is demonstrating that Chinese politicians are going to maintain and expand their political and economic preferences in the Greater Middle East including Caspian Sea & Central Asia to Indian Ocean and even pull the Europeans away from

Atlantic alliance in order to control the sea routes commerce, pipelines and transit roads in this great region. This kind of Chinese practice I call it pivot to West i.e., to get rid of U.S. encirclement; somehow, against Obama's pivot to Asia (East) which is going to manage rising China. In this light, in 2013, the "One Road, One Belt" plan was declared by Chinese leaders, even though three years after the Obama's pivot to Asia, to fulfill the said preferences transparently. Of course Chinese are not going to leave East Asia. All in all, Obama's pivot to Asia, a forefront plan, is not only a response to China's developments, but also a response to U.S. needs and the East Asia developments that made its shift strategically to the East Asia.

In this light, putting America's fiscal house in order and renewing its long-term economic strength were Obama's priorities in his first term. That meant reducing the nation's commitments abroad, especially in the Middle East, where they had extended beyond vital national interests (Gerges, 2013). Obama announcement of the "pivot to Asia" strategy was a part of Obama's "grand strategy". President Obama in his address to the Australian Parliament on November 17, 2011 termed it as a "broader shift" for the US. He said, "after a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region...As the world's fastest growing region—and home to more than half the global economy—the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority and that is creating jobs and opportunity for the American people" (Muni & Chadha, 2014, p.3)

Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State, in her article "America's Pacific Century" argues that pivot to Asia-Pacific is a strategic turn to the region; to secure and sustain America's global leadership. This turn requires maintaining and advancing a bipartisan consensus on the importance of the Asia-Pacific to our national interests (Clinton, 2011). She states that in Economy, the region generates more than half of global output and nearly half of global trade. Half the world's population & many key engines of the global

economy are there. Obama's goal is doubling exports by 2015 (Ibid). Last year, America's exports to the Pacific Rim totaled $320 billion, supporting 850,000 American jobs. Total export in 2010 is equal 1.2 trillion dollar and in 2013, 1.5 trillion dollar with 475 billion dollar export to Asia (www.census.gov, 2014). And in Security, maintaining peace is to ensuring transparency in the military activities of the region's key players. Our key allies and important emerging powers are like China, India, and Indonesia. Smart execution of a coherent regional strategy for the global of our choices, in shaping and participating in a rules-based regional and global order, is needed (Clinton, 2011).

John Kerry, the present US secretary of state, is also stressing that when the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations are complete, about 40 percent of global GDP will be linked by a high standard trade agreement. Thousands of new jobs will be created in America. Expansion of relation with ASEAN as E3 or "Expanded Economic Engagement" has more business opportunities and jobs. The second variable which is vital to the paradigm shift of US policy is the question of security. In this light, American security and prosperity are closely and increasingly linked to the Asia Pacific. I have no illusions about challenges and nor does Obama, they are more complex than the bipolar system. We need a formula for 21st century that will sustainably power us into the 22nd century (Kerry, 2014). Panetta, then the US Secretary of Defense, on June 6, 2012 stated: "America is at a turning point. After a decade of war, we are developing a new defense strategy - a central feature of which is a "rebalancing" toward the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, we will expand our military partnerships and our presence in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and the East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia. According to the new strategy, the US has planned to deploy 60 per cent of its naval force into the Asia-Pacific region by the year 2020." Earlier, US naval forces were divided in equal proportion between the Atlantic and Asia-Pacific regions

(Muni & Chadha, p.20).

Ashton Carter, US Secretary of Defense, on April 6, 2015 stated that "America's policy of building stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific has succeeded over the years because it's been a strong, bipartisan priority through both Democratic and Republican administrations. The regional status quo will change… to ensure we did not lose ground in this dynamic and important region. Half of humanity will live there by 2050; by 2030, more than half of the global middle class (already more than 525 million and we expect there to be 3.2 billion in the region by 2030) and its accompanying consumption will come from that region; half of the world's GDP, and nearly half of the world's trade (our Asia-Pacific allies, together we represent $25 trillion of economic might, we and our allies; A third of the global economy). The Trans-Pacific Partnership is expected to increase U.S. exports by $125 billion in the next decade, supporting high quality jobs" (Carter, 2015). He added in security section that "the region is home to some of the world's largest militaries, and defense spending on the increase. America's strength is also manifest in our military… Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and our allies in the region have invested over $16 trillion in defense; almost as much as the rest of the world combined spent since 1990, and about ten times more than the next highest spending country, which is China. The United States spent nearly $4 trillion since 1990 just on research and procurement alone, developing thereby an unmatched capital stock; challenges to our technological superiority, it will takes decades for anyone to build the kind of military capability the United States possesses today; innovation and the drive to develop revolutionary technologies" (Ibid).

In this light, the main stipulated objective in the U.S. firsthand documents is to secure and sustain U.S. Global Leadership. This leadership will be fulfilled in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia by U.S. economic and security interests linked to this dynamic region.

Thus, an underlying U.S. balance of military capability and presence and greater clarity of Chinese strategic intentions in its growth of military power will maintain peace, stability, the free flow of commerce, and U.S. influence. (Defense Strategic Guidance, 2012). In this regard, American leadership is a global force for good and enduring national interests, i.e., "the security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners; A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity; Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and A rules-based international order advanced by U.S. leadership" (National Security Strategy, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that this major shift is a bipartisan consensus. By the time the George H.W. Bush (I) administration was concluding its term, the indications of China's rise had started emerging unmistakably. In its last National Security Strategy statement in 1993, the Bush-I administration wondered if the US should "support, contain or balance" China's rise. Clinton administration answered this question by seeking and encouraging China's integration and active participation in "regional security mechanisms to reassure its neighbors and assuage its own security concerns". As a result, the Clinton administration aimed at building a "New Pacific Community" based on strong US presence in the region, capable of deterring "regional aggression". President Bush's (II) Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice envisaged creating a regional balance in the Asia-Pacific based on the prospects of major Asian players being supported by the US to deter China from playing a "negative role". Rice in her answer to a question on China at Sophia University in Japan in March 2005 said:

> "So knowing that China is a new factor, knowing that China has the potential for good or for bad, knowing that it will one way or the other be an influence, it is our responsibility to try and push and prod and persuade China towards the more positive course...So as we look to China's life, I really do

believe that the U.S.-Japan relationship, the U.S.-South Korean relationship, the U.S.-Indian relationship all are important in creating an environment in which China more likely to play a positive than a negative role" (Binnendijk, 2014, pp.8-10).

The decision by the United States to rebalance or pivot its foreign and national security policy focus towards Asia does not take place in a vacuum. It is the result of significant changes in the global strategic environment. There are other reasons as follow:

1. Economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region is breathtaking. "The 21 economies in the region account for a combined GDP of $39 trillion, or 56 percent of world economic output. Asia is exporting huge quantities of goods to Europe and the United States and is in turn becoming a giant consumer market for U.S./European products. The region also has half of the world's population and some of the largest military forces worldwide" (Ibid, pp.205-206).

2. Most trend studies indicate that the United States is in relative decline, raising questions about the future role of America in the world. "Global Trends 2030 assesses that the United States will hold just under 20% of total global power by 2030, a decline from about 25% today. This is less the result of American decline and more the result of the rise of others. By 2030 no one country will be a hegemonic power" (Ibid, p.4).

3. Europe over the past decade has created a high degree of complacency about security issues. "Russia's armed occupation and annexation of Crimea may well change that sense of complacency. The history of Europe is a history of warfare and division. During the 1990s, Europe experienced turmoil in the Balkans which NATO helped stabilize and it saw the expansion of NATO to the east. Most trend studies have suggested continued stability in Europe with a focus on recovery from economic recession" (Ibid, pp.7-9).

4. Global power is shifting from the transatlantic nations to the East and South.

"Global Trends 2030 projects that by 2030 Asia will have

> surpassed North America and Europe combined in terms of global power, based on GDP, population size, military spending, and investment in technology. China's power index alone as measured by the NIC surpasses that of Europe in the next few decades and surpasses that of the United States by 2045. China's actual defense budget for 2012 was estimated by the U.S. Defense Department to be between $135 billion and $215 billion, with an annual growth of nearly 10% over the past decade" (Ibid, pp.9-10).

5. Europe is in interest to access to pivot. "Europe, too, has shifted more attention to Asia, often bilaterally. But Europe's impact on Asia is more limited. So, it is suggested that the American pivot should be "with Europe." A "new trilateralism" uniting the nations in North America, Europe, and Asia in an effort to solve global problems that affect each of them, to integrate China and others into the existing international system, and to create institutions in Asia that improve settlement of disputes by rule of law" (Ibid, p.ix).

In sum, the strategic shift to Asia-Pacific in U.S. declaratory policies is the result of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, bringing 60 present Navy military to East Asia, and robust economic development there. All in all, US military and economic power is necessary in securing and sustaining its global leadership. In this regard, the other developments like security complacency in Europe and the shift of global power to the East, especially the fact and figures we which were mentioned about the "Importance of Asia", has accelerated this move.

Considering these two variables, i.e. economy and military, the Global Trends Report demonstrate the U.S. relative decline in future; however, the same report acknowledges the fact that U.S. is still in power and its pivot or rebalancing to Asia is going to reinvent the international system. This is a smart policy, to prevent a peaceful rise of China as a rival power which is carried out by, harnessing the sea routes, energy and goods needed by China. In this line, containment policy is changed to cooperation and competition, and hedging

probable rotations or pivoting the allies and friends and emerging power in the region to the orbit of China. It is crystal clear that U.S. has delayed to steadfast implementation of its collective pivot to Asia policy. Conversely, China as a patient dragon has utilized the opportunities, U.S. engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, in East Asia; economically and militarily.

Conclusion

The paper examined Obama's foreign policy toward the Middle East after the declared new policy of Pivot to Asia; this policy was the result of fatigue of war in Afghanistan and Iraq and because of American's needs. The paper attempted to respond to the main question of the research "What is the importance of the Middle East in Obama's Foreign policy? Through Defensive Realism theory and by qualitative content analysis method, I find out that even though the Middle East- a place full of conflicts and several wars- is important to the Obama Administration, the new realities speak of vast potentials in Asia-Pacific. The growing engagement of U.S. in the Middle East was a consequence of America's increasing global power. Currently with a relative decline of power, the US will rebalance its policies based on national interests. The continuous U.S. national interests in the Middle East, e.g. the importance of oil (securing and controlling free flow of oil and no disruption), Israel, terrorism, political Islam, moderate Arab States, geopolitics and military bases are among the key concerns for the United States. Formerly, the expansion of Soviet Communism and revolutionary Arab Nationalism and after the Cold War the rise of political Islam and terrorism like Al-Qaida & ISIL, are perceived as major threats to US interests.

Obama Doctrine in general is direct diplomacy, without preconditions, which reduces America's costs and risks overseas and to have "economic and security outlook" to the world's policies. Obama as a realist-idealist has veered between democracy promotion and preservation of core strategic interests. In the Middle East in

particular challenges the status quo and wanted to have change. Susan Rice in NSS 2015 depicts the road map for settling the Middle East issues: ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution; dismantling terrorist networks; confronting external aggression against US allies and partners; ensuring the free flow of energy from the region to the world. Meanwhile stability and peace in the Middle East and North Africa also requires reducing the underlying causes of conflict or to have a comprehensive agreement with Iran. During Obama's period the threat of communism-nationalism was replaced with the threat of Sinologism-Islamism, i.e., to manage Iran as a key player or regional power in the Middle East, and also to manage China as a regional power in the East Asia. In order to face Iran as the greatest strategic challenge, U.S. came to have direct talks in recent nuclear energy issue with Iran. Moreover, the US insisted on engagement between the [P] GCC–Iran in Camp David forum in 2015, to remove military solution to the conflicts and replace it with diplomacy. This approach can be regarded as "Dual Engagement." Obama expected that Camp David forum would eliminate regional obstacles on Iran's nuclear talks. Although, Iran factor in the last year of presidency and election in 2016 is a golden goal utilizing for the winning of Democrats.

In this light, Pivot to Asia policy is a broader shift for the purpose of U.S. secure & sustaining its global leadership, a strategic and long term turn or pivot to new realities. U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and the East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia; From Pacific Region to Indian Ocean. Despite military budget reduction, Obama keep insisting that pivot or rebalancing will not come to the expense of Asia-pacific. Pivot is a coherent regional strategy for the global of U.S. choices; it is designed based on rules on regional toward global order. In military it means bilateral security with alliances, regional security arrangements and broad –based military presence in the region. It is a "full spectrum

force" with a smaller and more agile force and advanced capabilities.

Meanwhile, economic strength will make U.S. strong enough to lead the Nations by engagement in East Asia, as the most dynamic region in the entire world and a place of key engines of the global economy. The need of U.S., jobs, export and investment, will be fulfilled in this region and make the U.S. as a full spectrum dominance force in the 21st century. By pivot or rebalance, the imbalances will be rebalanced in this dynamic region. As Hilary Clinton mentioned, they pivot from the Middle East to the East Asia which is a new global reality. In this light, she is insisting on priority of the regions; although, the other regions remain vitally important, each of these regions demands American engagement and leadership.

U.S. by "Asia power web" which is supplementary to "hub and spoke model" is going to manage rising China, simultaneously strongly sustaining its leadership economically and militarily. U.S. military presence, arms sale and controlling sea lanes of China offshore through military force by regional key allies and partners are vitally considered. And in economic dimension, more competition with China to gain more share of Asian market and to retreat China to her mainland is concerned. Regarding defensive realism theory as we have applied to our case, we saw that Obama has tried to sustain U.S. global leadership through a moderate and reasonable behavior. He has paid attention to the threat and opportunity of the regions and the rising states and balanced them with soft power based on domestic politics. This grand strategy is called by Obama as "Smart Leadership" and by Kissinger as "Enlightened Leadership".

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سیاست خارجی خاورمیانه‌ای اوباما: کاهش و یا افزایش اهمیت خاورمیانه

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هنگامی که اوباما به عنوان رئیس جمهور امریکا برگزیده شد، سیاست جدیدی در مورد جنگ‌های پرهزینه این کشور در عراق و افغانستان با توجه به خواسته‌ها و اهداف امریکا اتخاذ کرد. آسیاگرایی و یا توازن مجدد قدرت از محدوده خاورمیانه فراتر رفت و شامل توان عظیم منطقه آسیا- پاسفیک شد. با توجه به این موضوع، سوال اصلی مقاله آن است که اهمیت خاورمیانه در سیاست خارجی امریکا چیست؟ پاسخ این سوال بدینگونه است که سیاست اوباما نسبت به خاورمیانه با توجه به افزایش اهمیت شرق آسیا در حال کمرنگ شدن است. در دوران ریاست جمهوری اوباما، با توجه به کاهش قدرت امریکا و تهدید چین و اسلام‌گرایی او ناچار به تعامل با ایران به عنوان یک قدرت منطقه‌ای در خاورمیانه و چین به عنوان یک قدرت منطقه‌ای در شرق آسیا شد. در نتیجه در قالب استراتژی منسجم، اوباما تاکید داشت گفتگوها با ایران مهمترین چالش استراتژیک در خاورمیانه است. با توجه به این موضوع، می‌توان گفتگوهای همزمان هسته‌ای با ایران و همچنین کشورهای عضو شورای همکاری خلیج فارس در کمپ دیوید در سال ۲۰۱۵ را تلاش امریکا در همکاری ایران با این شورا دانست. همزمان و مهمتر از آن آسیاگرایی به عنوان یک نیروی قوی در تمامی حوزه‌ها (استفاده از نیروهای کوچک، سریع و پیشرفته‌تر نظامی در کنار قدرت اقتصادی برای تأمین نیازهای اقتصادی امریکا مانند شغل، صادرات و سرمایه‌گذاری) در جهت حفظ جایگاه رهبری جهانی امریکا برای مدیریت رشد چین در دستور کار قرار گرفت. آسیاگرایی فرمولی برای قرن ۲۱ است تا قدرت امریکا را در قرن ۲۲ حفظ کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: اوباما، مصلحت ملی، رهبری، آسیا گرایی، خاورمیانه، شرق آسیا