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Thesis Prospectus

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### **Contextual Background**

John Mearsheimer in his *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* argues that offensive realism can explain the nature of the current international system. In his explanation of current power standings and power shifts, Mearsheimer states “China is the key to understanding the future distribution of power in Northeast Asia.”<sup>i</sup> With the rate that China has been growing annually along with its population size, China has the potential to become wealthier than Japan, and possibly the United States. According to his theories on offensive realism, China’s rise to regional hegemony is also dependent upon its abilities to project its military powers beyond its borders. But with a enough amount of wealth, China could build a much more powerful army and shift the power balance to an unbalanced multipolar system, making Northeast Asia far more dangerous than what it is currently. In his analysis, however, Mearsheimer concludes “China is still far away from the point where it has enough latent power to make a run at regional hegemony.”<sup>i</sup>

However, since *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* was published in 2001, China has surpassed Japan in GDP value, become a recognizable force in international politics, and its economy still continues to grow at unprecedented rates. China’s potential military power has also increased. According to the Department of Defense Report on the

People's Republic of China for 2011, Beijing announced a 12.7% increase in its military budget to approximately \$91.5 billion, whereas the budget was around \$16 billion in 2001<sup>ii</sup>. In a 10-year period, the Chinese defense budget has increased 6 times over.

In his final analysis, Mearsheimer predicted that if China were to become a regional hegemon, the United States would maintain its forces in East Asia to contain China.<sup>i</sup> Currently, the United States is reducing the number of its troops in the Middle East and scaling back the overall size of its Armed Forces. Despite these trends in military size reduction, the Pentagon announced last November that the US would establish a permanent military presence in Australia. According to the Washington Post, President Obama also announced, "to expand America's military in the Asia Pacific as a 'top priority'" as American focus shifts from the Middle East.<sup>iii</sup>

Now it appears that Mearsheimer's prediction is maybe coming true.

### **Research Question**

Is the change in Chinese military power having an effect upon US national security policy in East Asia? If a correlation can be made between Chinese policies and US policy orientation, then Mearsheimer's prediction can be proven true, indicating China's potential of becoming East Asia's next hegemon and the subsequent shift in the balance of power.

## **Hypothesis**

According to the research I have done so far and common media rhetoric, there is a lot of evidence that indicates Chinese military power has grown significantly since 2001. Because of this, the US views its interests in East Asia becoming more and more threatened by China, resulting in a change in US military mission focus to East Asia. Therefore it is the goal of this thesis to prove that the growth of Chinese military power is causing the US to place more military forces in East Asia in order to counter balance China's growing power and containing China's influence from affecting the US and its allies' interests.

## **Methodology**

Using Chinese military power as the independent variable, and US military policy as the dependent variable, my research will focus on answering the previously mentioned question using qualitative research.

However, other variables will have to be used to represent both the independent and dependent variables:

### **Independent Variable:**

For representing the change in Chinese Military Power, I will be borrowing from the model created by Ashley Tellis in *Measuring National Power in the Post Industrial Age*. Ashley Tellis argues that when measuring military capabilities on a universal scale,

the questions that have to be answered are “What resources does the military get, and how successfully can they be transformed into effective military power?”<sup>iv</sup> She uses 3 variables to answer these questions:

- 1.) Strategic resources a military receives from the government it serves
  - a. Defense Budget
  - b. Manpower
- 2.) Resources converted into effective capabilities
  - a. Military Academy Enrollment
  - b. Military Trade
- 3.) Combat Proficiency
  - a. Number and types of Advanced weaponry

**Dependent Variable:**

For representing change US military policy, I will be using variables that directly represent the implementation of the new focus in East Asia military policies:

- a. Defense Budget for East Asia
- b. Number of troops stationed in East Asia
- c. Joint military operations
- d. Demand for Asian analysts
- e. Military trade

I will create a database with these variables for every year since 2001 and then run analyses on them to determine if there is a correlation between the variables at all. I will only be looking at this one independent variable to prove its connection with the dependent variable, as opposed to looking at other independent variables in order to disprove the original independent variable.

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<sup>i</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton, 2001. Print.

<sup>ii</sup> Crane, Keith. *Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005. Print.

<sup>iii</sup> Nakamura, David. "Obama: U.S. to Send 250 Marines to Australia in 2012." *Washington Post* 16 Nov. 2011: n. pag. Print.

<sup>iv</sup> Tellis, Ashley J. *Measuring National Power in the Postindustrial Age*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND/Arroyo Center, 2000. Print.