

# Evolution of U.S. Military Strategy Since the 2010s: U.S.–China Rivalry and Strategic Pivot to East Asia\*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to trace the evolutionary process of U.S. military strategy and its implications within a structural and macroscopic context of change in America's grand strategy since the 2010s. The most important change that defined the U.S. global strategy during the financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 was the sense of crisis of deteriorating hegemony and the rapid rise of China. East Asia was the region of utmost importance in terms of responding to such change and the U.S. searched vigorously for a new global strategy that centers around East Asia. The 'Rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific' strategy of the Obama administration and the global strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations, which were both focused on the Indo-Pacific, were all results of such strategic thinking. U.S. military strategy also changed in tandem with such a transition in the global strategy. Despite the budgetary restrictions during the Obama administration, the U.S. drastically reinforced equipment in the Asia-Pacific region and proposed the air-sea battle and JOAC as a new concept of operation that takes into account a potential conflict with China. The Trump administration expanded the Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific and strengthened the tendency of military reinforcement in the West Pacific. Also, JADO, a developed form of JOAC, was declared as a new concept of operation, and the strengthening of integrated conduct of operation capability and cutting-edge military power was emphasized. The Biden administration developed

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\* This work was supported by the research grant of Jeju National University in 2022.

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JADO to JWC and strengthened the third offset strategy through the concept of Integrated deterrence, which centers on cutting-edge defense sciences and technology. Such evolution of U.S. military strategy observed since the 2010s shows that the U.S. military strategy, which takes into account a strategical competition with China, maintains a flow of consistency despite various domestic and foreign changes. This also implies that the current military strategy of the U.S. will not change in a short period. Amid the intensification of a new Cold War confrontation, there lies a great risk of aggravated tension within East Asia when the Biden administration's strategy of restoring alliance and China's aggressive foreign strategy collide.

**Keywords**

Rebalance strategy, Indo-Pacific strategy, Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), Joint All-Domain Operation (JADO), Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC), Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2)

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyze the evolution of U.S. military strategy in terms of change in its grand strategy, which is a change at a structural and macroscopic level. Since the 2010s, the most important changes that defined U.S. global strategy were the sense of crisis that U.S. hegemony was in decline after the global financial crisis and the rapid rise of China as a challenging state. The administration under Obama responded firmly to such challenges with its ‘Rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific’ strategy. The Trump administration, which ascended to power by imposing the slogans of “America First” and “Make America Great Again”, forewarned an extensive change in U.S. foreign policy strategies based on unilateralism. However, the fundamental direction of U.S. global strategy shows strong continuity to that of Trump’s administration even after its completion. Despite the advent of Trump as an anomalous figure, there have been no changes to the opportunities and restrictions imposed by the structural environment such as the U.S. power and the nature of U.S.-China strategy competition. While criticizing Trump’s unilateralism and asserting multilateralism, re-establishment of alliances, and foreign policy rooted in a commitment to values, the Biden administration has inherited a hard-line policy toward China.

Thus, despite partial differences and changes in foreign policy, the U.S. grand strategy since the 2010s has maintained a coherent basis in that U.S. impose strong pressure on China which has risen as its hegemonic competitor. Against such a hard-line strategy China has been

confronting the U.S. by modernizing its military and implementing aggressive foreign policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), therefore, intensifying the U.S.-China strategic competition. While the Rebalance strategy of the Obama administration was an uncompromising countermeasure to China, it also served as an engagement policy that was based on confidence that the U.S. can tame the Chinese threat and on the belief that U.S. and China can co-exist. However, the bilateral conflict intensified during the Trump administration and the fundamental assumption of the China strategy started to change. A unilateral attitude that is typical of Donald Trump himself and the intensification of the U.S.-China competition combined raised doubt on the engagement policy, and this led to a transition to a more unyielding policy that pursued separation from rather than co-existence with China and sought conflict rather than competition. Such hard-line policy trend has been maintained even throughout the Biden administration. Joe Biden declared China as a state that challenges U.S. hegemony and made clear that the U.S. will deter China's challenge with its mighty power.

U.S. military strategy has also been transforming and evolving according to such transition on a grand strategy level. The core of the U.S. military strategy within the Rebalancing strategy was to contain China and secure geopolitical dominance in East Asia. For this to happen, Air-Land Battle based on the army and air force, a previous concept of operation, was replaced by Air-Sea Battle based on the navy and air force. Moreover, high-tech equipment and weapons have been reinforced in the Asia-Pacific region despite plans to reduce military budgets. Such a trend has become stronger with the advent of the Trump administration: Military budget was drastically increased, and military

force in the Western Pacific region has been reinforced; China was declared to be a power that poses a serious challenge to the U.S., and the need for a much more powerful military posture that can put direct pressure on China was emphasized. This has led to the concept of the Indo-Pacific region which expands the Asia-Pacific region, thereby replacing the Rebalance Strategy with the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Even after the Biden administration came into power, confronting and deterring China's rise was re-emphasized as the core of U.S. national strategy, and the trend was maintained in focusing military strength in the Indo-Pacific region under the hard-line policy toward China.

Despite changes and differences in foreign policy due to a shift of domestic political power or transitioning international affairs, U.S. global strategy since the financial crisis from 2007 to 2008 has maintained consistent direction in that it aims to take action against a rising China and retains its dominance. Surely, significant changes were carried out in major areas such as multilateral diplomacy and foreign economic strategy due to changes in the executive branch which led to changing methodology in foreign policies. However, in the case of military strategy, strong continuity and accumulative development of strategy were detected. This demonstrates that the change in U.S. military strategy that occurred in the 2010s is significant in that it sharply reflects a structural trend, which is the change in U.S. grand strategy. It also implies that such a trend will inevitably persist despite the Russo-Ukrainian War or any other adventitious geopolitical situations.

On the grounds of the problems and arguments mentioned above, this article is composed as follows: Section 2 will explain the transition of a global strategy that took place during the Obama administration and the

formulations of a new military strategy in correspondence to such transition. In particular, it will emphasize that the Obama administration's Rebalance strategy was the starting point of a change that defined the 2010s and that such change was not merely that of U.S. foreign policy or regional strategy but rather a fundamental transformation of America's grand strategy. In section 3, the intensification of U.S.-China strategic competition and the evolution of military strategy during the Trump administration are explained. This chapter will show that despite the severance due to Trump's inauguration as president, the tendency shown during the Obama administration grew stronger and that it should be stressed that attempts of the U.S. to impose strong pressure on China intensified. It will be shown that in terms of operations concept, integrated operations encompassing all military services were emphasized while regarding the reinforcement of military strength, development of defense sciences and technology through cutting edge technology and research and development was stressed. Section 4 articulates the change in military strategy and the trend of military strength reinforcement that appeared since the advent of the Biden administration. Even though Biden's administration criticized Trump's unilateralism and restored liberal hegemonic strategy, it is noted that this did not ameliorate U.S.-China relations but rather aggravated bilateral strategic competition. Also, concerning U.S. military strategy one may observe a continuing tendency extending from Obama and Trump eras to enhance military strength in the West Pacific. This tendency is especially focused on cutting-edge military strength based on integrated deterrence and the third offset strategy. And a new attempt was made to reinforce the U.S. air force as a countermeasure against China's mid to long-range missile

capabilities. Section 5 provides a summary of the main argument of this article and forecasts the direction of change in U.S. military strategy. The U.S.-China conflict in the Indo-Pacific region possesses grave danger of rapidly expanding into a worldwide level confrontation. The U.S. may still possess dominant capabilities over other states; nevertheless, it will face difficulties in achieving its strategic goals due to limits to U.S. national power and internal fissure within the alliance network.

## **II. Obama Administration: Transition of U.S. Global Strategy and Formation of A New Military Strategy**

### **1. China's Rise, U.S. Decline, and the Rebalance Strategy**

The most important changes that define America's global strategy since the 2010s are the anxiety of a deteriorating hegemony and the rise of China as a challenging state. Obama administration, having come to power immediately after the financial crisis, established as a top priority task the countermeasures against a rising China and restoration of U.S. hegemony, and East Asia was the region of utmost importance regarding such strategic transition. With the advent of the Obama administration, the U.S. emphasized the need for a global strategy that centers on the Asia-Pacific. Such strategic transition which moves the central axis of the global strategy to the Asia-Pacific region resulted in the formation of the Rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific strategy(Drezner 2011).

The Rebalance strategy developed in two aspects, military strategy, and foreign economic strategy(Berteau et al. 2012; Manyin et al. 2012; Green

et al. 2016). The gist was to deter the rise of China and to reorganize the regional order in the Asia-Pacific to that which would correspond to U.S. national interest. The core of the military strategy was to secure military dominance over China in East Asia. A new concept of operation was developed to correspond to China's military rise, therefore, high-tech equipment and weapons were reinforced in the Asia-Pacific region despite plans to cut military budgets.

Intra-regional military cooperation was also strengthened among states. The U.S. strengthened military cooperation with established allies such as Australia, Japan, and Korea as well as with Southeast Asian states. By signing an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Philippines, the U.S. decided to use the Filipino military bases again, and it has also carried out joint training with Vietnam. Moreover, the U.S. reinforced military exchange with Indonesia through the U.S.-Indonesian Comprehensive Partnership. The U.S. has been showing intention for active engagement in the East Asian region through its application for membership in the East Asian Summit (EAS) of 2011 and having its president participate in the EAS in 2012.

The major goal of foreign economic strategy also was to deter and pressure China. The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) declared recovery of economic balance and the continuity of globalization as tasks that are directly related to 'national security'(the White House 2010). The most important task in doing so was to adjust the global imbalances between U.S. and China. America criticized China that it was responsible for imbalance adjustments and demanded that it suspends its mercantilistic economic policies such as exchange rate manipulation, coercion of technology transfers, violation of intellectual property rights,

and illegal subsidies. Such demands were also reflected in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). In this regard, TPP was not merely another trade agreement but a means to intervene in and reorganize the regional economic order of East Asia.

This new strategic basis was maintained until the 2015 NSS, and the U.S. re-emphasized the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and its will to execute its Rebalance strategy(the White House 2015). This strategy is a clear reflection of the core task of the American global strategy which, after the U.S. handles the global economic crisis, seeks to deter China's rise at the medium and long-term level and to find alternatives in renovating U.S. hegemony. In this regard, the Rebalance strategy was a fundamental transition of a global strategy and this was the very reason why such a tendency was inevitably inherited to the ensuing U.S. global strategy(Gong 2018).

## **2. A New Military Strategy Centered on the Asia-Pacific**

A defense strategic guidance report published in 2012, Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense(DoD 2012a), suggested the projection of power as countermeasures to China's Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2-AD) as the most important task in U.S. defense strategy. Change in military strategy can be analyzed in two aspects, which are the innovation in the concept of operation and military enhancement. The core of such change was to solidify military dominance in the West Pacific region and to prepare for a potential military conflict with China(Le Mière 2012).

First of all, the concept of operation was altered by taking into

account the Chinese threat. This can be confirmed by the Quadrennial Defense Review Report (QDR) published in 2010 and 2014. The core of this new concept of operation was the navy's enhanced access capability, maximization of agility, mobility, and flexibility of military operations. QDR of 2010 formulated the concept of air-sea battle as a means to respond to a new threat—China's A2-AD(DoD 2010a: 32). The concept of air-sea battle centered around the navy and the air force has replaced the previous concept of operation, which was the air-land battle centered around the army and the air force. The concept of air-land battle is no more relevant in the strategic competition with China as it was a concept used during strategic competition with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and later in the war against terrorism after the Cold War. The concept of air-sea battle developed into a Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), which emphasized maximization of access to China and effectiveness of the operation in all domains encompassing the navy, air force, army as well as the cyber and outer space(DoD 2012b; 2013).

Plans for reinforcement and management of military strength were even more systematically defined in the 2014 QDR. This report also states that the Asia-Pacific region is the core region with the utmost importance to military and security strategies. A suggested plan involved programs for additional “forward stationing and rotational deployment”(DoD 2010a: 43), reinforcing the military strength of the navy and the air force, and complementing reduced troops with the latest equipment in place of further increasing the size of ground forces. A plan was also suggested to reinforce military strength to enable flexible operation of a navy and air force-centered military strength as well as agile and mobile conduct of operations. Secretary of Defense, L. Panetta,

emphasized that the U.S. military will adjust its naval power in the Pacific and Atlantic from a ratio of 5:5 to 6:4, and presented plans to supplement fighter planes and cyber warfare capacity to the air force.

Change in military strategy since the advent of the Rebalance strategy led to a substantial transformation of U.S. military power deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. U.S. and Australia deployed Australian warships to the U.S. carrier strike group and agreed to expand U.S. naval access to Australian naval bases located in the Indian Ocean. A plan was also forged to establish a Marine Air Ground Task Force based on the rotational forces that will be stationed in Australia(DoD 2014). In addition, 50,000 U.S. troops stationed in Japan were dispersed and subject to rotational deployment in regions including Australia, Hawaii, and Guam, and strategic flexibility was enhanced through the expansion of the range of operations of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Naval and air force power such as B-1, and the B-2 bomber, unmanned reconnaissance planes Firescout that were previously assigned to the Middle East and South Asia were re-assigned to the Asia-Pacific region, while signal reconnaissance plane EP-3 and antisubmarine patrol aircraft P-3 were also deployed in the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, 14 Ground-based Interceptors were deployed in Alaska, TPY-2 radar was deployed in Japan and the Aegis Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense system was reinforced to strengthen the sea-based missile defense system(Carter 2013; Green et al. 2016).

The execution plans for this new military strategy were more specifically presented in A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower(Allen et al. 2015), a report published by the Department of the Navy, and Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy(DoD 2015), a report

published by the Department of Defense. In *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, the core of maritime forces is defined as assured access to all domains, deterrence, maritime control, projection of military power and maritime security. Strengthening U.S. military force, the expansion of military alliance and cooperative relations were emphasized as necessary to achieve such goals.

Meanwhile, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* stated a specific reinforcement plan for the U.S. military based on four dimensions, which are the capability of military strength projection, airpower, flexible response to contingencies, and intelligence power. As a means to strengthen the military capability projection, the Pacific Command replaced the aircraft carrier USS *George Washington* with USS *Ronald Reagan* and decided to deploy the *America-class* amphibious assault ship. Plans were also put forward to deploy two additional *Aegis* vessels in Japan and three of the latest stealth destroyers all in the Pacific. As for reinforcing the air power, Japan was decided as the first overseas deployment base for the F-35. To increase flexible response capability, military ties with ASEAN nations were strengthened alongside the original plan to carry out a rotational deployment of littoral combat ships in Singapore, and plans were also laid out to implement a rotational deployment of mobile landing platforms within the region. Lastly, to enhance intelligence capability, cutting edge equipment such as RQ-4 *Global Hawk*, 24 E-2D *Advanced Hawkeye* aircraft, 48 P-8A *Poseidon* maritime patrol aircraft, and unmanned surveillance and patrol aircraft MQ-4C were also deployed(Allen et al. 2015; DoD 2015).

An important task in this transition that reinforced the military force in the West Pacific was strengthening the southern part of the Asia-Pacific

region including Southeast Asia through more flexible management of U.S. troops and equipment that were previously concentrated in Northeast Asia. The idea was to reduce the expense of stationing by the rotational deployment of U.S. troops originally concentrated in large bases in Japan and Korea to the South-West Pacific region and to strengthen U.S. military power in the regions of Southeast Asia and the South China Sea.<sup>1)</sup> This would enable the forward and rotational deployment of small-scale units with speedy operation execution abilities, thereby securing flexible management of military power. The Obama administration had already promoted strengthening military cooperation with the ASEAN nations through measures such as the ADMM-Plus, Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, and US-ASEAN Defense Forum as a means to carry out this plan. The U.S. also reinforced military cooperation with India and carried out the Malabar, a joint military exercise with India(Shirley 2014; Green et al. 2016). Ashton Carter, the 25th U.S. Secretary of Defense, proposed the Southeast Asia Maritime Initiative at the 2015 Asia Security Summit and compiled a budget of 425 million dollars(Carter 2015).

In the early stages of the Rebalance strategy, there were voices of skepticism that transition of defense strategy cannot be executed as was originally intended due to constraints in the defense budget. In fact, due to the Budget Control Act of 2011 that was implemented to reduce the

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1) The core of this plan was the role of Guam that will have been the new strategic hub and the base for forward stationing of the U.S. military. The B-2 stealth strategic bombers and nuclear-powered attack submarines were deployed, and construction of base to deploy Global Hawk groups and naval unmanned reconnaissance aircraft has begun. THAAD, the core weapons of missile defense has also been deployed in Guam(Shirley 2014; Green et al. 2016).

defense budget, the budget had to have been cut by 480 billion dollars in the following decade and the annual defense budget was to be limited to under 500 billion dollars. However, with the passing of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, opportunity of an increase in defense budget emerged, and with the emphasis by the Obama administration for the need of the Rebalance strategy led to an increased compilation of the defense budget. This implied that the observed changes of U.S. to concentrate its military resources to the Asia-Pacific region was not temporary but was a transition that took place on a grand strategical level.

### **III. Trump Administration: Intensification of U.S.-China Strategic Competition and Evolution of Military Strategy**

#### **1. Intensification of U.S.-China Strategic Competition**

Trump came to power as president by advocating slogans such as “America First” and “Make America Great Again”, and forewarned an extensive transformation of U.S. foreign policy strategy. However, even after Trump’s administration, the fundamental directionality of U.S. global strategy showed strong signs of continuity. In spite of the appearance of a heretical politician such as Trump, strategic resources available to U.S. and the structural environment that aggravated U.S.-China strategic competition remained the same. Therefore, it was inevitable that the basis of Trump administration’s foreign strategy was

inherited with strong continuity to the Rebalance strategy(Gong 2022).

The basis of Rebalance strategy was reinforced in regard to military strategy. China was declared as a revisionist state that threatens U.S. values and interest in 2017 NSS report and 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, and the need for a stronger military readiness to counter Chinese military threat was emphasized through 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) report(the White House 2017; DoD 2019; 2018). Such strategic basis was reflected in the strengthening of military power in the West Pacific region, and a great number of measures to reinforce military power in this region were included in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Despite unilateralism unique to the Trump administration, military alliance with East Asian states were maintained.

Notwithstanding a major change such as U.S. withdrawal from the TPP, continuity also appeared in America's foreign economic strategy. Trump administration applied a strict principle of reciprocity in order to adjust trade imbalance and applied strong pressure on the surplus states. Through his first executive order as president, Trump withdrew from the TPP and promoted re-negotiations of NAFTA and KOR-US FTA. Nevertheless, what Trump administration demanded of the surplus states included suspension of currency manipulation, reinforcement of regulations on intellectual property rights, opening of financial and service markets, and these demands were not so different from the TPP.

Surely, there were some changes due to Trump administration's unilateralism. The core of such changes was not a deviation from the Rebalance strategy but rather served as reinforcement to the strategy itself. Criticism against China became more explicit and direct sanctions on Beijing were also increased. In regard to military strategy, the

concept of Asia-Pacific was expanded to Indo-Pacific in order to deter China's expansive foreign policy strategy, and PACOM was also reorganized as INDO-PACOM. The Quad alliance of U.S. Australia, Japan and India was reinstated, and weapon sales to Taiwan also resumed. The Department of Defense report published in 2019, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, expressed the strong will of America that it will not close its eyes to China's challenge(DoD 2019).

Concerning U.S. foreign economic strategy, bilateralism has replaced minilateral-framework such as the TPP, thereby intensifying direct pressure on Beijing. By advocating fair trade at the forefront, Trump aggressively applied direct pressure on foreign trade and sanctions, which resulted in a U.S.-China trade war. Trump administration defined Beijing's state-driven development strategy as an economic invasion and imposed tariffs and sanctions on China. Legal grounds were provided by Article 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, which states that sanctions can be imposed in the occurrence of a national threat, and Article 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which stipulates that retaliatory actions may be taken when economic damage occurs.

As the intensification of U.S.-China strategic competition, which served as a backdrop of the Rebalance strategy, combined with Trump's unilateralism the fundamental assumption of U.S. strategy against China started to change. Even though the Rebalance strategy was a strong response to the rise of China, it was also a strategy that assumed interdependent coexistence with China. However, with the aggravation of the U.S.-China conflict, the fundamentals of the engagement policy toward China became subject to review. In the report of the president published on May 2020, United States Strategic Approach to the

People's Republic of China(the White House 2020a), the U.S. declared China as a dictatorship and emphasized that China is threatening the liberal order led by the U.S. through its state-driven capitalism and expansionist foreign strategy. It also criticized China for imposing threats throughout East Asia, including the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait employing coercive military actions. This report concludes that it is necessary to forcibly retaliate against China, which poses a full spectrum challenge to America including the U.S. political system, values, economy, and security. This led to a transformation of the U.S.-China conflict into a full-scale conflict centered on regime legitimacy, and some even dubbed this U.S.-China relation as the new Cold War(Gong 2022).

## **2. Integrated Operations and Development of Defense Sciences and Technology**

Aggravation of the U.S.-China conflict was also reflected in U.S. military strategy. The 2018 NDS report stressed the need for a military strategy more directly aimed at China and the Pentagon proposed the concept of Joint All-Domain Operation (JADO), which was an enhanced version of JOAC presented by the Rebalance strategy. In line with JOAC, JADO was a new concept of operations for reinforcement of offense capabilities through the integration of military power of all domains that encompasses the army, navy, air force, cyber, and space. JADO is meant to maximize an integrated execution of operations capability in the Indo-Pacific region by focusing on the U.S. navy's long-distance strike capability, and its main target was China's A2-AD strategy, as was with the Rebalance strategy.

JADO was a result of an innovative concept of operation which aims to strengthen the U.S. capability of integrated execution of operations. Since the proposal of JOAC, introduced was the Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAMGC), which reinforced the roles of the army and the navy and expanded the scope of integrated operations. According to the JAMGC, the army developed the concepts of Multi-Domain Battle and Multi-Domain Operations. Such innovations inevitably led to JADO which emphasized the integration of powers of all forces. After the concept of JADO was presented, concepts such as Distributed Maritime Operations, and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operation were developed by the navy and marine, while Agile Combat Employment was developed by the air force. The core of such changes was the maximization of power from Joint Forces through reinforced integration of operations(U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command 2017; 2018; U.S. Navy Institute 2018).

The Dynamic Force Employment and Global Operation Model emphasized in the 2018 NDS was presented in the same context. Dynamic Force Employment and Global Operation Model are plans for agile and flexible maneuver of U.S. military forces stationed all around the world, and have provided a guideline for a changeable and flexible maneuver of the Joint Forces. The most important objective was to secure execution of operations capability on a global level and to achieve global integration of U.S. military power by using the aforementioned models. Indo-Pacific Strategy Report also presented as core tasks the increase of lethality of the Joint Forces and the strengthening of alliance and partnership in the Indo-Pacific region(Joint Chief of Staff 2019; DoD 2019).

To effectively support such a change in the concept of operations, the Trump administration made a substantial increase in the defense budget. An advocator of the slogans “Peace through strength” and “Make our military strong again”, Trump pursued a foreign strategy based on strong military power. The Sequester of the Budget Control Act of 2011 was abolished and even with reduction of the 2018 fiscal year budgets in most departments of the federal government, the defense budget was increased by 13 percent. According to the total yearly defense budget compiled by the NDAA, the U.S. defense budget showed a steady rise during Trump’s incumbency.<sup>2)</sup>

Even after the Trump administration, the core region of military power reinforcement was the West Pacific. The NDAA of 2018 and 2019 included a great number of materials related to strengthening missile defense and reinforcement of cutting-edge weapons and equipment in the Indo-Pacific region. The budget was compiled for the development of an Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile which was intended to countermeasure China’s A2-AD capability, and plans were announced to purchase F-35 fighter planes, KC-46 aerial tankers, and B-21 bombers. USS Gerald R. Ford, a next-generation aircraft carrier, was delivered to the navy, and the second Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier, USS John F. Kennedy, has been launched and is scheduled to be commissioned in 2024. Third and fourth Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers are also scheduled to be deployed by late 2020s. Plans for the additional construction of ten destroyers with ballistic missile defense capabilities were also announced, and a budget has been drawn up for the

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2) The budget for the defense was 611.1 billion dollars in 2017, 691.9 billion dollars in 2018, 708 billion dollars in 2019, 729.8 billion dollars in 2020, and 730.3 billion dollars in 2021.

construction of a next-generation nuclear-powered submarines.

Since coming into power, the Trump administration has stressed the importance of science and technology to national security strategy. Accordingly, the Department of Defense has vigorously promoted innovation in defense sciences and technology. The 2018 NDS presented quantum computing, big data analysis, artificial intelligence (AI), robots, hypersonic technology, and biotechnology as emerging technologies, and budgets were concentrated in these areas. Under the leadership of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the weaponization of unmanned aerial vehicles, unmanned ships, and hypersonic missiles has also begun (DoD 2018a; the White House 2020b).

This transition was also reflected in the composition of the defense budget. The most notable trend in the defense budget since the advent of the Trump administration is the increase in R&D expenses. This implied that the U.S. was investing a substantial amount of its budget into R&D to maintain dominance in the area of defense. In the 2021 fiscal year, the Trump administration drew up a R&D expenditure of 100 billion dollars and more within the defense budget, and plans were presented by the NDAA to focus the R&D capabilities on future industries and emerging technologies..

In addition, DARPA is promoting an AI development project necessary for the execution of the mosaic war, and Joint Artificial Intelligence Center has been established within the Department of Defense in June 2018 which is pushing ahead with force integration of artificial intelligence. Also, in August 2018, the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence was founded. Emphasis on defense sciences and technology implied a continuation of the third offset strategy which was

formalized by the U.S. Department of Defense in 2014. The third offset strategy was a plan to utilize cutting-edge technology such as AI, and robotic technology to integrate defense organizations, concepts of operation, and military technology innovations, and to secure overwhelming dominance over China. This basis was also passed on to the Biden administration.

On the other hand, unlike the Obama administration, the Trump administration pursued modernizing and increasing the role and proportion of nuclear capability. The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) published by the Obama administration emphasized the securing of dominance in conventional weapons and the missile defense system while insisting on the reduction of roles played by nuclear weapons and efficient maneuvering of nuclear capability(DoD 2010b).<sup>3)</sup> However, the 2018 NPR published after the advent of Trump’s administration aimed to procure a strong and flexible nuclear capability as well as modernization of the capability. The core basis of nuclear capability reinforcement was an increased threat caused by the modernization of nuclear capability by China and Russia. The priority of U.S. nuclear capability, which was nonproliferation, reverted to procuring strong deterrence against potential powers of hostility, and the concept of “sole purpose” was not adopted. By expanding the conditions for use of nuclear weapons, the U.S. stresses that its nuclear capability may be exercised in deterring both

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3) However, despite such basis, the principle of “no first use” of nuclear weapons was not adopted. Neither was the declaration of “sole purpose”—which states that nuclear weapons are used only for the purpose of countering a nuclear attack—adopted and the option that allows the use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear strategic attack was maintained. Reason why the goal to reduce nuclear capability had to be pursued restrictively was that U.S. assessed that nuclear threat from China and Russia is on the rise(DoD 2010b).

nuclear and non-nuclear attacks of the opponent, thereby making room for the expansion of its nuclear capability. Accordingly, the Trump administration promoted the reinforcement of flexible reaction capability through various tactical nuclear weapons(DoD 2018b).

## **IV. Biden administration: Liberal Hegemonic Strategy and Integrated Deterrence**

### **1. Biden's Liberal Hegemonic Strategy**

Hard-line policy against China remained even after the advent of the Biden administration. Upon his appointment as president, Biden declared China a challenging state to U.S. hegemony and made clear that the U.S. will deter it by a strong force. In the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance published in March 2021, U.S.-China strategic competition was formalized in terms of value, alliance, and technology(the White House 2021a). Indo-Pacific Strategy Report of the United States published in 2022 emphasized once again that countering and deterring China's rise was the core of the national strategy(the White House 2022). Operations concept that stressed the integration of all domains was consistently emphasized, and cutting-edge technology was also established as the main agenda of defense policy. Cutting-edge technology and innovation in military strategy centered on DARPA and the National Science Foundation (NSF) became systematically liaised. The Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), which aims to strengthen military power in the Indo-Pacific region, was also included in the 2021

NDAA(DoD 2021; Hoehn 2022).

The foreign economic policy also inherited this hard-line policy on China. The attempt to surpass China in technology competition was reinforced through intensive industrial policies and support for R&D led by the federal government. Just after his inauguration, Biden signed an administrative order to inspect the supply chain of semiconductors, batteries, rare earth elements, and medical supplies. As a result, a report was published, the core of which was a plan to enhance U.S. major industrial capabilities and reduce its dependency on China. This report proposed an establishment of a supply chain that excludes China and a Supply Chain Disruption Task Force to supervise this network. It also proposed the creation of a Trade Strike Force which, under the leadership of the United States Trade Representatives (USTR), would promptly respond to unfair trade practices. Reports from USTR also presented as the main policy issue the reaction to China's coercive and unfair trade practices(the White House 2021b; USTR 2021a; 2021b). The CHIPS and Science Act passed in August 2022 regulated that a federal budget that surmounts 280 billion dollars is to be used for R&D in and subsidizing expanding cutting-edge industrial capabilities such as artificial intelligence and semiconductors.

A major change that took place during the Biden administration was the attempt to sever its ties to Trump's unilateralism and to restore a liberal hegemonic strategy. The slogans "America is back" and "Return to normalcy" symbolized the change. The core of this strategy was value-oriented diplomacy and the restoration of alliance and multilateralism. Emphasizing the need to recover leadership as a respected nation, president Biden returned to the Paris Climate

Agreement, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the UN Human Rights Council, all of which Trump withdrew membership, and suspended derogation and demands of cost sharing to U.S. allies. He also stressed universal values such as human rights and democracy as the foundation of America's leadership. The market economy was also presented as a core principle of an international order that would be led by the U.S. and, alongside democracy, the most important standard by which the U.S. distinguishes allies and opponents(Biden 2020; the White House 2021c).

Such change that stresses alliance and multilateralism may have enhanced the stability of U.S. foreign policy strategy in comparison to the Trump era, nevertheless, it did not extend to improving U.S.-China relations. This was due to an increased possibility of a U.S.-China confrontation leading to a confrontation between U.S. allies and China, which in turn would expand to a confrontation between the U.S. bloc and the Chinese bloc. As Biden's administration stipulated its confrontation with China as a conflict between democracy and authoritarianism and rallied an anti-Chinese alliance through values such as human rights and democracy, hard-line policy toward China not only served the American interest but also became a common duty to be accomplished by democratic states. Therefore, room for compromise in U.S.-China relations narrowed(Gong 2022).

Especially, the combination of a value-oriented alliance with a production-technology alliance that pursues reorganization of the global supply chain reinforced a new Cold War structure in the U.S.-China confrontation. The U.S. proactively utilized alliance relations to reorganize a global supply chain that excludes China and to secure

leadership in legislating technology control and international standard. U.S. aspired to strengthen cooperation in the realms of cutting-edge technology such as semiconductors, 5G/6G, and AI by using a wide range of alliances, ranging from traditional bilateral alliances such as U.S.-Japan relations and U.S.-Korea relations to cooperation with G7 or EU, and multilevel alliance such as Quad alliance and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. With the consolidation of the bloc structure and intensification of conflict surrounding the reorganization of the supply chain, a tendency was generated to weaponize the economic interdependency of the U.S. and China. The U.S.-China conflict became more acute and concerns of amplification of instability in the world order spread(Gong 2022).

## **2. Integrated Deterrence Capability and Reinforcement of the Third Offset Strategy**

Biden administration inherited the basic direction of the Trump administration's military strategy. Reinforcement of military power and innovation of operation concepts to enhance integration of all domains operations and to secure rapid and flexible execution of operations capability at a global level continued. Even in the Biden administration, the most important part of this task was responding to the Chinese threat and reinforcing military power in the Indo-Pacific. U.S. withdrew troops from Afghanistan to focus on the Chinese threat while emphasizing strategic flexibility and dynamic maneuver of U.S. military troops stationed in the Indo-Pacific. PDI also suggested enhancing naval power within the Indo-Pacific region as a top priority(Hoehn 2022).

The Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC) was proposed by the Biden administration as an operations concept more advanced than the former JADO. Whereas JADO emphasized an innovation of the operations concept on a joint forces level, it did not provide concrete details. In 2019, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper proposed an operations concept, a new Joint Warfighting Concept for All-Domain Operations, which was further developed and adopted as JWC in 2021. Adopted in March 2021, JWC pursued integrated mobile warfare through dispersion and focus, and maximization of cross-domain synergy served as the core of this concept. Offensive and defensive capabilities can be maximized by integrating firepower from all-domain military strength to implement a fatal attack, while rapidly dispersing military power to increase chances of survival(Austin 2021; Hitchens 2021; Milley 2021).

Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2), which was developed as a part of JADO, was also adopted officially by the Department of Defense. It was a strategy that integrates an intelligence collection system and tactics control network that was managed separately by each military service, thereby connecting the army, navy, air force, marine corps, and even the space force into a single command and control system. The Biden administration announced its plan to apply this not only to the U.S. Joint Forces but also to its major allies. Emphasis on the concept of “Integrated deterrence” in the 2022 NDS of Biden’s administration is also in line with the transition mentioned above. Integrated deterrence is a new concept that maximizes U.S. deterrence against China by proactively applying cutting-edge technology while, at the same time, utilizing all-domain operations that integrate all domains including the army, navy, air force, cyber force, and space

force(DoD 2022).

On the other hand, to maximize Integrated deterrence capability and maneuver JADC2 effectively, support from areas of AI, communication technology such as 5G/6G, and cloud environments is essential. In this regard, the U.S. Department of Defense proposed project plans to establish a command and control system based on such technologies and prioritized the development of innovative future military strength by accelerating the development of an autonomous weapon system. Also in line with this design is a plan which praises the idea of Dynamic Force Employment proposed by the Trump administration and develops it even further to reinforce pocket battleships and unmanned navy vessels(Hoehn 2022).

However, expenses for the aforementioned plans were not fully accommodated by the defense budget of the Biden administration. Within the 2022 defense budget, that of next-generation intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) development and nuclear experiment and facilities-related projects was increased. On the other hand, the R&D budget related to applied and basic sciences and cutting-edge technology was cut by 15 percent, while associative research program of naval, army, and air force was also reduced. Nor was there any budget compiled for nuclear modernization. This can be construed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic response expenditures and a recent trend of inflation. If defense budget constraints are not temporary and last for some time, this will cause a setback to America's plan to take strong countermeasures against China through military innovation and military force reinforcement in the Indo-Pacific region.

Nevertheless, the defense budget for the 2022 fiscal year announced

by the Biden administration surmounted to 778 billion dollars, which was an increase from that of the previous year, and the budget in 2023 is presumed to experience a large increase which would surmount to an estimate of 813 billion dollars. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific Command requested a budget of 226.9 billion dollars during the period from 2023 to 2027. Amid a decrease in the overall federal budget during the fiscal year 2022, an increase in defense expenditure and concentrated deployment of troops in the Indo-Pacific region appears to reflect the urgency of the strategic competition with China. Despite the reduction of budgets related to research and development and nuclear modernization, the budget related to focus military strength in the Indo-Pacific region is still on the rise. Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States calls U.S. a nation of the Indo-Pacific and proposes a plan to secure regional stability through integrated deterrence against various threats including China. It also reconfirmed the importance of Integrated deterrence capability enhancement of the Joint Forces, innovation of defense sciences and technology, and alliance and partnerships(the White House 2022).

A trend to reinforce military strength in the Indo-Pacific region was also evident in the PDI budget. According to the 2022 fiscal year defense budget, 7.1 billion dollars were assigned to the PDI and the future budget is expected to increase. In particular, it should be noted that the appropriated PDI budget was much larger than what was originally requested by the Indo-Pacific Command as well as the Department of Defense. The Indo-Pacific Command initially requested a budget of 4.6 billion dollars, which was increased to 5.1 billion dollars when the Department of Defense was preparing for the budget request,

then was later drastically increased and settled at 7.1 billion dollars during the final stages of decision at the Congress. This has great significance in that it implies the existence of a strong agreement on U.S. reinforcement of military strength in the Indo-Pacific region(McGarry 2022).

The most important goal of PDI was to procure military dominance that enables the U.S. to protect a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and maintain deterrence against China. PDI encompassed many plans related to adopting and deploying advanced weapons to achieve this goal. The core of such plans was to reinforce the presence of and modernize the air force. Ever since it was reorganized based on the Rebalance strategy and the East Asia region, the heart of U.S. military strategy was a navy-centered response to China's A2-AD. Even the NDAA submitted by the Indo-Pacific Command and the Department of Defense stated the reinforcement of a navy-oriented Joint Forces military strength as the core of the PDI. But after a strategic assessment that China's strengthening of its medium and long-range missile capability has become a substantive threat, a discussion in Congress took place and the plan changed to revolve around the idea to modernize and reinforce the presence of the air force(McGarry 2022; DoD 2022). Additionally, to strengthen U.S. medium and long-range strike capability, the PDI included a plan to establish an air missile defense capability in Guam.<sup>4)</sup>

On the other hand, Biden and the Democratic Party limited the

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4) U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) and development of medium and long range ballistic missiles were executed with the objective to secure dominance over China. U.S. is promoting development of multi-purpose missiles such as Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) and Maritime Strike Tomahawk (MST).

objective of U.S. nuclear strategy to deterrence and counterattack and adhered to a position to reduce excessive dependency on nuclear capability and expenditure. Plans to reduce the role of nuclear weapons were included in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance(the White House 2021a). However, nuclear weapons-related budgets were mostly retained in the 2022 defense budget, showing how the basis of the nuclear capability of the Trump administration was strongly inherited to the Biden administration. Accordingly, the defense budget as was shown in the 2022 NDAA rather increased in relation to projects regarding next-generation ICBM development, and nuclear experiments and facilities.

The defense budget of the 2023 NDAA submitted by the Biden administration prioritized nuclear submarines, strategic bombers, and the modernization of ICBM. This implies that the U.S. is promoting the reinforcement of its nuclear capability to secure dominance over China and Russia in military strength competition. R&D budgets including nuclear weapons modernization and the development of hypersonic missiles also surmounted to 130 billion dollars, which is an increase of 10 percent or more from their previous expenditures. Budget for reinforcement of air force strength, which includes purchasing F-35 fighter planes, was also set at 56.5 billion dollars. A budget of around 40 billion dollars was appropriated to the navy for expenditures such as the construction of additional nuclear submarines. In addition, the development of space capability, missile alert system, and missile defense were also included as major items, and budgets were allocated to next-generation intercept missiles and THAAD. Should this structural tendency of U.S.-China strategic competition continue, the U.S. will carry

on with arms buildup as far as is allowed by its budget, and will inevitably maintain for some time to focus its military strength in the Indo-Pacific and offset the Chinese threat through innovation of operations concept and maneuver.

## **V. Conclusion**

This article intended to analyze the evolution of U.S. military strategy since the 2010s based on the change in U.S. global strategy in face of the decline of U.S. hegemony and the rise of China as a challenging state. The gist of this paper can be summed up in the following manner.

First, in face of a structural transition such as the decline of U.S. hegemony since the financial crisis from 2007 to 2008 and China's rise America carried out a transformation of its grand strategy, which resulted in the formulation of the Rebalance strategy. The main idea of the Rebalance strategy was to contain China's rise while maintaining dominance over China in East Asia. Accordingly, the previous military strategy changed into that which established East Asia as the central axis. The core of this new strategy consisted of the reinforcement of troops and equipment in the West Pacific region and the adoption of JOAC, a new operations concept, which enabled the maximization of agility, mobility, and flexibility of the U.S. military with the navy and air force at the center.

Second, the basis of the Rebalance strategy was inherited even after the Trump administration came into power. However, with aggravated

U.S.-China strategic competition, the U.S. started to apply more direct pressure on China, thereby changing a bilateral conflict into an all-out war revolving around the two regimes. As Trump's administration advocated a strong China policy, the U.S. defense budget was drastically increased, and R&D of cutting-edge technologies such as AI, robotics, and quantum computing started to have a direct linkage to defense policy. It was also emphasized that the direct objective of defense sciences and technology development and adoption of advanced weapons was China. In terms of operations concept, JADO—a concept that puts greater emphasis on integrated operations execution and attack capabilities than JOAC—was adopted.

Third, the Biden administration also inherited the Trump administration's hard-line China policy. However, it discarded Trump's unilateralism while attempting to restore a liberal hegemonic strategy, which resulted in the further intensification of the U.S.-China strategic competition. Also on the side of military strategy, Biden's administration inherited the basic orientation from Obama's and Trump's administrations, while developing JADO into JWC and JADC2. Ideas such as the third offset strategy, which is achieved by reinforcing advanced military strength, and Integrated deterrence were also emphasized. The tendency to increase the defense budget was also maintained, and PDI, which intends to strengthen U.S. military force in the Indo-Pacific, was also developed. Despite various changes in the domestic and international environment, U.S. military strategy that extends from the period ranging from Obama, Trump, and Biden's era shows strong consistency and continuity. If the current structural trend forged by U.S.-China strategic competition continues, America will have

no choice but to mobilize its full available resources to focus its military capability in the Indo-Pacific region and maximize its Integrated deterrence capability against China's threat.

A variable that must be considered with priority is Russia which grew rapidly in recent years as a core nation in international affairs due to its strengthened semi-alliance with China and the Russo-Ukrainian War. Current America does not possess the capability to execute two containment strategies against China and Russia. Another problem is weak domestic support due to the expense and fatigue that will be caused by strong external intervention. Such limits are the reason why while the U.S. focused its military strength in East Asia, it stressed the mobility and flexibility of operations through innovation of operations concept and rotational deployment rather than the development of large-scale military bases and reinforcement of troops, which are both quite expensive. Limits to U.S. capability and its lack of domestic support imply that the U.S. will inevitably depend on passing along the military costs to its allies. Biden administration's alliance restoration strategy can also be understood in this context. However, this may cause discord and tension between the U.S. and its allies and also among ally states themselves.

Russo-Ukrainian war served as an opportunity for the U.S. to claim that European states, and especially Germany, and Japan should increase their defense budgets and take greater military responsibilities. It can be construed that the U.S. has begun to emphasize that allied states take more active roles amid the current situation in which America is struggling to restrain the challenges of Russia and China on its own in both Europe and Asia. U.S. alliance network is complex and

multidimensional, encompassing AUKUS and Five Eyes, which are the most essential alliance, G7 and NATO, which are the core of the Atlantic alliance, Quad alliance, which is an alliance in the Indo-Pacific, and bilateral alliances such as U.S.-Japan alliance and U.S.-Korea alliance. If this network becomes involved in the U.S.-China conflict, there is a great risk that a new Cold War confrontation may rapidly expand to a worldwide level.

The U.S. still possesses dominant capability compared to the challenger state in the military and economic dimensions, and its strategic basis of concentrating national power on the Indo-Pacific region will be maintained for some time. Nevertheless, it appears that America may not obtain the intended results due to various limitations mentioned above in this article: limits to U.S. national power and internal fissure within the alliance network. Rather, there is a potential threat of intensification of an arms race in the Indo-Pacific region and amplification of geopolitical tension for the time being due to a combination of intra-regional state conflicts and extra-regional state interventions surrounding the U.S.-China confrontation.

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Manuscript: Oct 21, 2022; Review Completed: Nov 01, 2022; Accepted: Nov 12, 2022
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