

Securitizing China's 'Peaceful Rise'

An Empirical Study of the U.S. Approach to Chinese Trade Practices, Military Modernization and Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea

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Abstract

The U.S.-China relationship is undeniably one of the most important economic and security relationships of the 21st century. Since Barack Obama took office in 2009, increasing emphasis has been put on ending the two wars in the Middle East and to redirect focus towards the increasingly important Asia Pacific region. The U.S. relationship with China has proven difficult to manage, and major differing opinions on economics, politics and security have contributed to tensions between the two powers. By employing mainly securitization theory and theories of hegemony, this thesis aims to illustrate how the U.S. approach to China's military modernization and economic development, in some cases, has led to the securitization of important strategic parts of China's rise. Through empirical analysis focusing on the cases of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, China's anti-access capabilities, and currency and trade practices, I argue that the unique historical context has created conditions that have put the United States in a vulnerable position, which has, in turn, facilitated the securitization of China's rise.

Key words: The United States, China, Securitization theory, Asia-Pacific, Military modernization.

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1 Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world where the movement of people, services and goods is rapid, ever changing and complex, wealth is becoming more widely distributed. Since 2001, when the U.S. accounted for about 28 percent of global GDP, the U.S. economy has been declining in relative terms (Xinbo 2010; 156). This change has generated an increasingly vast literature suggesting that the strongest emerging power – China – is picking up what the United States is losing. The rise of China is said to have various implications for the world in general and for the Asia Pacific in particular. The significance of the region is apparent in that the economies of APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) make up about 55 percent of global GDP (APEC 2011). Moreover, one third of total worldwide commercial maritime traffic passes through the South China Sea (Kaplan 2010). This makes the region the most economically vibrant, and arguably the strategically most important, in the world. Its importance is central, and the ‘pivotal’ importance of the region is illustrated in the refocus of U.S. diplomatic, military and economic efforts to the region. With these developments, it is important to more closely study the dynamics taking place in the region.

With American focus being redirected from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific, the U.S. is faced with a new reality: Its capacity to project power in the Asia-Pacific has decreased dramatically through a mixture of neglect, major economic difficulties and resulting budget restraints (Burns 2012). In addition, China has developed (what the Americans call) naval anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities (Cole 2011) whilst maintaining a lack of transparency as to its intentions. In the words of Robert Kaplan, “while U.S. is distracted, China develops sea power” (Kaplan 2010). It has also become apparent that Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea is causing concern about vital shipping lanes, jeopardizing established maritime law and threatening vital U.S. interests in commercial traffic (Thayer 2010; 69). Furthermore, countries bordering the energy-rich South China Sea, with claims to disputed islands, are faced with a Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) that harass fishing boats, geological survey vessels and other traffic in the disputed waters. The pivotal importance of the region cannot be understated, and the struggle for influence seems to turn previously political and economic relationships into relationships of security.

1.1 Background

According to Ni Feng, the U.S-Sino relationship has gone through three phases since the 1970's: The China-US strategic cooperation stage (1972-1989), continuous development in turbulence (1989-2001), and relative stability (2001-2009) (Feng 2012). However, at present time, the debates range from a power shift (White 2010), a contest for supremacy (Friedberg 2011), a declining America being overtaken (on its current track) by China (Friedman and Mandelbaum 2011), to name only very few in a vast sea of scholarly work taking a more or less pessimistic, realist influenced, standpoint on the U.S.-Sino relationship and regional security. Others take a more optimistic, liberal stance, claiming that Sino-US relations will be stable because of their deep economic interdependence (Friedberg 2005; 8). As Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011) argue, it seems as if the rest of the world, and Americans in particular, want to believe the liberal stance and turns a blind eye to actual developments. Hugh White makes the observation that "today's optimists who believe that globalisation has rendered major war unthinkable are the latest in a long line of people to underestimate humankind's capacity to make choices against its best interests" (White 2008; 92). Alongside these scholars, there is an apparent change in media coverage and scholarly work. They range from benign reports and coverage about China as the successor of the East Asian 'Tiger' (Gage and Kattoulas 1997) and *The China Miracle* (Lin, Cai and Lee 2003), to more malignant views of China's military modernization, its nationalism and its disregard for established international rules and human rights.

The United States is currently facing difficult economic times and although they are slowly recovering, there are indicators pointing at an American decline (See e.g. Luce 2012, Chomsky 2012, Schweller and Pu 2011). This decline is arguably resulting in historically unique behavior. Regardless of what the pessimists and the optimists say, what 'declinists' argue, and what Washington claims; real measures are being taken to hedge against a growing China. It is my understanding that this hedging is aimed at limiting the loss of competitive edge, declining manufacturing, and to deal with loss of sea control in a time of massive budget restraints. Thus, the situation in which the US is finding itself after a decade fighting two wars in the Middle East, is one in which extraordinary measures have been adopted to enable refocusing, strengthening, protecting and projecting American power in the 'Asian century'. This was reflected in President Obama's address in the Australian Parliament in 2011 when he said:

This is the future we seek in the Asia Pacific -- security, prosperity and dignity for all. That's what we stand for. That's who we are. That's the future we will pursue, in partnership with allies and friends, and with every element of American power. So let there be no doubt: In the Asia Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in (Obama 2011a).

In the pursuit of these goals, the Americans have identified the vast importance of regional engagement through the renewal of alliances and the building of new partnerships. This has resulted in several Chinese scholars claiming that the U.S. is pursuing a policy of containment (see e.g. Chase 2011; 135). Whether accurate or not, U.S. strategy in the Asia Pacific involves cooperation with allies and surrounding states that are all somewhat concerned about the implications of China's rise. Such a concerted effort to balance China's economic and military power in the region seems to be in the interest of several American allies and partners, such as Australia, the Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam.

A major reason for regional concern is China's rapidly developing military capabilities, as well as uncertainty regarding U.S. engagement and support for its allies in the region (Yano 2012). With *official* annual growth in Chinese defense spending averaging 12,1 percent between 2000 and 2010, whilst annual GDP growth was averaging 10,2 percent in the same period (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2011; 51), concerns are not groundless. It is commonly believed that with increasing economic power comes the desire to increase influence in political affairs (Acemoglu 2011).

Despite this vast increase in military spending, China is officially pursuing a policy of a 'peaceful rise' (see e.g. Bijian 2005, Guo 2006). Explaining China's inclination towards a peaceful rise, Zheng Bijian, one of president Hu Jintao's closest advisors, states: "China has a population of 1.3 billion. Any small difficulty in its economic or social development, spread over this vast group, could become a huge problem" (Bijian 2005; 19). In other words, China cannot afford any destabilizing hick-ups. Instead, by embracing globalization and by pursuing economic growth without interference, colonization, exploitation and confrontation in other states, China has pulled hundreds of millions of people out of poverty (Bijian 2005; 19-20). By looking at these achievements, it would not be unreasonable to draw the conclusion that China is on a path of exactly that; a peaceful rise.

Nevertheless, Washington has not turned a blind eye to the possible implications of China's assertiveness in the South China Sea; military modernization; its reluctance to let their currency float; claims to expanded exclusive economic zones; insufficient protection of intellectual property rights; and the protection Chinese industry by limiting foreign companies' possibility for investment. The states of the Asia-Pacific are all in a situation where they have to assess their alternatives. Realists argue that these alternatives include: to jump on the Bandwagon or to exercise internal or external balancing of power (Wang 2010; 555). Many realist scholars argue that regardless of a rapidly growing state's intentions, rapid growth and military modernization will often be viewed as a threat to bordering states as well as to the current hegemonic power and those who favor the current world order (Schweller and Pu 2011; 43). Regional states are taking precautions, and my intention with this thesis is to explore what those precautions have been and how they have developed.

1.2 Objective and research question

The main objective of this thesis is to develop the research on the security implications of the U.S. approach to China by, mainly through the lens of securitization theory, look at how the Obama administration has dealt with China's rapid economic growth and military modernization. It is my intention to provide an analysis of current affairs to illustrate how, and why, U.S. relations to China have taken a new direction. It is not, however, my intention to make any predictions about the future relationship, but rather to analyze developments in the relationship since the Obama administration took office in 2009. The time-period since 2009 is the focal point not only because the United States got a new administration, but also because of the 2008 financial crisis and the importance of theorizing about significant recent security developments.

Moreover, much academic work on the U.S.-Sino relationship takes a strong realist approach. This fails to fully account for questions of *how* security issues arise in sectors other than the military, and rather take empirical observations at face value and judge those empirics against the static material balance of power, or balance of threat, as living a life of its own without subjective agency (Krause and Williams 1996; 237-239). Therefore, outlining a theoretical framework drawing mainly on the Copenhagen School's *Securitization Theory* (ST), and customizing the methodological approach, enables the empirical application of the theory, and thus helps to account for a more full-fledged construction of security. These elements will be further explained in the theory and method parts of this thesis.

Against this background, this thesis attempts to answer the following research question:

How has the U.S. approach to China's economic growth and military modernization shaped security in the Asia Pacific since the Obama administration took office in 2009?

The thesis is guided by the understanding that relations previously pertaining to 'normal' politics and economics have become issues of security through the process of securitization in several sectors. Internal problems in the United States have made it increasingly difficult for the U.S. to facilitate a growing China. These developments have made military-to-military relations increasingly difficult, economic protectionism more prominent, and regional alliances and presence have been presented as pivotal for future U.S. preeminence.

1.3 My role as a researcher

According to social constructivists, the responsibility of the researcher lies in the idea that analysts help shape discourse and thus also reality (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 33). Others argue the difficulties of being unbiased in that “[K]nowledge is crucially interest-driven” (Sheehan 2005; 136) and that “theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose” (Cox 1981; 128). It is seemingly impossible to detach oneself from these pitfalls and inherent obstacles. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge these problematic aspects and to reflect on the outcomes of any analysis from a variety of standpoints. This way, one can avoid, to an extent, some of the traps. Against this background, it is problematic to argue the strategic implications and the ramifications for regional security due to the rise of China. Aaron L. Friedberg states that:

Those who raise questions about the strategic implications of China’s rise, or the adequacy of current policies for responding to it, risk being characterized as ill-informed alarmists. Worse yet, they are likely to find themselves accused of creating problems where none need otherwise exist (2011; 5).

Analyst responsibility lies in the acknowledgement of these pitfalls, and the recognition that any piece of work never accomplishes an immaculate analysis. Some argue that having a pessimistic outlook on relations creates self-fulfilling prophecies (Guzzini 2011; 336). Huysmans expresses the inherent dilemma in security studies, arguing that “speaking and writing about security is never innocent” (2002; 43). Similar points are brought up in Johan Eriksson’s *Observers or Advocates*, where he points out that analysts “might be seen as acting more as politicians than as analysts, objectifying security, and spreading negative connotations of threats and enemies to new issue areas” (Eriksson 1999; 316). As a final comment to these issues, Barry Buzan states: “[T]his tension between the need to study what is, and the danger of reproducing it by doing so, is unresolvable” (Buzan 1996; 54). Thus, I acknowledge that the empirical analysis in this thesis run the risk of being colored by me as a researcher and as perhaps reproduce dominant notions of security by illuminating selected parts of a complex reality.

The position I take, and the theories I use to research the subject, is but one possible way of addressing the outlined research problem. Results in social science are inherently subjective and the researcher makes choices based on his/her experiences and educational background. James Paul Gee states that validity in discourse analysis (which is a central part of securitization theory in this thesis) is difficult, to say the least, but that any interpretation of certain data is rendered useful and meaningful in some ways and not so illuminating in others (Gee 1999; 94). He also states that: “All analyses are open to further discussion and dispute, and their status can go up or down with time as work goes on in the field” (Gee 1999; 94). It is my intention to illustrate what it can look like if a

securitization theory and methodology is applied in these cases, what difficulties one might run into and what findings might be meaningful.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured as follows: After this introductory chapter, the second chapter will outline and discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis in terms of applicability and relevance. Both neorealist concepts and constructivist theory is employed as they complement each other and are not mutually exclusive in the method employed. The third chapter deals with the methodological approach to the study and I attempt to employ a model that will deviate slightly from the Copenhagen School's approach to make it more applicable to empirical case studies. Chapter four will constitute the empirical study of securitizations in the political and military sectors. The cases will focus on the securitization of international laws and norms, and on the securitization of China's naval capabilities. This is followed by the empirical study of securitization in the economic sector in chapter five. I will analyze recent securitizing moves in the U.S. employed to deal with the perceived threat of China's trade practices. In the final chapter, I will conclude my findings as well suggest possible future research on security relations in the Asia Pacific.

2 Theoretical perspective

In the chapter on theory, I will situate the thesis within the wider field of security studies and define the theoretical framework that will guide the study. I will discuss the security concept from two approaches most relevant to this study: neorealism and constructivist schools of thought. Firstly, I will outline the ontological assumptions and the main ideas of realism. Limitations of the theory pertaining to this study will be illuminated and discussed mainly in terms of level of analysis and sector focus. Second, I will discuss a more constructivist-oriented approach to international security by outlining the Copenhagen School and the concept of securitization. The constructivist dimension of securitization, as well as the broadening of the security agenda will be discussed in terms of its relevance and applicability to this study. Thirdly, because of the regional dimensions to the U.S. pivot, theories of regionalism will be elaborated to illuminate the importance and structure of the Asia Pacific region. Finally, theories of hegemony and power transition are employed to help explain the specific historical conditions that make securitization possible in the empirical cases.

2.1 The realist tradition of security studies

Theories of international relations (IR) in general and security studies in particular have a long-standing realist tradition dating back to the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thucydides. With a vast amount of scholarly work on realism and structural realism (neo-realism) developed during the Cold War, the approach is seen as heavily influenced and tied to that specific historical moment in time characterized by bipolarity, nuclear deterrence, MAD (mutually assured destruction), détente, and state survival (Krause 1998; 301). Realism in international relations and security studies during that time “emphasize(s) the competitive and conflictual side of international relations” in an anarchic world system (Buzan 1996; 51). With the end of bipolarity, realism faced some difficulties in adapting to the new international environment. Nevertheless, there is a strong realist dimension in security practice in the Asia Pacific.

There is no *one* unified realist doctrine, but rather a wide range of ontological assumptions around which different theories have been developed (Mastanduno 1997; 50). In his 1954 book *Politics Among Nations*, Hans J. Morgenthau argues that states are rational actors guided by self-interest and the maximizing of relative power, and that the world can be studied objectively as pertaining to certain universal laws of human nature (Morgenthau cited in Jørgensen 2010; 86). This is where neorealists and realists differ most clearly. Morgenthau, who is a

classical realist, emphasizes the idea that human nature and its flaws are at the center of power politics, whereas neo-realists (such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer) focus on system-level structures and move away from classical realisms ontological underpinnings that biological human attributes affect action and international outcomes (Buzan 1996; 51, Jørgensen 2010; 84, Sterling-Folker 2002; 77). The common ontological assumptions around which most realists – classical and neo – build their theories are that: there are objects or things in the world that exist autonomously of human interaction and involvement (Sterling-Folker 2002; 76).

Epistemologically, the state is the main, rational actor operating in an anarchic, self-help, international system dominated by power politics and the material balance of power (Mastanduno 1997; 52). Threats are measured in the material capabilities of other states and policymaking is adjusted accordingly (Buzan 1996; 50). At the center of any realist security doctrine are the ideas of the *security dilemma* and the *balance of power*. K.M. Fierke describes the security dilemma as: "the pursuit of security is part an parcel of the production of insecurity" (Fierke 2007; 18). In other words, the security dilemma is referring to the fact that when one actor (state) is taking some form of action for the sake of its own security, it increases another actor's insecurity. This can explain why Asia Pacific states are feeling increasingly uneasy as China modernizes its military, despite its claims of a peaceful rise. However, it fails to explain why, in many cases, capabilities alone do not create insecurity.

The theory of the balance of power says that in order for states to establish order in the anarchic system, weaker states create power leverage by joining forces with other states, and thus balances the asymmetric power (external balancing) (Fierke 2007; 18). The state can also employ internal balancing, which means taking political, economic and military action to counter the capabilities of the more powerful state (Wang 2010; 556). Both internal and external balancing can be empirically observed in the Asia Pacific. When speaking of material capabilities, Waltz refers to "population and size of territory, resources, economic strength, military capability, political stability and competence" (Waltz 1979; 131). An elaborate idea of threats is Walt's 'balance of threat theory', which acknowledges that it is not just about capabilities but also intentions (Walt 1985; 9). This theory can better explain why some countries are viewed as threats and others not, regardless of their material capabilities. These neorealist ideas are useful in my analysis as a tool to explain certain facilitating conditions. For example, when analyzing issues involving military capabilities, such as China's military modernization, the balance of threat can help explain external balancing.

Nevertheless, studying the U.S. security relations with China in the Asia Pacific from a strictly neorealist perspective is problematic precisely because it views actors as static objects that act rationally because not doing so will result in punishment in the long run (Krause and Williams 1996; 239). This idea provides little analytical clarifications to behavior that is incoherent and sometimes contradictory to this idea of rational actors and the state as the only referent object of security. It is also insufficient to analyze recent development in U.S. economic

policy towards China, which places economic and political issues within the security field.

2.2 Constructivism and security

Alexander Wendt famously stated that "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt 1992; 64) arguing for an inherent socially constructed dimension to the international system by claiming that material capabilities are not, in and of themselves, dangerous. A constructivist reading of security tries to cut through the orthodoxy of neorealist and realist explanations of empirical material and qualitatively study behavior that plays a role in determining state action (Busse 1999; 42). From a constructivist perspective, security is seen as a social construct in that only when meaning is applied to material capabilities do they acquire the status of a threat or a security issue (Krause 1998; 306-307).

One of the more successful challenges to (but also commonly viewed as an extension of) the conventional wisdom of neorealism has come out of what is called the 'Copenhagen School'. Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan are the two most prominent carriers of this school of thought. They seek to extend the security agenda beyond the military/political to encompass five sectors: military, political, environmental, economic, and the societal sector (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998). With focus still on the state as the main (but not only) object of reference, it can be seen as an attempt to strike a balance between the two seemingly antagonistic approaches to security by incorporating constructivist ideas into the neorealist approach (Eriksson 1999; 314). Thus, security complex theory, of which securitization is a vital part, acknowledges a reality outside of discourse as well as a socially constructed reality where objects acquire meaning.

At the center of the Copenhagen school lies *securitization theory*. The ontological underpinnings of securitization theory is that "security [is] a specific social category that arises out of, and is constituted in, political practice" (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; 40). In the process of securitization, the securitizing *speech act* is a discursive practice, or action, that attempts to create an idea that some object is facing an *existential threat* (Fierke 2007; 104-105). The perception of a threat needs not be 'real'. Instead, a 'referent object' (e.g. a state) needs merely be presented as facing an existential threat, and to be accepted as such by an *audience*, to achieve security status and thus be lifted, in terms of urgency, above 'normal' political practice and justify emergency measures (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 24). An existential threat looks different in different sectors and does not have to involve the military (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; 27). The most obvious case of non-military security is environmental security. The approach widens the agenda and a major idea of the securitization concept is that a variety of different referent objects across different sectors can obtain security status.

If an attempt to securitize an issue does not create a justification of acts outside normal practice (by breaking otherwise established rules or conduct), it is

merely a securitizing *act* (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; 25). Three interrelated components are necessary for successful securitization: “existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules” (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; 26), as well as three important facilitating conditions:

- (1) the demand internal to the speech act of following the grammar of security, (2) the social conditions regarding the position of authority for the securitizing actor – that is, the relationship between speaker and audience and thereby the likelihood of the audience accepting the claims made in a securitizing attempt, and (3) features of the alleged threats that either facilitate or impede securitization. (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 33).

Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde acknowledge that “It is not easy to judge the securitization of an issue against some measure of whether that issue is ‘really’ a threat; doing so would demand an objective measure of security that no security theory has yet provided” (1998; 30). Instead, what can be studied with this theory is which actors have the authority, under what conditions, and with what effects, to successfully securitize an issue (*ibid*; 27). The study of securitization thus lies in the study of “discourse and political constellations” (*ibid*; 25).

As a result, the securitization framework has been most frequently applied to non-traditional security issues such as immigration, terrorism and environmental threats because of the traditional security approaches’ shortcomings in addressing such non-state actor problems (McDonald 2008; 567). It attempts to identify the specific moments where an issue is identified and presented as an existential threat to a specific referent object. The applicability of securitization to this study is relevant for that reason. The theory allows the researcher to identify the speech acts that put a certain issue into the discursive field of security. Important to remember is that the Copenhagen School does not regard securitization as a ‘good’ but rather as something that ought to be avoided (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 35). This enables me to analyze instances where certain issues are lifted above normal politics as a conscious choice rather than as an inevitable reaction to a perceived threat.

It is important, however, to reflect on the limitations of any theoretical framework employed to study a certain phenomena. No single theory will be able to cover *everything*, but it is of great importance to ask the questions of whether it does what it sets out to do, and if the framework is sufficient in explaining that phenomena (McDonald 2008; 581). The securitization framework alone cannot fully account for a viable construction of security. Accordingly, securitization theory has at times been accused of being “shorthand for the construction of security” (McDonald 2008; 580).

Another common critique of the securitization framework is the ambiguity of the intersubjective relationship between the securitizing actor and the audience. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde state that the audience needs not be massive but that an “order always rests on coercion as well as on consent” (1998; 25). This implies that rather than a matter of audience *scale*, a successful securitization is reliant on the relative *influence* of the audience itself. Stritzel (2007; 363) has argued that it

is quite unclear from the theory of how to judge which, and when, audiences are relevant as well as how to determine when a securitizing actor has successfully gained support. Legitimacy is always arbitrary and in this case it can make the analysis of audience acceptance quite ambiguous.

To get around these problems, it is important to reflect on how to measure the success of a securitizing act. It arguably requires a bit of modification and attention to develop fully. For the purposes of this thesis, it will be most practical to work around this by looking at the relative power of actors, and the wider discursive practices and policy that the actors follow and shape. This modification will be further elaborated in the section on methodology, where I adopt Stritzel's (2007) critique and suggestions of how to empirically trace securitization. It also becomes apparent in the empirical analysis that an audience, at times, lacks significance.

2.3 Asia Pacific regionalism

This thesis is guided by the idea that the United States has decided to pursue a policy line which has, due to its ambiguity and two-sidedness, resulted in a range of issues becoming securitized through the interaction with regional actors. In order for the United States to successfully implement such a policy in a highly dynamic and diverse region, engagement with regional states has been identified as essential. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the dynamics and interactions that help shape the region.

A central critique of the neorealist concept of security is its focus on the global, abstract, system-level, which results in little consideration for differences in culture, religion, state strength, type, government and, more generally, regional differences (Buzan and Wæver 2003; 28). What has been named the 'old regionalism' arose in the 1960s and 1970s when the world order was faced with the Vietnam War and the end of the Bretton Woods system (Kelly 2007; 199). However, neorealists, like Waltz, do not give much attention to subsystems and virtually disregards their importance on the premise that they are always temporary confusions that will ebb out (Kelly 2007; 199). There have also been questions regarding regionalism due to the unipolar nature of the world such as: "If the United States is an empire, can regionalism be meaningful?" (ibid). Nevertheless, there are studies of a neorealist nature in regionalism, focusing on subsystems of core-periphery, regional international organizations, and on the regional distribution and balance of power, as well as the security dilemma, whilst still operating under the constraints of the international level (Kelly 2007; 202-203).

In the post-Cold War system, and with the end of bipolarity, an increasing interest in subsystems in IR has resurfaced under what has been called the 'new regionalism' (for a review of the literature, see Väyrynen 2003). The 'new regionalism' was developed during the 1990s and the 2000s and argues, amongst other things, that regions have not only come about from state initiatives, but also

through processes like ‘*regionalization*’ that have been the consequence, or the result, of the close interconnections between economies, politics, production and trade in the process of globalization (Nair 2008; 111). Security in the new regionalism is based on the idea that threats are oftentimes closely linked to geographical proximity and the idea that a neighbor generally poses a greater threat than countries far away (Kelly 2007; 198).

The idea of regions can be divided into two major categories: (1) Physical regions that are made up through military, political, territorial and economic spaces mostly controlled by states; and (2) functional regions that are defined by non-territorial factors such as the market and culture and that can be comprised of non-state actors (Väyrynen 2003; 27). The Asia Pacific region is comprised of interconnections through bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, economic cooperation and competition, military competition, maritime security and territorial sovereignty.

Regionalism in the Asia Pacific is quite diffuse when looking at it historically. It has been close to impossible to construct a regional security regime in Southeast Asia, since the US has bilateral alliances with several countries in the region (Nair 2008; 113). Buzan and Wæver, in their *Regional Security Complex Theory*, address the issues of US influence through what they call ‘penetration’, which basically refers to what happens when “outside powers make security alignments with states within an RSC” (2003; 46). However, this intervention of hegemonic powers is what lies behind the idea that regions are ‘porous’ which, according to Katzenstein, largely undermines closed regions (Katzenstein 2005; 19). Second, and related to the first, lies the difficulty to create a region based on economics since most (if not all) states in subsystems are so heavily influenced by external players and global economic factors (Nair 2008; 113). In a unilateral world, the U.S. is thus a major actor in any region.

Against this background, without being explicit about exact boundaries, the Asia-Pacific referred to in this thesis is based on the following ideas: (1) that exclusionary regionalism is (almost) impossible due to the influence of external powers (both economic and military) (Kelly 2007, Nair 2008); (2) that regions can be unintentional, social, imagined constructs (Bhattacharyya 2010; 74); (3) that the level most active and interesting for analysis is discovered through the study of empirics (Buzan and Wæver 2003; 52); and (4) that the economies of APEC economies make up about 55 percent of global GDP (APEC 2011). Thus, the interactions in established regional forums and agreements such as APEC, ASEAN, ARF, the (future) TPP, as well as the significant influence of the United States, illustrate regional cooperation, economic interdependency, security relations and political constellations. The sum of these institutions and interactions amounts to more than its mere parts, which suffices to label the Asia Pacific as a region.

2.4 Facilitating conditions and social theory

Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde point out that discourse analysis is not the only tool of securitization theory and for a more complete analysis, other aspects of social theory and security complex theory are necessary (1998; 177). Any analysis on the construction of security necessitates reflections on “the social, political and historical contexts in which particular discourses of security... become possible” (McDonald 2008; 573). These contexts make up the facilitating conditions. There are two main, interconnected, theories that are relevant for this purpose here: hegemony and power-transition theory. The idea is that rivalry oftentimes functions as a facilitating condition (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; 37). These theories will help illuminate recent issues of competition in the military, political and economic sectors between the United States and China. The theories will be briefly discussed here and then further employed in the empirical analysis to elucidate those specific conditions under which the relationship can change as it has.

Despite some quite convincing arguments for the decline of the United States, president Obama said in his state of the Union Speech in 2012, that “Anyone who tells you America is in decline or that our influence has waned, doesn’t know what they’re talking about” (Obama 2012a). Nevertheless, there are clear indications that the U.S. is taking precautions and measures outside of the ordinary to tackle the problems that it is facing. These developments can be interpreted as trying to calm regional concern, to reinstate confidence, and to quite bluntly disregard all concern that America is fading in relative terms.

Emerging ideas of *declining* hegemony place the U.S. and its effects on the world at the center of 21st century security developments (Layne 2009). Various scholars have engaged in discussions of how the United States is in decline and how this is effecting its relations with China. The ‘declinist’ camp oftentimes speak of the ‘hegemon’s dilemma’, which refers to the hegemon’s attempt to provide and maintain a certain regime of free commerce and common goods at the expense of its own competitiveness, thus contributing to its relative economic decline (Beckley 2011; 46). Beckley argues that the dilemma is more prominent in the area of security, finance and trade than in any other because of the production of public goods (Beckley 2011; 46).

The hegemon’s dilemma can be accompanied by several unwanted consequences. Kindleberger argues that there might be instances in the international economy where public goods are underproduced because of the free rider (Kindleberger 1981; 247). This can help explain why the United States is viewed as being in decline. It appears as if the United States can no longer provide the expected public goods, whilst it might be doing so for a reason, e.g. that China is riding the wave of an open American market whilst devaluing its own currency to create an unfair advantage. Kindleberger claims that this unwillingness to lead the world economy already started in the 1960s and that no country since has played the role (1981; 248).

The struggle, and policy development, between the United States and China is grounded in predictions about future relations in terms of economic and military power. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde argue that economic arguments and the subsequent securitization might be due to the potential loss of political status for hegemony, such as the US (1998; 102). Furthermore, Tammen and Kugler argue that the relation between a leading nation and an emerging challenger are at its most fragile just as the emerging challenger reaches the same, or 20% more, of the capabilities of the dominant actor (2006; 43). In economic terms, and on the current trajectory, predictions of a Chinese overtake land somewhere between 2020 and 2035 (Layne 2009; 163, Tammen and Kugler 2006; 45).

Power transition theory can be seen as explaining a pyramid-like structure of power where the dominant state is at the top and where other powers, amongst them possible challengers, are below (Jørgensen 2010; 94). Tammen and Kugler state that: “The key to stability is the challenger’s satisfaction with the *status quo*” (2006; 46). Recent developments in U.S. policy towards China indicate that the U.S. suspects Chinese dissatisfaction with this structure. These predictions about power-transition cause stress in Washington and the goal of U.S. foreign policy is to remain dominant in the 21st century. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that U.S. foreign policy under the Obama administration aims to “strengthen America’s position of global leadership” (Clinton 2009).

3 Methodological approach

The securitization framework also provides a methodological approach to go along with its theoretical approach. This section of the thesis outlines the method with which I attempt to trace the construction of security. The Copenhagen school attempts to reconcile the seemingly conflicting principles of neorealism and constructivism by looking at balance of power theory, the materialist idea of power and the state as the main (but not only) referent object, whilst also looking at the social construction of security through discursive practice and so-called speech acts (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). It is these speech acts, the context in which they are expressed, and the response they get from a certain audience that guides the method:

Based on a clear idea of the nature of security, securitization studies aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (i.e., what explains when securitization is successful) (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 32).

This statement outlines the method suggested to trace the construction of security and threat in the speech act. It is about observing in which instances a certain actor identifies an existential threat and communicates this threat to an audience who, in turn, support extraordinary measures to deal with the threat. On the face of it, it seems simple, but interpreting these observations do, however, come with some difficulties.

A major problem often expressed in critiques of securitization theory is the role of the ‘audience’ (see e.g. Stritzel 2007). This is as much a theoretical problem as it is a methodological one. In theory, any securitizing actor needs an audience for a securitizing act to become successful (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 25). This intersubjective relationship is diffuse in terms of the role of the audience, as well as its relative impact on securitizing moves. In reality, it seems an issue can become securitized with little or no influence of a ‘wider’ audience. A good example being the securitization of the development of WMDs in Iraq, and the subsequent US invasion without consent from a majority of neither the US population nor the international community (Chomsky 2012). It therefore seems more accurate to uncover the structural power of the securitizing actor than about determining audience acceptance.

The most influential book on securitization theory coming out of the ‘Copenhagen school’ is Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde’s book from 1998: *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. In this book, however, little attention is given to

the problem of the actor audience relationship. As outlined in theory, this diffuse relationship has methodological consequences in terms of determining a successful securitization. Later attempts to develop the theory (and method) and to determine under what circumstances the securitizing act is successful have been of various kinds and with different (and sometimes conflicting) emphasis even from its creators in the Copenhagen School (McDonald 2008; 567).

A problem facing any work involving securitization theory, and closely tied to the first issue, is the normative dilemma (See e.g. Huysmans 2002) and an analysis that can be thin and only partially account for the construction of security (McDonald 2008; 568). The normative dilemma is referring to the idea that the researcher can establish discursive links that might not reflect reality but that still contribute to the securitization of certain issues, and thus produces exactly what one tries to avoid through the production of certain knowledge (Huysmans 2002; 43). This is especially so for securitization theory because of the idea of the speech act being something that can occur on its own, in one instance, and thus construct a security threat. However, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde acknowledge that analysts play a role, but that that role is mainly in terms of determining when an actor's speech act fulfills the rhetorical criteria for security, and not to determine whether the security issue is 'real' or not (1998; 33-34).

Against this background, it appears necessary to address two things: Firstly, the analytical tools with which one measures securitization ought to incorporate these critiques. Another dimension needs to be applied to deal with the problem of intersubjectivity and instead unveils the *facilitating conditions* to account for the construction of threat/security. In other words, the reasons *why* a securitizing move is successful and the specific context that makes it possible. By adopting Stritzel (2007), the *embeddedness* of a securitizing act helps to account for this shortcoming in the Copenhagen School's approach. The embeddedness is important because it enables a deeper account for why an act is successful. Instead of looking at an act as always political and contingent, the act is assessed on the premise that it is a "cultural and sequential one, intensifying an already existing or even partly sedimented practice" (Stritzel 2007; 376). Secondly, by incorporating Stritzel's (2007) other two elaborations on the applicability of securitization as method, I will be able to more accurately study empirical cases of securitization. Stritzel (2007; 378) divides the securitization process into three layers:

1. The performative force of an articulated threat text
2. its embeddedness in existing discourses and
3. the positional power of securitizing actors

The positional power of the actor seems much more important than an ambiguous audience's response, and the interpretation of a speech act or text is dependent on existing discourse and the context (historical, geographical) in which it is spoken (Gee 1999; 11). It is similar to the steps outlined by Buzan Wæver and de Wilde (1998) but it redirects the focus from the audience to the

actor and takes a slightly more post-structural stance with the power structures behind the actor's discursive practices. Accordingly, Stritzel argues that "securitizing actors speak to and from a broader linguistic context by framing their arguments in terms of the distinct linguistic reservoir that is available at a particular point in time (Stritzel 2007; 369).

3.1 Case selection

Due to the diverse nature of securitization in terms of referent objects, threats and facilitating conditions, diversity in cases is needed to illustrate change in the United States' approach to China. In identifying changing dynamics, securitization theory was selected because of its usefulness in pinpointing the process in which security and threats are socially constructed in discourse as well as its compatibility with material notions of security. The Asia Pacific region is – perhaps more so than any other region in the world – still very structured around the state, territoriality, and the material balance of power.

The cases were selected on the basis of the above stated, and with the hypotheses that a wide range of relations previously relating to economics and 'normal' politics have become (or are in the process of becoming) securitized in the Asia Pacific. Some of the most prominent and media-covered issues in recent developments have been chosen for their contemporary significance. The first case will analyze securitizing acts surrounding China's territorial claims and increasing assertiveness within the political sector. Chinese military modernization makes up the second case. It will be studied by analyzing U.S. perceptions of, and discourse around, China's military modernization. These two cases are intimately connected but will be separate in accordance to securitization theory's analytical idea of sectors. The third case will be analyzed within the economic sector and deals with U.S. approach to China in terms of trade and currency.

This selection of cases spans a wide range of issues that all seem to be in the process of being securitized. The selection of cases based on the dependent variable (securitization) can be both good and bad (George and Bennett 2005; 24). If one ignores the cases that seem to contradict the hypotheses, the research runs the risk of becoming fruitless and to be subject to so called case selection bias (ibid). Therefore, cases spanning over at least three of the five sectors outlined by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998) have been selected. The cases are dealing with some of the major developments in the region in recent years, and are picked more on their prominence (and media coverage) in contemporary affairs than against any other criteria.

The specific texts illustrating these contemporary affairs will focus mainly, but not exclusively, on the actors usually perceived to have the legitimacy to speak

and shape security. Despite the Copenhagen School's idea that actors other than state political leaders can speak security, it is simultaneously acknowledged that security is almost always a tool limited to actors with institutional power and legitimacy (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 32-33). In line with McDonald, "The default position here is [therefore] a focus on the political leaders of states and their designations of threat" (2008; 574).

The main (but not only) texts analyzed are: (1) President Obama's speech in Australia (November 2011), his State of the Union address in 2012, and his speech at the APEC meeting in Hawaii 2011; (2) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's remarks in Hanoi 2010, in Manila 2011, and her widely cited article in *Foreign Affairs* 2011; (3) Statements made by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and former Defense Secretary Robert Gates; (4) Various other statements and documents produced by U.S. and regional officials.

3.2 Approach to empirical material

The collected empirical material is mainly in the form of speeches, government communications and reports, and also newspaper articles. In terms of collecting theoretical papers dealing with similar topics explaining and developing different concepts, the modus operandi has been so called 'armchair' research as well as online research for articles and other reference material. A limit has been set on the time-span of the material pursued. Any new developments (unless of significant importance to a case) after April 15, 2012 are disregarded. The material investigated thus focuses on the time period since the Obama administration took office in 2009.

A certain focus has been put into how to navigate the material and how to methodologically approach the material when I find it. The latter is addressed in the previous section. To address the former, I formulated guiding questions that would be asked across the cases. George and Bennett (2005; 86) emphasize the importance of these questions being of a general nature to ensure their applicability across all cases in the study. Nevertheless, the questions need also to reflect the theoretical framework within which the study operates, as well as the objectives of the research question (ibid). These questions are also important in order to structure a coherent analysis across the sectors, and to address the importance of enabling others to trace the steps of the research (King, Keohane and Verba 1994; 23-26). The questions are formulated in a way that enables the identification of possible variance of success. In other words, securitizing acts might not be just successful or unsuccessful; they can possibly be successful to a degree. The questions are also largely guided by the discourse analytical approach. The list below is not exhaustive but gives a general idea of what has guided my approach to the empirical texts:

- Does a speech act seem to fall in the discursive field of security? I.e. is an existential threat identified, emphasized and treated with urgency?
- Who is the securitizing actor?
- What is identified as being threatened?
- What is the position of the securitizing actor in terms of power, influence, and legitimacy in the specific context?
- What position does the issue have in existing security discourse?
- What, if any, extraordinary measures have been taken to deal with the threat?
- How does the securitizing move, or extraordinary measure, shape the discourse around the object identified as a threat? I.e. how is the order of discourse shaped as a result of a speech act.

3.3 Discourse analysis

For the majority of discourse analytical approaches ... - and for qualitative research in general – there is no fixed procedure for the production of material or for analysis: the research design should be tailored to match the special characteristics of the project (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; 76).

The Copenhagen school states that processes of securitization are studied through discourse analysis (Buzan et al 1998). Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde state: "The technique is simple: Read, looking for arguments that take the rhetorical and logical form defined here as security" (1998; 177). As stated before in the approach suggested by Stritzel (2006), the embeddedness and performative force of the speech act are all closely tied to the discourse analysis. Therefore, the discourse analysis will not just look at the words spoken and take them at face value. Speaking the words 'security' and 'economy' in the same sentence, does not necessarily imply that the actor is talking about economic securitization (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 33). For a fruitful analysis, there thus needs to be an interconnected focus of the discourse analysis and the wider issues pertaining to security, embeddedness, the actor's positional power and performative force of the discourse. Therefore, to frame the discourse analysis, and emphasize the importance of more than speech acts, background and facilitating conditions are introduced before the textual analysis in the empirical chapters.

The area of critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a good entry point to analyzing discourses, their embeddedness in society and in the wider practices of security, hegemony and social change (Fairclough quoted in Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; 63). Every time an actor performs a speech act, there are three dimensions working together:

- it is a *text* (speech, writing, visual image or a combination of these);
- it is a *discursive practice* which involves the production and consumption of texts; and

- it is a *social practice*. (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; 68).

These three dimensions fit well with the three securitization elements previously outlined by Stritzel; the performative force, the embeddedness in existing discourse, and the positional power of the actor. Analytically, the discursive practice and the text are kept separate as the discursive practice refers to the embeddedness in existing discourse (for both the actor and the audience) whereas text analysis focuses on the vocabulary that reflects the discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; 69). In other words, the text analysis is looking at the specific linguistic features that build the discourse whereas the discursive practice is focusing on *how* those linguistic practices draw on previous discourse, in a hermeneutical sense. Despite its critical nature and its aim to reveal injustice and inequalities, the model is a useful complement to the discourse analysis in securitization theory because of the dimension of an actor's power.

It is also clear that all social practices cannot be accounted for by discourse analysis since there are non-discursive elements in the world (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; 69). This, in turn, is important to acknowledge since the positional power of the actor often is institutionalized and existing in established structures unchanged by discursive practices (as in the case of political elites). The point of the discourse analysis adopted is thus to identify instances of securitization by asking: "has the order of discourse been transformed, thereby contributing to social change?" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; 87).

4 Securitizing China in the South China Sea

With a focus on China's growing political aspirations, backed by its military modernization, this chapter will deal with securitization in two sectors: the political and military. The two cases analyzed below are intimately connected in reality and are separated mainly to elucidate sector-differences as a theoretical and methodological tool. First, I will outline the background that frames the analysis within the current discussions on recent developments in and around the South China Sea and America's 'pivot' in the Asia-Pacific. I will then go on to look at different texts and discursive practices pertaining to these issues to identify security discourse in the developments. Starting with the political sector, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the issues of sea-lanes of communication and freedom of navigation will be analyzed. The discourse analysis will focus on U.S. actors but also incorporate reactions from some officials in the region, as they are all moving within the same field of discursivity.

Thereafter, the intimate connection between the political and military sector enables a natural transition into the securitizations within the military sector. This part will be analyzed focusing mainly on China's military development in general, and the anti-access/area-denial and a lack of transparency in particular. The discourse analysis in this section will focus on the 2012 'Strategic Guidance' paper produced by president Obama and Defense Secretary Panetta, as well as on speeches by Obama during the tour of Asia in 2011 and the 2012 State of the Union speech. It will also include significant parts of the Department of Defense's *Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2011*.

4.1 Background and facilitating conditions

The stability in the Asia Pacific region has been central to U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. Therefore, the U.S. has a lot of previous discourse to build arguments upon. The performative force of freedom of navigation and international law are deeply engrained in the international liberal economic order (ILEO) of which America is the head architect. It also appeals to most actors with a stake in the region and of the maintenance of this order.

The South China Sea sits at the heart of Southeast Asia and is of immense strategic importance for all countries bordering it, as well as for virtually the rest of world due to the vast amounts of merchant traffic charting through those

waters. There are long-standing territorial disputes in the South China Sea most significantly involving some hundred islands and reefs called the Spratly and Paracel Islands (see figure 1). Already in 1951, Beijing articulated their territorial claims by specifying that any statements made at the San Francisco Peace Conference not recognizing Chinese territorial sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands would be viewed as illegitimate (Austin 1988, cited in Howarth 2006; 5). The Islands themselves are virtually useless and mostly uninhabited, but their potential significance for future energy security of the rapidly growing region is immense. Estimates say that energy consumption in Asia will double by 2030, with China demanding half of that increase (Kaplan 2011).

Since the Obama administration took office in 2009 the U.S. has gotten tougher with China. For U.S. officials, this seemed like a necessary policy direction for several reasons outlined in detail below. However, many observers argue that the administrations approach is far from the optimal solution to differences (See e.g. Goldstein 2011, Glaser 2012a). Those arguments call for more emphasis on military relations in order to avoid misunderstandings escalating into the use of force; to let the regional states in Chinas proximity balance China themselves; to promote joint development of natural resources; and that the U.S. remains a strong actor in the Asia Pacific and does not have to be excessively concerned about China (Glaser 2012a and Goldstein 2011). Nevertheless, with the looming U.S. presidential elections, and with internal pressures on America's future heightened, the Obama administration is giving few concessions and is approaching the region with "every element of American power" (Obama 2011a). The Asia 'pivot' and America's concerted effort to increase influence has resulted in quite a few securitizing moves.

Beijing saw weakness in the United States' new posture, mainly in its incapacity to recover from the financial crisis (Glaser 2012b; 22). Wu Xinbo argues that "The two pillars of U.S. power – military and economic – have been shattered in the past decade" due to its apparent limitations in dealing with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the recovery from the financial crisis (Xinbo 2010; 155-156). This perception has resulted in a period where the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) increased its assertiveness and intimidation in the South China Sea. On March 9, 2009, Chinese vessels harassed the USNS *Impeccable* when it was conducting surveillance 120km south of Hainan Island in the Chinese EEZ (Chase 2011; 141). As a result of this incident, the armed USS *Chung-Hoon* was diverted from its regular deployment in the area to escort the *Impeccable* for the remaining duration of its operations, illustrating the willingness of Pentagon to disregard China's claims of illegality of U.S. surveillance missions (Scott Tyson; 2009). This was one of several occasions in 2009 where the Pentagon reported Chinese harassment occurred in the waters surrounding China (see Garamone 2009).

China has also repeatedly been harassing Vietnamese fishing boats near the Paracel Islands, detaining the crews with the motivation that they had entered Chinese territory (Pham 2010; 427). These incidents have, in turn, resulted in the surrounding states looking to (amongst others) the United States to balance Chinese power and to hedge against the uncertainties of the future (Dillon 2011;

65). The United States has since reaffirmed many of its alliances in the region and abandoned the hands-off approach to the South China Sea. As a result, “the U.S. Asia ‘pivot’ has prompted Chinese anxiety about U.S. containment and heightened regional worries about intensified U.S.-China strategic competition” (Glaser 2012b; 22). Chinese worries are illustrated in several official’s statements, for example: “PLAN Admiral Yang identifies the United States as the greatest potential threat to China’s security” (Chase 2011; 138).

According to several regional actors, China is making increasingly unreasonable claims for maritime territory. This was illustrated when Beijing protested loudly after Manila announced that it would issue exploration licenses for petroleum blocks less than 150km off the coast of Palawan Island (undisputed Philippine territory) (Richardson 2012). The closest undisputed Chinese territory (Hainan Island) is over 1000km away, making it far beyond China’s, but within the Philippines’, 370km (200 nautical miles) Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982; 44) to which both parties are signatories. The EEZ is different from territorial waters, which stretches no more than 12 nautical miles from the baseline of a coastal state (UNCLOS 1982; section 2 article 3)



Figure 1: China’s claims in the South China Sea.
Source: bbc.co.uk

Moreover, in order for the Chinese to increase their influence in the region and to prevent U.S. intervention in the case of armed conflict between Taiwan and China, the Chinese have over a long period of time developed so called A2/AD anti-access/area denial capabilities (Cole 2011). These naval capabilities are of immense concern for the United States and it is increasingly visible that the Obama administration and the Department of Defense are taking steps to develop counter-capabilities to deal with this problem (Forbes 2012). As the U.S. Pacific

Command (PACOM) faces a major budget challenge, its funds for counter-capabilities are far from unlimited. China's armed forces has developed, or is pursuing, capabilities including – but not limited to – anti-ship cruise missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles, mines, manned aircraft, unmanned aircraft, submarines, aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, patrol craft, amphibious ships, mine countermeasures, and hospital ships (O'Rourke 2012; 3). The immense development led U.S. Admiral Michael Mullen to, in June 2010, make the following comment on PLA developments: “I have moved from being curious to being genuinely concerned” (Mullen cited in O'Rourke 2012; 1). A major reason for U.S. official's concern is a lack of transparency in China's military modernization (Kiselycznyk and Saunders 2010; 4). China distinguishes between transparency in capabilities and transparency in intentions, claiming that it has long been clear about its ‘peaceful rise’ and its benign intentions (ibid).

Some analysts claim that developments in recent years do not reflect the acclaimed ‘peaceful rise’ but have rather created an image of China as a bully in the South China Sea (Christensen 2011; 65). This recent history has placed China within a regional security discourse, increasing the performative force of any speech acts addressing the issue of Chinese assertiveness and stability in the South China Sea. This belief has enabled the U.S. to reaffirm its alliances and maintain or increase military presence at bases in e.g. the Philippines, South Korea and Australia.

In November 2011, the Obama administration went on a 7-day trip in the Asia Pacific making sure its presence was felt and noticed while reaffirming the important relationships with regional states and announcing the American ‘pivot’ to the Asia Pacific. These visits constitute the chief occasions where American discourse surrounding China changed, and where the Chinese rise was incorporated in a wider security discourse of the Asia Pacific.

The Obama administration deemed the trip a necessary step to remain competitive in the 21st century and to maintain its position as a regional guarantor of stability and peace (Medcalf 2011). The contexts in which securitizing speech acts took place, and the way that the discourse was shaped around points of stability, freedom of navigation, human rights, economic growth and the rule of law, made it appealing to virtually every actor with a disconcerting relation to China. The performative force of this discourse, as mentioned above, is mainly founded in the ILEO and the U.S. discourse merges with claimants' worries about China's assertiveness. This naturally includes all five actors besides China with claims in the South China Sea, i.e. Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan, but also other states such as Australia, Japan, South Korea and Indonesia whose national security is depending on regional stability.

In relation to the rapid ‘refocus’ of U.S. foreign policy to the Asia Pacific, Chinese scholars have argued that: “The US changed its Asia strategy in a hurry to return to Asia, complicating China's relations with its neighbors further and weakening their political mutual trust” (Jie and Feiteng 2010). Furthermore, the Chinese has a different view on developments in the Asia Pacific, arguing that: “the U.S. has disturbed the military balance in the Western Pacific region” (Han

Xudong quoted in Chase 2011; 140). It is important to acknowledge the Chinese position, as it is not necessarily considered in U.S. securitizations. The next section deals with a range of significant speeches and texts that have shaped the U.S. approach towards China based on the above circumstances and conditions.

4.2 Political sector: Securitizing Chinese assertiveness in territorial claims

Although the nature of territorial disputes might seem to fall into the military sector, the issues are largely related to established international law in the form of freedom of navigation in international waters and the UNCLOS which outlines boundaries, territorial rights, and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). According to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, issues pertaining to international law fall under the political sector (1998; 141). They further argue that by identifying “threats to international society, order, and law” states, such as the United States, can securitize a threat to the international order and thus legitimize interventions in sovereign issues (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 159). This is visible in the following case where the U.S. has decided to get involved in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea on precisely these grounds.

Established international law (UNCLOS) provides a framework to deal with disputes such as the ones between China-Philippines and China-Vietnam. However, with increasing assertiveness and an unwillingness to agree on a path to solution, any territorial dispute that might result in armed conflict is threatening to destabilize the region. The threat in this instance is thus mainly identified as one where international law is being breached and vital international commercial shipping lanes in one of the world’s busiest waters are compromised. This has been deemed unacceptable by the United States.

China’s 9-dash line claim (see figure 1) is at the center of the issue as China claims virtually the entire South China Sea and thus puts it in dispute with all other claimants. Since 2010, a number of incidents involving Chinese patrol boats have caused some anxiety in the region. In one incident, a Chinese patrol boat cut the cables of a Vietnamese survey vessel operating in Vietnam’s acclaimed continental shelf (Glaser 2012a; 2). Chinese boats have also intruded in disputed waters that the Philippines claim (rightfully according to UNCLOS) as a part of its EEZ (Valencia 2011). Moreover, China also warned that any exploration in the Spratly area is a violation of its sovereignty and it has labeled the SCS a ‘core interest’ (Thayer 2010; 69). The Philippines has resorted to diplomatic protests due to its inferior military power, and president Benigno Aquino III has said the government is ready to take the issue to the UN (Reyes 2011). The Chinese permanent representation at the UN sent a *note verbale* to the Secretary General expressing its outrage over the Philippine claims to islands that China argues belongs to its Nansha Islands (PRC 2011). Furthermore, in a move towards

internal balancing of power, Vietnam reportedly signed a contract to buy six submarines from Russia (Pham 2009).

According to statements made by top officials in the Obama administration, America has a range of national interests in the disputes. A report published by the *Council on Foreign Relations* outlines four major reasons why the U.S. has national interests in the South China Sea, namely: (1) Upholding global rules and norms such as freedom of navigation; (2) Alliance security and regional stability that the U.S. is expected to uphold to ensure stability; (3) Economic interests pertaining to shipping lanes where \$1,2 trillion of U.S. goods pass through each year; (4) Cooperative relationship with China from which both states benefit (Glaser 2012a; 4-6). These national interests are substantial and guide U.S. policy in the region.

July 2010 officially marked the beginning of U.S. involvement in the South China Sea disputes to further protect its interests by securitizing the Chinese threat to international maritime laws and norms. At the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Hanoi, Hillary Clinton received a lot of critical remarks from Chinese officials after she brought up the South China Sea issue, something that Beijing had kept off the agenda for 15 years (Graham-Harrison 2010). Clinton (2010) said, among other things: "The United States, like every nation, has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea". She further stated that the U.S. urges a peaceful resolution and that it supports the 2002 Declaration on the Conducts of Parties in the South China Sea, and that "The U.S. is prepared to facilitate initiatives and confidence building measures consistent with the declaration" (Clinton 2010).

The fact that 12 of the 27 countries at the meeting favored a multilateral approach provoked the Chinese Foreign minister Yang to believe that the U.S. effort was staged and planned to put pressure on China (Landler 2010). As one Australian reporter observed: "The US has helped Asia find its voice to speak up against China" (Hartcher 2011) and this did not sit well with the Chinese. National Defense University professor Han Xudong stated, in relation to the U.S. decision to involve itself in the South China Sea, that: "the Obama administration must clearly understand: are they prepared to fully open up an era of friction with China? If they are not then they are certainly giving the impression that they are" (Xudong quoted in Graham-Harrison 2010). The reaction indicated that despite the somewhat benign approach taken by Clinton, it was perceived as malignant.

Subsequently, on her visit to Manila in November 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton chose to use the name "West Philippine Sea" for what is usually referred to as the South China Sea (Clinton 2011a). This discursive practice could have unintended destabilizing consequences that might lead Manila to be less open to a peaceful resolution to its disputes with China (Glaser 2012a; 6). It can be understood as a risky rhetorical tool employed for the specific context to enforce Manila's perception that the U.S. is sympathizing with the Philippines. Whether intentional or not, the rhetoric shaped the wider order of discourse.

Clinton was more than once asked questions pertaining to the U.S. position on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, which clearly indicated Philippine

worries and its pursuit to externally balance Chinese power. When asked about U.S. support for the Philippines in the dispute with China over the Spratly's, Clinton said the following:

The United States does not take a position on any territorial claim, because any nation with a claim has the right to assert it, but they do not have the right to pursue it through intimidation or coercion. They should be following international law, the rule of law, the UN Convention on Law of the Seas, UNCLOS... And we stand for the rule of law and we stand for international norms and standards, which is why we support the peaceful resolution (Clinton 2011a).

Clinton thus indicated a stance of non-involvement in this particular instance, and marked a path where the U.S. indorses the legal framework of UNCLOS. This statement is not a securitizing move but rather an attempt to *limit* expectations on U.S. involvement and keep U.S. reaction to conflict ambiguous. However, the U.S. is no longer a bystander on the issue but rather an active participant and a central actor in shaping regional relations. Following turbulence over its involvement in the South China Sea dispute, the United States, through Hillary Clinton, continued to emphasize U.S. interest in the dispute as the leaders and upholders of the liberal international order. In her widely cited article in *Foreign Policy*, Clinton made the following remarks:

Strategically, maintaining peace and security across the Asia-Pacific is increasingly crucial to global progress, whether through defending freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, countering the proliferation efforts of North Korea, or ensuring transparency in the military activities of the region's key players (Clinton 2011b).

Freedom of navigation in the South China Sea is identified as *crucial to global progress* and to ensuring security in the greater Asia-Pacific region. By incorporating the word *crucial*, Clinton dramatizes the issue and presents it as a top priority, something that, according to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998; 26), places an issue in the security realm. The order of discourse is changing with this statement because of the speech's clear reflection of security discourse through words like *defending*, *security*, and *peace*. Nevertheless, there is an element of what Faircough calls 'modality' by not explicitly naming China but instead saying "the region's key players". Modality is used in order for the speaker to hedge against confrontation in which it can say: 'I/we did not refer explicitly to this or that actor' (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; 84). Nevertheless, transparency in military activities is arguably directed towards China. This makes it clear that the political and military issues exist in the same order of discourse.

Clinton further argued that the bilateral U.S. alliances in the region ensure the future facilitation of economic development in a time of security challenges (Clinton 2011b). In a response to Chinese officials' assertions that the United States is not a part of the South China Sea dispute and should thus stay out,

Clinton responded as follows: “The United States has a national interest in freedom of navigation, respect for international law, and unimpeded lawful commerce in the South China Sea” (Clinton 2011c). Not only does the United States have a *national* interest in the order it has established, but it also has a range of regional alliances that involve certain responsibilities. National interest also takes a place within the security discourse as a way of enforcing the importance of an issue and making it a top priority.

Regarding the Philippines, Clinton tried to reassure Manila by saying:

We are determined and committed to supporting the defense of the Philippines, and that means trying to find ways of providing affordable material and equipment that will assist the Philippine military to take the steps necessary to defend itself (Clinton 2011d).

This statement does not necessarily guarantee U.S. involvement in case of conflict, but it does state that it will help the Philippines with necessary means to fight off any enemy. The U.S. decided to take a stance that does not fully commit it to the defense of the Philippines, but that still involves a clear element of security practice through alliance and a commitment of support. U.S. officials consistently state that the U.S. does not take sides in the South China Sea dispute and they decline to answer how the United States would react in case of Chinese coercion arose over disputed territory and waters (Glaser 2012a; 2). This is likely so for strategic reasons; to keep China guessing.

Clinton’s positional power as a securitizing actor seems to be limited to a practice where she reflects and reinforces the discourse produced mainly by Barack Obama’s administration apparatus. This is likely due to the nature of her job. However, it is clear that she is constantly reproducing the existing U.S. discourse on China’s assertiveness, the U.S. national interest in freedom of navigation, and the possible security implications of China’s behavior. On the Asian ‘tour’ in 2011, Clinton and Obama both made essential, coherent, statements.

As the Commander in Chief of a democratic nation, the president has an institutionally tied authority and legitimacy in speaking security. The Copenhagen school argues that: “security is very much a structured field in which some actors are placed in positions of power to define security” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 31). During his visit to Australia in November 2011, president Obama gave a keynote speech to the Australian Parliament in which a clear path for the future was painted. He made the following remarks, quoted at length, reflecting the same order of discourse and its embeddedness in a larger strategy of the United States’ Asia ‘pivot’:

First, we seek security, which is the foundation of peace and prosperity. We stand for an international order in which the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld. Where international law and norms are enforced. Where commerce and freedom of navigation are not

impeded. Where emerging powers contribute to regional security, and where disagreements are resolved peacefully.

Now, I know that some in this region have wondered about America's commitment to upholding these principles. So let me address this directly. As the United States puts our fiscal house in order, we are reducing our spending. And yes, after a decade of extraordinary growth in our military budgets – and as we definitively end the war in Iraq, and begin to wind down the war in Afghanistan – we will make some reductions in defense spending.

As we consider the future of our armed forces, we've begun a review that will identify our most important strategic interests and guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade. So here is what this region must know. As we end today's wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in U.S. defense spending will not -- I repeat, will not -- come at the expense of the Asia Pacific (Obama 2011a).

The promises and statements of these parts of the speech are unambiguous and firm. Its textual structure further develops the discourse that the Asia Pacific region is a *top* priority in U.S. foreign policy and that security is placed as a prerequisite. He is enforcing the weight of freedom of navigation as a core value of the United States and the international order. Any threat to this international order is a security issue. He is also attempting to settle any growing uncertainty and doubt about U.S. commitments in the region to its allies, as a balancer and a guarantor of security, by strongly emphasizing that no budget cuts will *come at the expense of the Asia Pacific*.

Obama further went on to state his intention with the coming Bali summit: “I believe we can address shared challenges, such as proliferation and maritime security, including cooperation in the South China Sea” (Obama 2011a). There is little or no *hedging* (in the sense of Fairclough) in his speech except for not being explicit about whom he is referring to. The understanding is tacit, and this was illustrated through the response of the Chinese media and in the regional media coverage the days following the visit. Now, not only did the U.S. reaffirm several alliances during the tour in 2011, but it has also raised a warning finger to China in an increasingly stern manner.

In a similar vein, the *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* stated the following:

In 2011, China continued a pattern of provocation in disputed areas of the South China Sea. China's policy in the region appears driven by a desire to intimidate rather than cooperate. Many of China's activities in the region may constitute violations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. While China sometimes demonstrates a willingness to cooperate with

other claimants to disputed waters in the South China Sea, it is unlikely that China will concede any of its claims (2011; 180).

This text, produced to guide decisions in congress, explicitly identifies China's intentions as malignant. Regardless of whether the intention is to contain China (as some argue) or not, the result is that the U.S. decided to employ a discourse that it is aiming to justify its increased presence, influence, assertion and balance of power against China. The extraordinary measures that have been taken to back up these statements are visible in a range of ways from increased military exercises with the Philippines, cooperation with Vietnam, presence in Singapore and the stationing of troops in Darwin, Australia. However, the measures taken to enforce the security in the South China Sea are closely knit to the securitization of China's maritime capabilities and the military sector. The measures will thus be discussed together after the next section.

4.3 Securitizing China's maritime capabilities

During the 2011 visit by China's president Hu to Washington, leaders of both countries emphasized the importance of increased cooperation not least in the military sector (Chase 2011; 133). The U.S. has repeatedly stated that it supports a more powerful and prosperous China (ibid), and China has since 2002 repeatedly stated its intentions of a 'peaceful rise' (Guo 2006; 39). The need for cooperation is often deemed critical. Australian strategist Hugh White has argued that if China continues on its current trajectory, a new order in the region will need to be established; one that takes into account the new power relativities, and that "if this doesn't happen, there is no reason to expect that the peace can be kept" (White 2008; 91). China has since continued on the same trajectory, but no further significant military cooperation or regional order has yet been on any significant agenda. The peace has so far been kept, and the urgency of cooperation has been repeatedly emphasized, but no major change has taken place. Rather, the relationship has during the past four years rather gone in the opposite direction and become increasingly antagonistic. Some Chinese scholars argue that the bilateral relations are good on the surface but that the U.S. is increasingly working towards a containment policy (Chase 2011; 135).

The Obama administration has chosen to take a tougher approach to China's military modernization as the cooperation has proven to be difficult (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2011; 53). For example, military cooperation and mutual visits were suspended by Beijing in a reaction to a U.S.-Taiwan arms deal in 2010 (Pomfret 2010). Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated at the 2010 Shangri-La Dialogue, that the increasing Chinese capabilities directed at Taiwan requires the U.S. to supply Taiwan with arms and that disruptions in military-to-military relations with China will not change U.S. policy toward Taiwan (Gates 2010). Many people in China view Washington's approach as increasingly worrying and the idea that the U.S. is trying to restrain Chinese power ambitions

is getting stronger (Chase 2011; 133-134). Richard Weitz argued that the good relations established by former Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates were largely due to Gates' personal commitment and that his retirement might retard the progress (Weitz 2011). Weitz assertion seems accurate because since Gates retired military-to-military cooperation is conspicuously absent and the Obama administration has increasingly started to securitize China's growing capabilities.

China's annual military budget has over the past ten years grown faster than the overall economy, measured in GDP (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2011; 51). There are many different speculations as to why China is developing its military at such a rapid rate, now having the world's second largest military budget only after the United States (The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database). A lack of military transparency is fueling suspicion about China's intentions in regional states and the resulting uncertainty is a source of reoccurring diplomatic tensions (Kiselycznyk and Saunders 2010; 4-5). Only recently has Beijing started to reveal some of the developments that they seek to achieve. Amongst other things, China has admitted their intention to deploy an aircraft carrier group in the near future (Wong 2010). They also have increased submarine capabilities and they operate an underground submarine base that enables Chinese submarines to reach deep waters rapidly and deploy submarines to vital sea lanes with great stealth (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2010; 2).

Sea power is pursued for two main purposes. The first one is to protect SLOCs (Sea-Lanes of Communication) and seaborne commerce in peacetime, and to ensure protection of these through sea-denial or sea-control in times of war. The second purpose is for offensive military power and aggression (Howarth 2006; 4). Howarth writes mainly about the intentions behind Chinese submarine development and states that:

Although originally conceived to play primarily a defensive role in naval operations, the submarine has more often been the instrument of choice for offensive operations by inferior navies. And possession of advanced, offensive weapons has often provided weaker states with the confidence to launch asymmetric wars against stronger opponents (Howarth 2006; 9-10)

This observation is true not only for China in this region, but also for surrounding countries like Vietnam, who, in order to hedge its bets against China, is developing significant submarine capabilities to defend its interests in the South China Sea.

The supposed reasons behind China's rapid and extensively developed maritime capabilities are grounded in its issues with Taiwan. Some argue that China's naval modernization started with the 1996 incident in which the U.S. carriers blocked the Taiwan Strait and denied China any possibility of attack (see for example Office of the Secretary of Defense 2011; 57). In the case of Taiwan trying to declare independence, China would use force to enforce its claims to the territory (Ross 2000; 87). The United States has a long-standing alignment with Taiwan, something that was illustrated when the U.S. sent two aircraft carriers into the Taiwan Strait in 1996 to counter Chinese coercive diplomacy against

Taiwan (Ross 2000; 88). Even though Taiwan might be the highest priority, it is not the only reason for China's modernization efforts. Other goals include protecting Chinese interest in the South China Sea; preventing piracy; protecting vital energy supply lines; displacing U.S. power and influence in the Asia Pacific (O'Rourke 2012; 5).

In September 2011, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency announced the \$5.8 billion arms package to Taiwan. This was not well received in Beijing, and the Chinese Ambassador in Washington said there would be consequences (Minnick 2011). China believes it has legitimate reasons for being outraged about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan because of the 1982 communiqué that outlines the long-term U.S. policy towards Taiwan with a gradual decrease in arms sales with the goal of a future resolution (Junbo 2011). In line with the commitment of China not to let Taiwan secede from Mainland China, U.S. officials believe that China has planned its military development in a way that will enable enforcements of its claims of Taiwan without outside interference. This suspicion is visible in several official documents, for example in the following statement in a Department of Defense report to Congress:

The PLA seeks the capability to deter Taiwan independence and influence Taiwan to settle the dispute on Beijing's terms. In pursuit of this objective, Beijing is developing capabilities intended to deter, delay, or deny possible U.S. support for the island in the event of conflict. The balance of cross-strait military forces and capabilities continues to shift in the mainland's favor (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2011; I).

Despite arguments that the PLAN is of little direct threat to the United States, the Obama administration has chosen to securitize the rise of the Chinese naval capabilities. In the strategic guidance for the Department of Defense in 2012, Obama writes in a letter that:

As we end today's wars and reshape our Armed Forces, we will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies. In particular, we will continue to invest in the capabilities critical to future success, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; operating in anti-access environments; and prevailing in all domains, including cyber (Obama's note in Department of Defense 2012).

The statement covers a lot of ground but, most significantly, it officially raises the issue of operating in anti-access environment on the military security agenda. The report also makes clear the redirected focus of U.S. military strategy, saying: "while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, *we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region*" (Department of Defense 2012; 2). The necessity lies in maintaining competitiveness and regional sea control. In the context of China's lacking transparency in military modernization, the report raises the importance of increased U.S.-Sino cooperation but also

immediately addresses the inherent difficulties in doing so: “The United States will continue to make the necessary investments to ensure that we maintain regional access and the ability to operate freely in keeping with out treaty obligations and with international law” (Department of Defense 2012; 2) and that:

States such as China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities... *Accordingly, the U.S. military will invest as required to ensure its ability to operate effectively in anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) environments.* This will include implementing the Joint Operational Access Concept, sustaining our undersea capabilities, developing a new stealth bomber, improving missile defenses, and continuing efforts to enhance the resiliency and effectiveness of critical space-based capabilities (Department of Defense 2012; 4-5).

The measures that the Department of Defense is taking to deal with China might prove difficult to justify to a wider audience. In times of budget restraints, the best way to justify developing increasingly advanced and costly capabilities might be through securitization of China’s naval rise. This is what the United States is currently doing.

There is clear suspicion from the United States in Chinese intentions largely due to its lacking transparency and the ambiguous nature of government communications. For example, regarding China’s policy of ‘no first strike’ a 2011 report to congress states that:

If China loosely defines a ‘strike’ to encompass some political action, this significantly alters the purportedly ‘defensive’ nature of this strategic construct. This implies that PLA forces might be employed preemptively in the name of defense (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2011; 25).

With U.S. alliances and primacy in the Western Pacific, the U.S. has chosen to securitize China’s anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) because they pose the greatest threat to U.S. ships in the event of a Chinese anti-access operation (Wishik II 2011; 39). The A2/AD concept is not used by China, but their ASCEL (Active Strategic Counterattacks on Exterior Lines) has many similar features, although Wishik (2011) argues that ASCEL might be seen as more extensive than A2/AD.

According to a *New York Times* article, the new Defense Secretary Leon Panetta expressed Washington’s worries about China:

We’re concerned about China... The most important thing we can do is to project our force into the Pacific – to have our carriers there, to have our fleet there, to be able to make very clear to China that we are going to protect international rights to be able to move across the oceans freely (Panetta quoted in Bumiller 2011).

This statement bluntly points out China as the perpetrator in the Pacific. With this serious security concern, it also, without hedging, identifies a strong military presence as the *most important thing we can do* and that U.S. interests will be protected using this military presence. The statement lift the issue to another level of urgency, possibly so as to justify further spending on new capabilities.

It can be observed, by looking at U.S. discourse surrounding China's military modernization, that there is an inherent dichotomy in U.S. posture towards China. Chinese scholars have called this the 'two-handed' China policy, which features characteristics of both engagement and containment (Chase 2011; 134). Chase argues that the Chinese misconceptions of U.S. intentions might create a situation that proves difficult to manage because of the attempt to employ both a firm approach of balancing power and simultaneously accommodating China's rise (Chase 2011; 135). The confusion is generated by ambiguous messages in statements such as the following made by Barack Obama:

And we'll seek more opportunities for cooperation with Beijing, including greater communication between our militaries to promote understanding and avoid miscalculation. We will do this, even as we continue to speak candidly to Beijing about the importance of upholding international norms (Obama 2011a).

The issues outlined are inseparable in the wider relationship, and Washington's attempt to both shape and accommodate China is antagonistic. The securitization of China's military modernization might be seen as a natural development. However, it is a conscious political choice that is effectively transforming China's increased military security into U.S. insecurity in a prime example of a security dilemma. The, at times, two-handed policy can be seen as a U.S. attempt to desecuritize certain threats for the purpose of cooperation. However, in the current climate, this has been deemed increasingly complicated.

4.4 Extraordinary measures

Arguably, the easiest way to determine whether a securitization speech act has been successful or not is by looking at how a perceived threat discourse has shaped policy, and how extraordinary measures have been adopted to deal with a specific threat (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 26). In the two sections dealing with the political and the military sectors, the extraordinary measures have come in the form of a concerted development in a wider political and strategic development. There are arguably three overarching, cross-sectorial, extraordinary measures that can be identified as being employed in direct response to the securitizations discussed above.

Firstly, to deal with the issues of territorial sovereignty and China's claims to disputed territory, and to protect international rules and norms, the U.S. has increased its military cooperation with the Philippines. In early 2012, the U.S. and

Philippines performed major joint naval exercises as a way to increase Philippine capabilities and to enable the U.S. to charter the volatile waters of the South China Sea (Odgaard 2003; 16). The U.S. also worked to improve its relationship with Vietnam. Secondly, as a wider measure to increase presence and flexibility in the region, president Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the stationing of the U.S. Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) in Australia's Northern Territory with the goal of having 2500 marines stationed there for six months per year by 2016 (White House 2011). This officially aims to improve relations with Australia and to enable fast-reaction operations in response to natural disasters. But the context of the announcement, and the current developments in the region has prompted suspicion that the deployment is a piece in a much larger puzzle to circle China. Thirdly, and perhaps the most extensive measure employed, is the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) developed by the United States. The central purpose of the JOAC (2012) is stated as follows:

As a global power with global interests, the United States must maintain the credible capability to project military force into any region of the world in support of those interests. This includes the ability to project force both into the global commons to ensure their use and into foreign territory as required. Moreover, the credible ability to do so can serve as a reassurance to U.S. partners and a powerful deterrent to those contemplating actions that threaten U.S. interests (JOAC 2012; 2).

The JOAC includes the new Air-Sea Battle concept, which aims to bring together the Navy and the Air Force in developing integration between the different forces to deal with a wider range of threats from cyber to A2/AD threats (JOAC 2012; 4). This concept is central to U.S. securitizations in the Asia Pacific region and constitutes a wide range of emergency measures to deal with the growing threat of Chinese military modernization towards which it is most clearly directed. These developments are but the most significant. They are all arguably integrated into what might resemble a 'grand strategy'.

5 Securitizing American jobs and enduring U.S. competitiveness

Security issues directly related to economics are often diffuse and difficult to distinguish because insecurity is inherent in commercial business and in the liberal economic system (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; 38 and 103). Business is in its nature competitive and faces existential threats, known as bankruptcy. However, economic aspects are often the instigator to larger problems developing in other sectors, as could be observed, for example, in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98 and in the economic hardship of the 1930s (Taylor and Luckham 2006; 145). Thus, the economic sector has a place in securitization theory since the discourse surrounding economic activity is, in many cases, closely tied to the security discourse. This is especially so in times of economic downturn such as after the 2008 financial crisis. The extraordinary measures employed to deal with some of the recent consequences of China's economic growth will not be dealt with in a separate section, as I did in the previous chapter. Rather, they will become visible in the empirical analysis and will not be investigated beyond their significance of illustration.

5.1 Background and facilitating conditions

So we seek economies that are open and transparent. We seek trade that is free and fair. And we seek an open international economic system, where rules are clear and every nation plays by them (Obama 2011a).

Recent developments in the economic sector have followed similar trends to those of the military and political. Many recent developments across the sectors have built increasing tensions that have been showcased through competition, and failed cooperation with China. Despite good intentions behind some of the developments, inherent differences arise in a global marketplace where domestic values and standards create tension on the international arena. It also seems like the domestic difficulties facing the U.S. are shaping foreign economic policy. The predictions of a power shift in China's favor looms like a dark cloud over Washington's officials. In accordance to these developments, it is often the case, that in instances where economic issues are securitized, it is because they relate to the overall, general relationship between two actors (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 190). Thus, certain economic policy is here viewed as a part of a larger

relationship of power struggle, in this section illustrated through recent developments in trade and currency.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, many economies around the world have been struggling to recover. Not least the United States' whose economy is recovering slower, partly because of the immense problems in the Euro zone (Lowrey 2011) and largely because of domestic political stalemate. The United States is facing a wide range of economic difficulties and its reactions to the problems can almost be viewed as looking for something to point at and say: 'that's why we're not doing well right now' – to blame external factors beyond direct control in order to maintain political power and stability. China seems to be the biggest actor at the end of that pointing finger. Securitizations in the economic sector, however, are not as clear-cut as in the political and military sectors. In this case, it is characterized by several internal (U.S.) differences where the discourse lacks consistency, coherency, clarity and a dominant actor. Therefore, the discourse analysis will incorporate several, but smaller, instances of textual analysis to illuminate differences and the problematic surrounding the actor-audience relationship in a democracy.

First, allow me to point out five key indicators of the United States' economic relations with China:

1. China holds US\$1,159 trillion in US Treasury Security Bonds (Department of the Treasury 2012).
2. In 2011, the US trade deficit with China alone reached US\$295,5 billion (Palmer 2012).
3. In 1991, China accounted for only 2% of total imports in the US, in contrast to 11% in 2010 (Bloom, Draca and Van Reenen 2010; 2).
4. U.S. foreign direct investment in China totaled \$49,4 billion in 2009, whilst Chinese FDI in the U.S. was only \$791 million (USTR 2012).
5. In 2010, Chinese GDP totaled \$5,926 trillion whilst U.S. GDP totaled \$14,586 trillion. In the same year, Chinese GDP growth was 10,4% whilst U.S. GDP growth was 3,0% (World Bank 2012).

As will be illustrated below, all these figures shape the facilitating conditions under which successful securitizations can take place.

The United States under the Obama administration has long criticized Chinese economic policy and intellectual property breaches. Obama, and members of his administration, has on numerous occasions (notably at the State of the Union speech 2012, as well as Obama's address in Canberra, Australia, in November 2011) claimed that China is not playing by the rules, and that something needs to be done to basically force it into submission. There are strong indications that the Obama administration has labeled China's practices as an posing existential threat to U.S. jobs and future competitiveness.

On the 2011 Asia-Pacific tour, Obama made the following remarks in his speech in the Australian Parliament:

We need growth that is fair, where every nation plays by the rules; where workers rights are respected, and our businesses can compete on a level playing field; where the intellectual property and new technologies that fuel innovation are protected; and where currencies are market driven so no nation has an unfair advantage (Obama 2011a).

With a hint to it in this statement, China is in different contexts being labeled as, amongst other things, a ‘currency manipulator’, as disregarding intellectual property and for restricting foreign business, denying any foreign company the opportunities of a state-contract involving, for example, energy and transport (The *Economist* Oct 15, 2011). However, despite strong indications of a wide consensus on China’s undervalued currency, the Obama administration has been cautious not to explicitly label China a currency manipulator, despite many domestic voices’ (mainly manufacturing industry) loud protests (Rugaber 2011). These domestic pressures from both industry and members of congress have arguably affected the Obama administration’s policy line, as well as the order of discourse in domestic politics.

5.2 Currency manipulation and unfair trade

In late October 2011, the Peterson Institute for International Economics estimated that the Yuan was undervalued by 23.5 percent (Cline and Williamson 2011; 4). A low Yuan enables Chinese exports to be sold cheaper in foreign markets whilst making imports expensive. This has resulted, according to Republican senator Lindsey Graham, in the loss of around 2 million manufacturing jobs in America in the past decade (Ambrams 2011). A World Bank Research Development Group report showed that what they call the ‘spillover effect’ of China’s currency fluctuations are significant and that exports to third countries, from, for example, the United States tend to significantly rise/fall with the appreciation/depreciation of the renminbi (Mattoo, Mishra and Subramanian 2012; 3). Therefore, it is not merely a bilateral issue, but embedded in other states’ interest, thus increasing the performative force of the discourse.

Beijing allowed the Yuan to strengthen significantly (21%) between 2005-2008 but devalued it to help spur exports in reaction to the financial crisis in 2008 (Wei 2011). The strengthening of the Yuan during that three-year period was likely a result of efforts by the US Congress to deal with the unfairness of an undervalued currency. China’s president, however, emphasized on March 26, 2012, that the Chinese renminbi was not the cause for the structural problems in the US economy (Gov.cn 2012).

Nevertheless, in response to this perceived structural unfairness in competition, the U.S. Senate passed the *Currency Exchange Rate Oversight Reform Act* (CERORA) on October 11, 2011. The act allows for countervailing measures should currency manipulation be seen to act as a subsidy for export goods (CERORA 2011). Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown is the sponsor of the bill

that is currently being ‘held at desk’ (and has been since October 12, 2011) in the House of Representatives (CERORA 2011). China responded to the bill by depreciating the Yuan, albeit only marginally and it bounced back quite fast (Wei 2011).

The bill has been subject to much disagreement and controversy. An article in *The Economist* stated: “America has legitimate beefs with China, but this bill is the wrong way to address them. It is legally flawed, economically dangerous and unnecessary. Were it ever to reach Mr Obama’s desk, he should veto it” (*The Economist* Oct 15, 2011). Further critique came from different senators prior to the bill getting voted through with a 65-35 majority. Republican senator James DeMint forewarned that the passing of such a bill would likely spark a trade war with China, and would not create more American jobs, but rather make everyday household goods more expensive for struggling families and that “this well-intended bill will have ... unintended results” (DeMint 2011). Furthermore, the speaker of the House of Representatives, John Boehner, articulated his fears, saying: “for the Congress of the United States to be taking this step at this moment in time poses a very severe risk of a trade war and unintended consequences that could come as a result” (Lengell 2011). The possibility of unintended consequences of securitizing the issue of currency manipulation was already sparked when the senate passed the bill. The bill also clearly illustrates that securitization is not *only* the product of the powerful actors, but is sometimes subject to substantial audience resistance.

It is unclear exactly where president Obama stands in the debate and whether he would sign the bill was it to end up on his desk. He has addressed the issue saying that: “My main concern ... is whatever tools we put in place, let’s make sure that these are tools that can actually work, that they are consistent with our international treaties and obligations” (Obama quoted in Palmer and Spetalnick 2011). Scott Paul, the executive director of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, has said that if Obama was to be consistent with his previous statements and stance on the issues with China’s currency, he ought to sign it (Ensinger 2011).

There is a fine balance to be struck between implementing protectionist measures in the U.S. and getting everyone to ‘play by the rules’. If China is not playing by the rules, does that render protectionist measure acceptable? According to the director of the renowned Peterson Institute for International Economics, the Chinese currency manipulation “is by far the largest protectionist measure adopted by any country since the Second World War – and probably in all of history” (Bergsten quoted in Levin 2011). Without being a government official with the conventional legitimacy to speak security, Bergsten is arguably in a position to play an active role in the securitization of economic issues. However, it can be argued that the extraordinary measures taken by the U.S. to tackle these problems are inherently protectionist measures. This confirms the theoretical idea that extraordinary steps can operate outside what is normally accepted.

At the APEC CEO Business Summit on November 12, 2011, Obama said that:

We've brought more enforcement actions against China over the last couple of years than had taken place in many of the preceding years, not because we're looking for conflict, but simply because we want to make sure that the interests of American workers and American businesses are protected (Obama 2011b).

American leaders want to protect the competitiveness of US businesses in times where economic growth in general, and manufacturing in particular, is slow in America. This statement claims that the aim is not conflict but protection. The referent object is not the state, but rather business and workers. The statement is also pointing out the administration's willingness to deal with China's perceived unfair practices.

Generally, the IMF is the body that deals with issues regarding currencies, but they are not authorized to force a country to change their ways (Sanford 2011; 2). The WTO is another actor commonly mentioned in the discussion because they deal with trade-related subsidies. The definition of trade subsidies, however, is very narrow and currency manipulation does not fit the description of an illegal subsidy (Sanford 2011; 3). Against this background, American leaders have identified a threat and chosen to deal with it through controversial domestic policy. The measures taken by the senate in passing the CERORA are emergency actions operating outside the framework of normal rules of the international economy. It is also a political move employed to win political support in a time of a struggling economy and looming presidential elections. This can be observed in the incoherent discourse and the hesitation to explicitly label China. Obama has been weighing domestic support versus bilateral consequences. As such, securitizing China's currency manipulation is neither unintentional nor completely intentional, but rather the consequence of a politically motivated move that has the potential for tragic consequences in the form of trade war.

Fears in Congress of the Chinese competitive advantages of an undervalued Yuan might be groundless and based around false premises. A report dealing with the impacts of Chinese imports on technological development suggests that the competition with China spurs innovation and technological development, and that only the establishments that are less IT-intensive are negatively impacted (Bloom, Draca and Van Reenen 2010). This raises questions about misperceptions and illustrates the risk of counterproductive securitizations. Nevertheless, competition is always good for development, but not for security unless the competition is conducted on a level playing field. A 2011 report to congress states that: "We are in a global competition with China, and U.S. policies should flow from this premise" (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2011; 19). So even if the securitization moves are counterproductive, some Washington officials have chosen to pursue them to uphold a system of rules and norms that it has built.

In a recent development, Obama announced, in his 2012 state of the union address on January 24, the creation of a trade enforcement unit that will deal with investigating unfair trade practices and also to protect against unsafe goods coming into America (Obama 2012a). This main point of his address specifically

deals with a security dimension to trade relations with China. Furthermore, at the 2011 APEC Business Summit, Obama expressed his concern of unfair and unsafe trade practices:

I don't think it's any secret -- Jim, you talked to a lot of CEOs and probably a lot of folks in this room -- for an economy like the United States, where our biggest competitive advantage is our knowledge, our innovation, our patents, our copyrights -- for us not to get the kind of protection that we need in a large marketplace like China is not acceptable (Obama 2011b).

Correspondingly, securitizing acts within the economic sector are often formulated in a way that identifies a “threat to *our* position” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; 102). With some \$50bn in FDI in China, the protection of intellectual property is necessary. Accordingly, when addressing the issue of unfair Chinese competition in the 2012 State of the Union address, Obama said:

this Congress should make sure that no foreign company has an advantage over American manufacturing when it comes to accessing financing or new markets like Russia. Our workers are the most productive on Earth, and if the playing field is level, I promise you -- America will always win” (Obama 2012a).

This is attempting to emphasize the perceived American exceptionalism but argues that a level playing field is a prerequisite to maintain ‘*our position*’. After difficulties creating an effective tool to deal with the issues of unfair trade practices, the president signed an executive order (on February 28, 2012) establishing the Interagency Trade Enforcement Center (ITEC). In the opening remarks of the order, he states:

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, and in order to advance U.S. foreign policy and protect the national and economic security of the United States through strengthened and coordinated enforcement of U.S. trade rights under international trade agreements and enforcement of domestic trade laws, it is hereby ordered as follows (Obama 2012b).

In sum, the executive order then outlines the following: Monitoring and enforcement of trade rules (domestic and international) have to be strengthened in order to protect American businesses and increase their exports on a level playing field. The center will include the Department of State, Treasury, Justice, Agriculture, Commerce, Homeland Security, the office of the Director of National Intelligence, and other agencies as the President, or the United States Trade Representative, may designate (Obama 2012b). The ITEC aims, among other things, at “Enhancing the Administration’s Capabilities to Aggressively Challenge Unfair Trade Practices” (The White House n.d.).

This action against Chinese economic development is the vanguard of the LIEO of which the US carries the burden. It makes Obama the securitizing actor through the constitutional power of issuing executive orders. Without drawing legitimacy from a direct audience but rather from structural, institutional power, Obama decided to protect the *national and economic security*, by putting these issues in the security realm to find justification.

To further promote U.S. trade in the region, and to ensure the maintenance of a liberal economic system guided by rules, fairness and other U.S. core values, the Obama administration is pursuing what it calls the ‘Trans-Pacific Partnership’ (TPP). The nature of the TPP as a free-trade agreement is, at first glance, difficult to connect to the securitization of China’s trade practices. However, it is intimately connected to the extraordinary steps taken to ‘force’ China into submission by emphasizing the importance of rules and ‘universal’ public goods. The partnership has a range of provisions unrelated to trade and it is open only to countries that can comply (USTR 2011). Due to the composition of the TPP membership, Meredith Lewis argues that the partnership enables the U.S. to alter the economic balance of power consistent with the Obama administration’s aim to engage the region (Lewis 2011; 37). Bhagwati argues that by shaping the TPP in a way that effectively excludes China in its current form, it could be seen as a *preferential* trade agreement (PTA) “built... in a spirit of confrontation and containment, not cooperation” (Bhagwati 2012). The exclusion of a successful TPP would have immense consequences on the Chinese economic development.

6 Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate how the United States has approached elements of China's economic growth and military modernization. By employing securitization theory and neorealist notions of security, I sought to reveal the transformation of the U.S. approach from being of a political nature to becoming issues of security. I employed a slightly modified model of securitization theory, emphasizing the importance of facilitating conditions and the institutional power of securitizing actors.

I have argued that the United States has chosen to securitize a range of issues pertaining to China's rise. The securitizations have been successful in instances where the facilitating conditions have been sufficient. However, securitization ought to be avoided, and the reasons for this become apparent in situations where attempts to securitize have failed, but where the echo of the attempt itself contributes to increased insecurity. Despite China's claims of a peaceful rise, the United States approach to China's increasing assertiveness in territorial disputes, its military modernization aimed at developing A2/AD capabilities, and the trade practices that are identified as unfair, is putting stains on a relationship vital to security and economic growth in the 21st century. I have suggested that the securitizations are embedded in a historically unique context and that these facilitating conditions are enabling securitizations that incorporate regional actors in a strategy to externally balance China.

Furthermore, the construction of security is dependent not only on a single speech act but rather around these significant facilitating conditions, and sequences of coherent speech acts that shape a wider order of discourse around security. However, the empirics suggest that there are, at times, two orders of discourse operating side by side: one of control, and one of engagement. This is what the Chinese have called the 'two-handed' U.S. policy. This has complicated the analysis and the findings have at times been conflicting.

The thesis studied securitizing acts in three sectors, and through the findings in the cases the following conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, in the political sector, China's assertiveness and its subsequent threat to the UNCLOS and vital SLOCs prompted the U.S. to get involved in the South China Sea dispute in 2010. It did so by announcing its national interest in the freedom of navigation and placing the issue within the security realm by emphasizing the importance of security and stability for all nations. The referent object was somewhat difficult to identify since a national interest was emphasized, which would suggest the state being the referent object, but where the threat is posed to international order and law. With the referent object being international law and the established order, the U.S., posing as the main vanguard of these principles, aimed to securitize China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. This is also the case where regional

dynamics became most prominent in the securitization process due to other actors' difficulty to assert their legal claims against a vastly more powerful China. For example, Clinton implied that the U.S. would support the Philippines with the necessary means to protect itself from any aggressor in these disputes, and it would not accept any actor asserting its territorial claims through coercion or intimidation. The order of discourse shaped around the territorial disputes and on China's harassment of vessels from various states, was clearly one drawing on the wider security discourse and the historical notion of China as a bully.

Secondly, I looked at how the U.S. has approached China's military modernization and how, despite major budget cuts, the Obama administration has emphasized the importance of U.S. operations in the region. The issue of China's A2/AD capabilities has been identified in the security discourse as the main threat to U.S. commitments in the region, mainly with reference to Taiwan. It is clear from the analysis that the Pentagon is aiming to counter these capabilities by adopting the JOAC and the Air-Sea battle concept. It was, however, somewhat difficult to apply discourse analysis to issues so clearly pertaining to security. This section therefore had a clear neorealist twist to it. Nevertheless, the analytical framework and the discourse analysis illustrated that the aims of securitizations in the military sector were closely tied to those developing in the political sector and I argued that the extraordinary measures were aligned in what could be seen as a grand strategy where securitizations have been deemed a necessary evil.

Thirdly, the securitizations of trade and the Chinese currency showcased a good example of security in the economic sector. It also illustrated how the intersubjective dimension in securitization is sometimes insignificant, as in the case of Obama's executive order, which overrides normal political practice but nevertheless stays within the legal framework. However, the economic sector also illustrated that democratic practice sometimes makes the audience vital, as in the case of the CERORA. This showcased that there are different ways to securitize, and that different instances require distinctive approaches on behalf of the actor. It also illustrated that the performative force of a speech act is dependent on its embeddedness in a wider discourse. The CERORA was seen as too controversial and risky in the current economic climate, and the stakes were too high. China's currency manipulation has thus not yet been lifted above normal economic practice.

It is difficult to determine when an issue obtains security status without reproducing dominant ideas of security and to contribute to the political process of securitization. The temptation to, at times, see issues where there are none can to an extent be avoided by being critical to the speech acts, and by tracing coherence and continuity in the discursive practices. Therefore, as a contribution to the field of security studies on the U.S. approach to China, the empirical cases have illustrated that the U.S. approach is ambiguous, and that the Chinese perception of a two-handed approach is somewhat accurate. U.S. securitizing moves across the three sectors have been successful to a varying degree. This inconsistency complicated the analysis of securitizing acts but it also illustrated the fact that the construction of security goes beyond the speech act.

In sum, these findings make up the answer to the research question. However, to follow the important developments in the region it is important that further studies are conducted, and to continuously trace change in the security of the Asia Pacific region. A missing piece is scholarly work conducted from a Chinese perspective, at least in English. I acknowledge that my approach is by its nature to some extent western-centric, and there are always two sides to a coin. Security is a different concept in different parts of the world, and as I stated in the thesis, it is highly dependent on regional and even national differences.

The U.S. approach to China under the Obama administration, this thesis argued, is characterized by increasing competition, failure to cooperate on vital issues due to the possibility of a looming power-shift, and difficulties to facilitate the important economic growth of China under its current premises. According to this, and with the facilitating conditions outlined throughout the study, the United States has securitized elements of China's economic growth and military development to protect American exceptionalism, the ILEO, American jobs and naval supremacy. These ambitions strain the relationship and moves the two powers further apart. As a result, security in the Asia Pacific is not becoming stronger, but might result in increasing unpredictability.

7 Executive summary

The relationship between the United States and China has been labeled the most important of the 21st century. Not only has China impressed the world with its rapid economic growth. It has also begun to spur concern due to its dramatically increasing military spending. China's military modernization is becoming increasingly advanced and it is arguably creating a power-shift in the Asia Pacific region. As a result, the states in the region are looking for ways to deal with the decision to either engage China or to hedge their bets and employ external and/or internal balancing of China's looming power.

A key worry in the region is largely due to the general lack of transparency in China's developments. China is not explicit about its intentions, and when it claims that it is pursuing a peaceful rise, there are many surrounding states, as well as academics and reporters across the world that chose to believe otherwise. Some aspects of China's rise affirm the peaceful rise strategy whereas several other aspects contradict it. Simultaneously, some aspects of China's economic boom is seen, mainly by the United States, as based around unfair practices in trade and currency. These practices allow China to gain a competitive advantage that furthers its growth, whilst restraining others.

On its current trajectory, China is predicted to surpass the United States in terms of GDP sometime in the late 2020s. China is also getting closer to achieving sea-denial capabilities that can prevent the U.S. from aiding Taiwan in a potential armed confrontation. With these growing capabilities, and with a perception of U.S. weakness in the light of the 2008 financial crisis and the wars in the Middle East, China has also increasingly begun to assert its territorial claims in the South China Sea. These developments have created a situation in which the United States has taken a wide range of measures to maintain its influence, power, and economic ambitions in the Asia Pacific.

Against this background, the primary aim of the study was to shine light on the wider implications of the approach taken by the Obama administration since he took office in 2009. To achieve this objective, the research problem was tackled by conducting three different empirical studies of cases that have been prominent in contemporary affairs.

7.1 Theoretical approach

The theoretical framework chosen to guide the study derives from the works of the 'Copenhagen school'. The securitization theory developed by the Copenhagen school seeks to extend the concept of security beyond the state. By employing

their idea of securitization theory, whilst also maintaining a somewhat neorealist approach, the thesis set out to identify the specific instances where certain issues were lifted above 'normal' practice into the realm of security. This transformation of an issue into a security matter can take place in economics, politics, military, society and the environment. By approaching the study with slight modifications suggested by Stritzel (2007), the empirical application of the theory was enabled. The approach employs discourse analytical tools to identify when a speech act places something within an order of discourse pertaining to security. It looks at the embeddedness of a certain discourse, the performative force of the speech act, and the way that this speech act shapes social practice. By using this framework in the methodological approach, significant speech acts have been analyzed and the implications of the actions have been analyzed.

However, the so-called speech act, which is central to securitization theory, is not sufficient in its own right to account for a complex construction of security. Therefore, a certain emphasis was placed on facilitating conditions. Facilitating conditions are the specific circumstances that enable a successful securitization. They are grounded in historical background as well as in recent developments. In this study, theories of hegemony and power transition were employed to explain some of the more implicit facilitating conditions, whilst also discussing the significance of regional dynamics in securitization.

7.2 Key findings

The thesis is comprised of three main empirical cases that, to a varying degree, illustrate instances of securitization. The cases were selected to cover three of the five sectors outlined by the Copenhagen school: economic, political, military.

In the first case, the issues surrounding China's increasing assertiveness in territorial disputes in the South China Sea were analyzed by looking at recent U.S. involvement. The U.S. has sought to get involved in the disputes because of the wider implications of a potential conflict. The U.S. seeks to protect vital shipping lanes and to uphold the current law and rules based system. In doing so, it has securitized Chinese assertiveness with the international law as the referent object. The U.S. announced that it had a national interest in the stability of the region and that it would thus attempt to ensure stability with all elements of U.S. power. The statement made by Obama in Australia 2011, applies to all cases studied in that it announces the wider strategy of the U.S. 'pivot' to Asia.

The second case was closely tied to the first one in terms of military presence in the region and its balance against China's naval capabilities. It investigated the securitization of China's military modernization mainly in terms of its sea-denial/area access denial capabilities. The U.S. is increasingly worried about the fact that China has (or is close to fully develop) the capabilities to prevent the U.S. Navy to access the Taiwan Strait in the case of armed conflict.

The third case studied U.S. securitizations of Chinese trade practices and currency manipulation. The United States has taken an increasingly firm stance on

what it perceives as unfair trade practices creating unfair competitiveness of Chinese exports, whilst also, through currency manipulation, making imports increasingly expensive. In the light of this, and because of pressures in domestic politics, the Obama administration has taken extraordinary measures to tackle its difficulties to recover from the 2008 financial crisis and to protect American jobs and future competitiveness.

In sum, the study found that the particular historical circumstances of relative decline, economic struggle, budget deficits, and the emergence of a new significant power, the United States has chosen to securitize, with varying success, certain elements of China's activities to justify its continuing presence and to keep its role as the upholder of the system it has largely created.

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