

Power and Paradox: Asian Geopolitics and Sino-American Relations in the 21st Century

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Abstract: The pattern of Asian geopolitics can be examined by employing three analytical perspectives. The first employs East Asia and the vigorous debate over the meaning of the rise of China as an intellectual prism to observe the currents of geopolitical continuity and change that are currently abroad in the Asian region. The second explores the extent to which the interacting forces of geopolitics and military modernization foster the rise of new force projection capabilities that may affect the strategic environment in Asia—particularly in East Asia. Here, the focus is mainly on the arsenals of the three indigenous Asian giants, China, Japan and India, all of whom have developed, or are in the process of developing, significant air and maritime assets whose operations have the potential to intersect in East and South East Asia. Russia is not as much a presence because it no longer possesses its powerful Soviet-era Pacific Fleet and has, in essential respects, retreated to its traditional role as a Eurasian land power.¹ The third examines the future of Sino-American relations in Asia in the context of the debate over China's ascent and U. S. decline—a discussion that has intensified since the implosion of the U.S. financial system in 2008 and the onset of the worst global recession since the 1930s.

For the first time since the beginning of the sixteenth century, the single largest concentration of global economic power will be found not in Europe nor in the Americas, but in Asia. Various U.S. and European scholars of geopolitics have called this shift the “post-Vasco da Gama era,” “the coming of the post-Columbian epoch” and “the end of the

¹ For Russia's naval decline since the 1990s, see Stephen J. Blank, “Potemkin's Treadmill: Russian Military Modernization,” in Tellis and Wills, *Strategic Asia 2006-06*, pp. 175-205 and Otto Kreisher, “A Potemkin Navy?” *Seapower: The Official Publication of the Navy League of the United States*, vol 53. 2 (Feb. 2010), pp. 12-15.

Atlantic era.”² Similarly, the leading Singaporean intellectual, Kishore Mahbubani, has written of Asia’s rise as carrying with it an “irresistible shift of global power to the East” which will transform the world.³ Yet, it remains unclear whether this economic revolution can be accommodated by the geopolitical structures that characterize contemporary Asia. Indeed, the dominant feature of contemporary Asian geopolitics is an unresolved tension between the direction of economic growth and that of strategic alignment. The vital interests of the world’s lone superpower, the United States, and those of the great powers of China, Japan, India and Russia are all engaged in Asia in a climate of change and uncertainty about the future.

Asia’s rise to economic supremacy is occurring against a general geopolitical environment that lacks formal security architecture for either stable arms control regimes or for structured conflict-resolution. The rise of China and the growing multipolarity of Asia, as a whole, is a challenge to U.S. supremacy. Concern over long-term regional security is fuelling a process of military modernization across East, Central and South Asia, from weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) to missile defense and information technologies.⁴

Asia is also increasingly a laboratory for the cross-cutting themes of what James Rosenau has called “the two worlds of world politics”—that is the old security agenda of modern realist geopolitics and inter-state rivalry and the new security agenda of post-modern globalized security and non-state threats.⁵ In terms of the old security agenda, Asia is home to eight of the world’s ten largest militaries and it contains four dangerous flashpoints: the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, Kashmir, and Pakistan-Afghanistan. Asia’s geopolitical security agenda includes a volatile mixture of Islamist extremism, transnational threats and weak states in South Asia and parts of South-East Asia. Some analysts view the dangers of Asia as deep and profound. To quote one 2008 study on U.S. Asian policy:

² Paul Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (New York: Perennial, 2000), p. xv; C. Dale Walton, *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: Multipolarity and the Revolution in Strategic Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1; Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, *The Shape of the World to Come: Charting the Geopolitics of a New Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), ch. 2.

³ Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

⁴ For discussion of these trends, see Nick Beasley, *Building Asia’s Security* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009); Amit Gupta, ed, *Strategic Stability in Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Amitav Acharya and Evelyn Goh, eds., *Reassessing Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Competition, Congruence and Transformation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia 2006-06: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty*, (Washington DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005).

⁵ James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 249-271.

Asia is not a theatre at peace. . . suspicions rooted in rivalry and nationalism run deep. The continent harbors every traditional and non-traditional challenge of our age; it is a cauldron of religious and ethnic tension; a source of terror and extremism; an accelerating driver of the insatiable global appetite for energy; the place where the most people will suffer the adverse effects of global climate change; the primary source of nuclear proliferation and the most likely theatre on Earth for a major conventional confrontation and even a nuclear conflict.⁶

Asian Geopolitics and the Rise of China: Primacists, Exceptionalists and Pragmatists

The shift in global economic power from West to East has seen no shortage of popular prediction and punditry on the likely shape of Asian geopolitics in the twenty-first century. As one British journalist has quipped, in order to become an Asian expert “all one needs is a rush of statistics, an occasional nod to Asia’s history and a Confucian aphorism or two.”⁷ Yet, in geopolitical terms, the very term “Asia” requires qualification. The Asian area extends from Afghanistan through Russia to Japan to Australia and there are distinct sub-regions with varying levels of interconnection—namely East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia and Central Asia. In East Asia, several great powers have connected interests, including the United States, China and Japan. South-East Asia is marked by its entwined maritime and littoral character from the Philippines to Indonesia. In South Asia, India and Pakistan have deep rivalries and in Central Asia, the interests of China and Russia are engaged in an environment of the politics of energy access. These diverse sub-regional strategic problems are emblematic of the fluid geopolitical environment of Asia in general.⁸

In many key respects, the strategic fulcrum of Asian security lies in East Asia. Here is where the vital interests of the world’s three most economically powerful states, the United States, China and Japan intersect and where—in future years—growing Indian strategic and economic interests extend. Indeed, much of the most intense geopolitical analysis is driven by what Zbigniew Brzezinski has defined as the core uncertainty facing Asia as a whole, namely the problem of ensuring a stable East Asia. As Brzezinski puts it, “East Asia is yet to establish whether its geopolitical future will resemble the Europe of the first half of the twentieth century or the Europe of the second half of the twentieth century.”⁹ In this sub-region continued U.S. supremacy, the rapid rise of China, corresponding Japanese anxiety and the growth of Indian ambition—all fuelled

⁶ Kurt M. Campbell, Nirav Patel and Vikram J. Singh, *The Power of Balance: America in Asia* (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security, June 2008), pp. 14-15.

⁷ Philip Stephens, *Financial Times*, July 1, 2005.

⁸ See Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* (2nd ed., Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), chs. 8-11.

⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p. 107.

by a range of national pathologies, painful historical memories, unresolved territorial and maritime disputes—have the potential to collide. Complicating rivalry in East Asia proper is the emergence of, what Brzezinski calls, the new “Global Balkans” of Eurasia—that resource rich area stretching from Suez through Central and South Asia to Xinjiang. This is an area that engages not only the interests of the United States, China and Japan but also Russia, India and Pakistan. If the future of Eurasia is to be secured over the long-term it must be done from the pivot of a stable East Asian geopolitical fulcrum.¹⁰

In generic terms, there are really three contending schools of thought on the future of Asia all of which pivot around the future stability of East Asia and the significance of China’s rise. These schools are at the center of what Chinese scholar, Zhu Feng, calls the “paradigmatic battle” in international relations theory over China’s influence.¹¹ The three schools can be labeled the primacist or “strategic competition,” exceptionalist or “peaceful rise,” and pragmatic or “competitive coexistence.” Understanding these schools is vital to grasping the character of Asian geopolitics. Although some experts have argued that “to get China right, we need to get Asia right”—this article argues that the reverse perspective—“to get Asia right, we need to get China right”—is equally compelling.¹²

The Primacist School: A Future of Strategic Competition

The primacist, or “strategic competition” school, takes a hard-edged realist view of Asia’s future as portrayed by Western scholars and defense analysts such as Aaron L. Friedberg, John J. Mearsheimer, Robyn Lim and Hugh White.¹³ They argue that Europe’s pre-1945 past is likely to be Asia’s future. In their view, Asia eerily resembles Europe of the *belle époque* prior to 1914. China’s rise in twenty-first century Asia is analogous to that of nineteenth century Imperial Germany in Europe with Beijing emerging as an inevitable strategic competitor of the U.S. In Friedberg’s now famous phrase, the region is “ripe for rivalry.”¹⁴ Hugh White sums up the prevailing wisdom of the

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 42; 60; 226. See also Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), c. 5.

¹¹ Zhu Feng, “China’s Rise Will Be Peaceful: How Unipolarity Matters,” in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 34-54.

¹² For “get Asia right” thinking see Michael J. Green, “Asia in the Debate on American Grand Strategy” *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2009, pp. 15-30.

¹³ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Europe’s Past, Asia’s Future,” SAIS Policy Forum Series (October 1998, no., 3); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Robyn Lim, *The Geopolitics of East Asia: The Search for Equilibrium* (London: Routledge, 2003); Hugh White, “Why War in Asia Remains Thinkable,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Dec. 2008-Jan. 2009, p. 6, pp. 85-103.

¹⁴ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security*, Winter 1993/94, pp. 5-33.

primacist school namely, that, in understanding balance of power relationships, “there seems no better way to frame questions about Asia’s future than in terms of the European past.”¹⁵

For the primacists there is a zero-sum game of power politics at work in Asia that differs little from Thucydides’s famous observation about the Peloponnesian War: “the growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta, made war inevitable.”¹⁶ Transpose China for Athens and Sparta for the United States and we have John Mearsheimer’s doctrine of offensive realism based on the “tragedy of great power politics.” As Mearsheimer writes, “the question at hand is simple and profound: will China rise peacefully? My answer is no.” If China continues its dramatic economic growth over the next few decades “intense security competition” will occur with considerable potential for war.¹⁷

Similarly, Robyn Lim notes, that the competitive interaction of economic development, military technology, strategic geography and national interest makes a future systemic crisis among the “quadrilateral powers” of the United States, China, Japan and Russia not simply thinkable but highly likely. Economic interdependence, the spread of democracy and multilateralism are unlikely to act as countervailing solvents to the traditional dynamics of great power conflict.¹⁸ In particular, great power strategic competition is likely to create an adversarial relationship between Beijing and Washington. As a result, in White’s words, “war in Asia remains thinkable because the international order that has kept the peace for more than 30 years is under pressure.”¹⁹

For primacists, then, competition between rising and dominant great powers is a fixed historical rule. As David Shambaugh has observed, “zero-sum competition is a virtual law of international relations, at least for the realist school.”²⁰ In an anarchic international system, Sino-American strategic competition is inevitable and, given China’s rapid rise, a “power transition” struggle is likely. In consequence, the United States as the dominant power has little choice but to keep its Asian alliance system in good order—particularly the Japanese alliance—if it is to contain China’s rise in the long term. In this context, it is no accident that within the second Bush Administration, Richard Armitage, as Deputy Secretary of State, advocated a calibrated

¹⁵ White, “Why War in Asia Remains Thinkable,” p. 92.

¹⁶ Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), p. 7, Book 1.23.

¹⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, “The Rise of China Will Not be Peaceful,” *The Australian* Nov. 18, 2005, and *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, especially ch. 10.

¹⁸ Lim, *The Geopolitics of East Asia*, pp. 164-71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁰ David Shambaugh, “Introduction: The Rise of China and Asia’s New Dynamics,” in David Shambaugh, ed., *Power Shift: China and Asia’s New Dynamics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 13.

upgrading of the U.S.-Japanese alliance describing Japan as the United States' "Great Britain of the East."²¹

Primacists believe that Deng Xiaoping's late twentieth century strategy of capitalist economic growth will translate into a twenty-first century challenge to the U.S. brokered *status quo*. They point to Chinese military modernization in general, and to its anti-access/area-denial missile strategy in particular, to highlight their concerns. As Friedberg puts it, the United States is increasingly threatened by "a combination of [Chinese] torpedoes, high-speed cruise missiles and land-based ballistic missiles" designed to cripple the great symbol of U.S. power-projection in Asia, namely its carrier fleet.²² Others highlight China's stealthy "string of pearls" strategy of "building presence"—that stretches through the South China littorals, the Strait of Malacca across the Indian Ocean and on to the Persian Gulf—as a precursor to future expeditionary bases in countries such as Pakistan, Burma, Bangladesh, Cambodia and along the Horn of Africa.²³

The primacist view of inevitable great power competition is supported by several observers of Chinese naval development, such as Mayan Chanda, James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, who foresee the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) transitioning from a defensive anti-access force into a fully-fledged offensive blue water fleet.²⁴ For Chanda, China is in the process of developing a "crouching tiger, swimming dragon" strategy based on "creeping assertiveness" towards the projection of long-range naval capability and the acquisition of expeditionary forces.²⁵ Similarly, in their various publications on Chinese naval ambitions, Holmes and Yoshihara also argue that China, traditionally a continental power, is gradually turning its geopolitical ambitions seaward. Three reasons explain Beijing's "turn to Mahan." First, the traditional landward threats China once faced from Central Asia are now much diminished because relations with Russia are relatively stable. As a result, future conflict is far more likely in China's oceanic periphery, not its continental hinterlands. Second, China's huge energy dependence on foreign oil demands the development of a Mahanian blue-water fleet to secure its sea lines of communications in the South China Sea

²¹ Quoted in Daniel Twining, "America's Grand Design in Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2007, p. 80.

²² Aaron L. Friedberg, "Here Be Dragons: Menace" in a debate "Is China a Military Threat?" in *The National Interest*, Sept/Oct 2009, p. 22.

²³ Christopher J. Pehrson, *String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2006).

²⁴ Mayan Chanda, "Crouching Tiger, Swimming Dragon," *New York Times* Apr. 11, 2005; James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21st Century: The Turn to Mahan* (London: Routledge, 2008); and idem, "History Rhymes: The German Precedent for Chinese Seapower," *Orbis* 54.1 (Winter 2010), pp. 14-54.

²⁵ Chanda, "Crouching Tiger, Swimming Dragon."

and Strait of Malacca. Third, of course, there is the Taiwan imperative. In the South China Sea, Taiwan is “the Gibraltar of the East” and holds the strategic central position off China’s mainland in the island chain overlooking the Western Pacific and so controls the throat of the Malacca Strait that is vital to Chinese economic prosperity.²⁶

For Holmes and Yoshihara, these strategic realities suggest that, in the long term, China will, like the Kaiser’s Germany before it, manifest a powerful “strategic will” to develop an oceanic navy. Consequently, it is folly for Western analysts to believe that Beijing will settle for the maritime *status quo* and thus permanent naval inferiority in the form of its current asymmetric strategy of anti-access sea denial. Such a strategy is unlikely to endure as China grows richer and more powerful. Over the next two decades, the U.S. Navy must re-study Tirpitz and Wegener and expect the emergence of a powerful twenty-first century Chinese version of the German High Seas fleet.²⁷ Holmes and Yoshihara conclude pessimistically that “the combination of permissive [continental] surroundings, burgeoning resources, and indomitable strategic will promises to make China a more formidable, more determined competitor at sea than Germany ever was.”²⁸

The Exceptionalist School: A Future Defined by Peaceful Rise

The second school, the exceptionalists, view Asia as a place where China’s “peaceful rise” is possible because a regional exceptionalism in general and a Chinese exceptionalism in particular have the potential to avoid an “Asian Europe.” Observers of China and Asia as diverse as David C. Kang, William H. Overholt, Kenneth D. Johnson and Edward Burman, contest the determinism and pessimism of the primacist school as being overly rooted in European realist concepts of international politics.²⁹ While careful to avoid any form of quaint “orientalism,” the exceptionalist school regards China on its own cultural terms and from within its unique Asian geopolitical orbit. They point, variously, to thirty years of peace since 1979; to the forces of economic integration and a complex intertwining of Sino-American security interests; to the restraint imposed by nuclear arsenals; and to the notion that much of East

²⁶ Holmes and Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy*, chs. 3-5.

²⁷ Holmes and Yoshihara, “History Rhymes,” pp. 26-34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁹ David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security*, Spring 2003, 4, pp. 57-85; and idem, *China Rising: Peace, Power and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); William H. Overholt, *Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kenneth D. Johnson, *China’s Strategic Culture: A Perspective for the United States* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, June 2009); and Edward Burman, *China: The Stealth Empire* (Stroud: The History Press Ltd, 2008).

and South East Asia is largely accommodating the rise of the Middle Kingdom.³⁰

The exceptionalists are genuinely perplexed by the primacist school's Eurocentrism and its postulate that Europe's past that represents Asia's future. As Kang has explained, "I wondered why we would use Europe's past—rather than Asia's own past—to explore Asia's future."³¹ He notes that "historically, it has been China's weakness that has led to chaos in Asia. When China has been strong and stable, order has been preserved. East Asian regional relations have historically been hierarchic, more peaceful, and more stable than those in the West." For Kang the "paradigm wars" that have pitted Western doctrines of realism, constructivism and liberalism against each other are self-defeating and have led to a body of sterile, overly-theoretical research that lacks policy relevance.³²

William H. Overholt's analysis of Asian geopolitics also concludes that much of the primacist's school's fears are misplaced. He observes, "the new era [in Asia] is not consistent with structural-realist theories, based on the economics and weaponry of a previous era, that any rising power will violently disrupt the system." This means that initiatives, such as the Six Party Talks on North Korea, inaugurated in 2003, may hold potential for a firm multilateral security regime emerging in East Asia over the next decade.³³ Also, the unique character of Confucian-inspired capitalist modernization derived from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore represent the new drivers of Chinese policy as exemplified by Deng's famous phrase on economic pragmatism: "it doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white; so long as it catches mice it is a good cat." As a result of thirty years of economic modernization, today's Chinese communist elite have become exceptionalists—"Market-Leninists" more in tune with the values of Gordon Gekko—than with those of Mao Zedong.³⁴

The views of Kang and Overholt have been echoed by Chinese scholars such as Zhu Feng and Wang Jisi who have written in Zhu's words of "the misleading effect of treating Eurocentric theory and the balance of power analysis as a 'universal' theory."³⁵ Some exceptionalists also follow the "peaceful rise" policy outlined by the senior Chinese official, Zheng Bijian, in his seminal *Foreign Affairs* article of September 2005.³⁶ This essay amounts to an explicit doctrine of Chinese exceptionalism based on mixture of economic

³⁰ See especially Kang, *China Rising*, ch. 9; and Overholt, *Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, ch. 4-8.

³¹ Kang, *China Rising*, p. xi.

³² Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong," pp. 66, 83.

³³ Overholt, *Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, p. 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-29.

³⁵ Zhu Feng, "China's Rise Will Be Peaceful," p. 35; Wang Jisi, "China's Search for Stability with America," *Foreign Affairs* vol. 84.5 (Sept./Oct. 2005), pp. 39-48.

³⁶ Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2005, pp. 18-24.

and social values and a rejection of great power military confrontation. As Zheng writes:

China will not follow the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan up to World War II, when those countries violently plundered resources and pursued hegemony. Neither will China follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination during the Cold War. Instead, China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development and cooperation with all the countries of the world.³⁷

Zheng adds that China will not be able to raise standards of living for over a billion people before 2050 and so achieve the status of “a modernized, medium-level developed country.” Given, this huge domestic challenge, China requires international peace and “does not seek either hegemony or predominance in world affairs.”³⁸ In some ways, Zheng’s analysis conforms to former U.S. State Department official, Susan Shirk’s characterization of a rising China as representing “a fragile superpower” hampered by a black box of unresolved domestic problems.³⁹

In the light of Zheng’s views, other exceptionalists such as Kenneth D. Johnson and Edward Burman emphasize China’s defensive security outlook and strategic identity as the keys to understanding Beijing’s decision making. In terms of security outlook, Johnson suggests that little evidence exists for China as an expansionist state. Rather, “there exists a uniquely Chinese, essentially pacific strategic culture, rooted in the Confucian disparagement of the use of force.” In today’s conditions, China seeks to uphold a geopolitical outlook based on President Jiang Zemin’s “16 character” guiding principle on U.S.-China relations: “enhance trust, reduce trouble, develop cooperation, and avoid confrontation.”⁴⁰

Burman highlights China’s distinct strategic identity by arguing that Beijing’s rise is, in important ways, qualitatively different from patterns in the West. China’s natural strategic culture is that of a riverine civilization. In geopolitical terms, the country is, by preference and necessity, a Mackinderite land power rather than a potential Mahanian sea power—as reflected by its creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Central Asia which includes its former rival Russia. For Burman, China’s ascent stems from “stealth power”—a power that is essentially indirect, soft and economic rather than direct, hard and militaristic—an approach that is replete with Chinese historical traditions of statecraft based on a mixture of coercion, restraint and caution.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 24; 21.

³⁹ Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. ch. 5.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *China’s Strategic Culture*, pp. 12; 13-21.

⁴¹ Burman, *China: The Stealth Empire*, chs. 8-12.

Finally, for many in the exceptionalist camp, a “peaceful rise” is possible because security threats in Asia are increasingly non-traditional—encompassing nuclear weapons proliferation, state failure, religious extremism and ethnic conflict, environmental degradation and a plethora of violent non-state actors—all of which require great power cooperation rather than conflict.⁴² At least one observer of geopolitics has speculated that, “it is thus entirely possible that relations between China and the United States, which will shape the twenty-first century, will turn toward a global partnership based on shared enlightened self-interest and Beijing’s growing assumption of responsibility, a solid guarantee for the stability of the international system.”⁴³

The Pragmatist School: A Future of Competitive Co-existence

Between the primacists and exceptionalists lies a pragmatic or “competitive coexistence” school that emphasizes the complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in Asian geopolitics and tends to reject both Western realist pessimism and Asian cultural determinism as misleading for policy-makers. As David Shambaugh has noted, Asia’s security dynamics are “multitextured and multilayered” and embrace “hard” alliance systems, aspects of “soft” inter-regional normative community and varieties of interdependence.⁴⁴ Such complexity requires pragmatic assessment as exemplified in the work of scholars as diverse as Amitav Acharya, Muthiah Alagappa, Robert S. Ross, Ashley Tellis and Michael Swaine and Avery Goldstein.⁴⁵

Alagappa and Achyara reject both the pessimistic Western realism of the primacists and the optimistic exceptionalism inherent in the “peaceful rise” school. Alagappa dismisses “the ahistorical realist lens” that suggests that contemporary Asia is a dangerous place. More eclectic analysis, he argues, reveals instead, the existence of a highly pragmatic “Asian security order” blended from multiple “security pathways.”⁴⁶ It is important to note that most of Alagappa’s Asian security order tends to center firmly on the fulcrum of East

⁴² See Stephen Hoadley and Jürgen Rüländ, eds., *Asian Security Reassessed*, (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2006), esp. Part 3.

⁴³ Cohen-Tanugi, *Shape of the World to Come*, p. 70. For similar views see Richard Rosenkrance and Gu Guolinag, eds., *Power and Restraint: A Shared Vision for the US-China Relationship* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009).

⁴⁴ Shambaugh, “Introduction: The Rise of China,” pp. 1-20.

⁴⁵ Amitav Achiraya, “Will Asia’s Past Be Its Future?” *International Security*, Winter 2003/4, pp. 149-164; Muthia Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, CA, 2003); Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2009); Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China’s Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000); Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁴⁶ Alagappa, “Introduction: Predictability and Stability Despite Challenges”, in Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order*, pp. 7, 18-19.

Asia and to embrace variously, partial U.S. hegemony, U.S.-China balance of power politics, the incidental appearance of regional concert processes (over intractable issues such as North Korea's nuclear program), and the growth of indigenous Asian multilateralism (i.e., the Association of East Asian States [ASEAN], the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum [APEC], and the East Asia Summit [EAS]). Together these security pathways have produced a unique and essentially pragmatic pattern of order, "closer to complex interdependence than to hard realism"⁴⁷

The pragmatism of Asian bilateral diplomatic practice, based on regime security, territorial sovereignty, and economic development furthers this pattern of interdependent security. At work in contemporary Asia—and in East Asia and South East Asia in particular—is what Achyara calls a pragmatic "conservative regionalism."⁴⁸ The result is a process of conflict management and effective security cooperation in which many Asian states enmesh both China and the United States into a mosaic of bilateral and regional ties that dissipate the potential for conflict. Despite many unresolved security concerns, most of Asia has become more, not less, stable since the end of the Cold War.⁴⁹

What might be styled as a pragmatic realist perspective on East Asia is a central feature of the work of Robert S. Ross on the interplay of the region's balance-of-power dynamics.⁵⁰ For Ross, the greatest paradox of the post-Cold War era is that U.S. unipolar global hegemony has never been translated into the idiom of East Asia because though "the global security system is unipolar; the East Asian regional balance is bipolar."⁵¹ Since the late 1970s, East Asia has been the world's most peaceful region but this is not because of Chinese exceptionalism or the Alagappa-Achyara notion of a security order forged from a mosaic of multiple security pathways. Rather, East Asia's tranquility lies firmly in the logic of balance-of-power politics. *Pax Americana* at sea and a *Pax Sinica* on land characterize this regional bipolar balance of power—a point that Ross first outlined in a seminal 1999 essay and subsequently developed in further work over the next decade.⁵²

Taking his cue from Nicholas Spykman's celebrated 1944 study, *The Geography of the Peace* on the emerging post-1945 world order, Ross argues that a *de facto* "geography of the peace" exists and will be perpetuated in twenty-first century East Asia. The discrete geopolitical zones of influence established during the Cold War are deeply entrenched and cannot be easily or

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁸ Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?" p. 159.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 150, 157-64.

⁵⁰ See the essays covering East Asia from 1991 to 2006 in Ross, *Chinese Security Policy*.

⁵¹ See Ross, "The U.S.-China Peace: Great Power Politics, Spheres of Influence and the Peace of East Asia," in *Chinese Security Policy*, pp. 85-86; and Robert S Ross and Zhu Feng, "The Rise of China: Theoretical and Policy Perspectives," in Ross and Feng, *China's Ascent*, p. 298.

⁵² Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security*, Spring 1999, pp. 81-118.

quickly transformed. For example, Chinese land power dominates continental East Asia while U.S. sea power dominates maritime East and South-East Asia. Because the Chinese and U.S. spheres of influence are so geographically distinct, major armed conflict is unlikely. China cannot match the U.S. system of maritime-littoral offshore balancing. Similarly, despite its forward presence in South Korea, the United States has no significant land power capability on the Asian mainland. In effect, the situation is akin to the child's game of "rock, paper, scissors" with neither the United States nor China possessing a decisive military edge for all continental-maritime strategic contingencies.⁵³

Writing in 2003, Ross again emphasized that "pax Sinica and pax Americana [sic] together create East Asian peace" for, despite mutual U.S.-China sensitivity to perception of threats and to changes in military capabilities, both Washington and Beijing have much to gain from maintaining a continental-maritime status quo.⁵⁴ In 2009, he observed:

Since the end of the Cold War, East Asia has been the most peaceful and stable region in the world. . . even as the region has experienced the rise of China and a committed U.S. response. This stability reflects the combination of bipolarity and the presence of water between spheres of influence. Insofar as these are enduring characteristics of the regional order, regional stability should endure well into the twenty-first century.⁵⁵

In short, a mix of old and new realities conditions U.S.-China cooperation. Older verities include the continental-maritime balance of power and the presence of nuclear arsenals. New verities include growing economic and financial interdependence between Washington and Beijing and the reality that in an era of globalization, the generation of wealth has been severed from territorial conquest. In sum, these old and new realities make U.S. and Chinese goals of coexistence congruent at a general policy making level with war, in the words of Robert J. Art, "a low-probability event [and] an all-out war... nearly impossible to imagine."⁵⁶

It is certainly true that the East Asian "geography of the peace" facilitates a peculiar and highly paradoxical U.S.-Chinese continuum of pragmatic calculation and mutual interests. Both the United States and China inhabit a new, increasingly multipolar East Asian world defined by interdependent global finance with Chinese officials in Armani suits jetting in to Washington and New York and buying American Treasury bonds in the so-called "Chimerica" financial relationship.⁵⁷ The CIA theorist, James

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 92-99.

⁵⁴ Ross, "The U.S.-China Peace," p. 76.

⁵⁵ Ross, "Introduction: Structure, Power and Politics," p. 10.

⁵⁶ Robert J. Art, "The United States and the Rise of China," in *China's Ascent*, p. 273.

⁵⁷ See Lawrence Lau, Mingchun Sun, Victor Fung, David K. Richards and Richard Rosencrance, "US-China Interactions: Trade, Finance, and Economic Modernization," in Rosencrance and Gu Guolinag, *Power and Restraint*, pp. 35-44. The term Chimerica was coined by Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick in 2006. See Niall Ferguson, "The G2: Are America and China Headed for a Divorce?" *New Perspectives Quarterly*, vol. 27.1 (Winter 2010) pp. 35-38;

Jesus Angleton, once called the craft of twentieth century intelligence an interrelated “wilderness of mirrors” in which ambiguity and nuance reigned.⁵⁸ In East Asia, the art of twenty-first century geopolitics might now be said to resemble a wilderness of paradoxes in which the ambiguities and nuances of Washington and Beijing’s mutual interdependence intertwines and conditions their unilateral power. Paradoxes abound in East Asia and work to reduce the risk of conflict between the United States and China. Most of East and South East Asia *wants* Washington to play the role of an offshore ringmaster to balance both China’s rise and to assuage Japan’s fears. China, for its part, *needs* the United States to prevent Japanese rearmament and to blunt any potential for a Japanese-Taiwan alliance. Meanwhile, the United States *requires* China’s assistance in dealing with North Korea and the problem of WMD proliferation.⁵⁹ In the early twenty-first century, then, most Asian states seek sound, extensive and cooperative relations with both the United States and China to avoid a “bipolar dilemma.”⁶⁰ As Evan S. Medeiros concludes in a recent analysis of emerging strategic currents in Asia:

None [of America’s allies] want to provoke China or be drawn into a containment effort; none want China to dominate the region; none want the United States to leave or even substantially draw down its presence; and all [states] want China to play a major role in managing regional challenges. American policy needs to reflect these changing regional realities.⁶¹

The reality of a U.S.-China bipolar balance of power in East Asia that fuels a process of pragmatic security is also at the center of the work of such analysts of Chinese grand strategy as Michael D. Swaine, Ashley J. Tellis and Avery Goldstein. Swaine and Tellis identify China as possessing a “calculative security strategy”—one that emphasizes the primacy of economic growth, amicable international relations combined with increasing efforts to create a more modern military, and a continued search for asymmetric strategic advantages. Beijing’s calculative strategy is, they suggest, based on hard-headed Chinese perceptions about the distribution of global power out to the year 2030.⁶²

Tellis and Swaine do not argue that China’s rise will be inherently peaceful or even stable over the long term. However, Beijing’s current policy of restraint should encourage U.S. policy analysts to pursue neither

⁵⁸ Robin Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in America’s Secret War* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), pp. 324-5.

⁵⁹ See Michael Evans, “The Manchurian Paradox: Asia, the United States and the Global Balance of Power in the 21st Century,” *Quadrant* vol. LIII.9 (Sept. 2009), pp. 36-43.

⁶⁰ Shambaugh, “Introduction: The Rise of China and Asia’s New Dynamics,” p. 17.

⁶¹ Evan S. Medeiros, “The New Security Drama in East Asia: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners to China’s Rise,” *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2009, p. 50.

⁶² Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China’s Grand Strategy*, ch. 4.

containment nor appeasement. Rather the United States needs to embrace “realistic engagement”—in the form of a balanced strategy—aimed at avoiding future Sino-American conflict while indicating to Beijing that challenging the United States militarily would be both foolhardy and costly.⁶³ Goldstein reached a similar conclusion on the character of Chinese grand strategy in 2005. He argues that since China’s current and projected grand strategy is not inherently revisionist, the best approach is for Washington to adopt a strategy of “contingent cooperation.” Such a strategy should be linked not to speculative projections about future Chinese military capabilities and strategic intentions but to actual regime behavior and Beijing’s record of international actions.⁶⁴

Of the three schools considered here—the primacist, exceptionalist and the pragmatist—the last with its vision of “competitive coexistence” has been the most influential in recent U.S. policy. For example, Ross’s cogent balance of power analysis and the Tellis-Swaine-Goldstein notions of realistic engagement and contingent cooperation appear to have helped the United States to shape a policy towards Beijing during the years of the Second Bush Administration. As one senior Bush Administration official has recalled, a “two-pronged strategy” of deterrence and diplomatic-economic engagement underpinned the U.S. policy of encouraging Beijing to adopt what in 2005 Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick, described as the status of a “responsible stakeholder” within the international system.⁶⁵

Asian Geopolitics, Military Modernization and the Balance of Power

Historically, the interaction of geopolitical change with growth in military capabilities—the interplay between the “dynamic of technological change and military competitiveness”—usually destabilizes any given balance of power.⁶⁶ In particular, the development of significant force projection capabilities may challenge geopolitical stability because such arms suggest potential transformations in the configuration of any established geographic system of maritime and continental power. The prevailing “geography of the peace” in East Asia will be no exception to this rule.

At the moment, concerns over China’s aims are clearly responsible for military modernization throughout all of the sub-regions of Asia. In overall terms, between 1994 and 2004, Asian military expenditure grew by 27 percent; India’s defense budget doubled; while Chinese military expenditure, insofar as

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 182-229; 231-41.

⁶⁴ Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, pp. 218-19.

⁶⁵ Thomas J. Christensen, “Shaping the Choices of a Rising China: Recent Lessons for the Obama Administration,” *Washington Quarterly*, July 2009, pp. 89-104.

⁶⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Fontana Press, 1989 edition), p. xvii.

it is possible to identify figures, increased by an estimated 140 per cent between 1997 and 2007.⁶⁷ In other words, China, Japan, and India are key to understanding the relationship between geopolitics, military modernization for force projection, and the future Asian balance of power.

“Crouching Tiger, Swimming Dragon?” The Meaning of Chinese Military Modernisation. There can be little doubt that China’s military strength is growing but whether this growth will challenge the East Asian strategic balance is unclear. In overall direction, Official People’s Liberation Army (PLA) strategic doctrine is that of “Limited War under High Tech and Information Conditions” in which the missile force, “the second artillery” is the mainstay. As part of this doctrine, China’s military has sought a range of asymmetric capabilities in the form of an “assassin’s mace” of deterrent, compellent and attack capabilities for immediate regional requirements to offset U.S. offshore maritime superiority.⁶⁸

To offset U.S. military muscle, China has achieved what China specialist, David Shambaugh, calls “a mini-leap forward.”⁶⁹ Much of the PLA’s effort over the last decade has been focused on anti-access missiles and land-attack cruise missiles while acquiring command and control, information, surveillance and reconnaissance technologies, electronic warfare capabilities and space technology (as exemplified by the 2007 anti-satellite test); improved air capability through the acquisition of *Sukhoi* 27 and 30 jets; and developing special operations forces and a number of new naval platforms. Out-of-area activities by the PLA are largely confined to military diplomacy in the so-called “string of pearls” approach to building politico-economic presence. Writing in 2005, Shambaugh observed, “with the exception of certain naval programs, resources are simply not being allocated to building power projection systems that would give the PLA out-of-area capabilities.”⁷⁰

Yet, as mentioned earlier, the issue that energizes many in the primacist school is that these “certain naval programs” point toward a Mahanian blue-water China. It is true that improving the capability of the PLA Navy (PLAN) has been a priority in Chinese military modernization. For instance, Russia has supplied advanced *Sovremenny* guided missile destroyers and these combined with the indigenous *Luhai*-class vessels are sometimes seen as a potential “Aegis-equivalent” for ballistic missile defense. The submarine force has also acquired

⁶⁷ See Ashley J. Tellis, “Military Modernization in Asia,” in Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty* (Washington DC: National Bureau of Research, 2005), pp. 3–40; and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Search for Military Power,” *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2008, pp. 125–141.

⁶⁸ See David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley, CA: University of Los Angeles Press, 2003), ch. 7; Fravel, “China’s Search for Military Power,” pp.125–141.

⁶⁹ David Shambaugh, “China’s Military Modernization: Making Steady and Surprising Progress,” in Tellis and Mills, *Strategic Asia 2005–06*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

new *Kilo* and *Song* class diesel powered boats.⁷¹ Moreover, China's growing energy security needs may, over time, contribute to a markedly improved maritime expeditionary capacity. By 2025, many economists predict that China's energy consumption may reach 15-20 million barrels per day. The need to secure the vital flow of energy raises the inevitable question of whether China will be content to abide by a strategic *status quo* under which U.S. maritime power secures the sea lines of the "global commons."⁷²

The sea lines of communication (SLOCs) of East Asia and the Indian Ocean that run through to the Persian Gulf are the vital sinews of China's boom economy. In particular, the Strait of Malacca—through which most of China's oil exports now pass—is a vital strategic asset for Beijing. In 2006, 76 percent of all the oil from the Middle East and Africa passed through the Indian Ocean and as one Chinese official has put it, "the Malacca Strait is China's maritime oil lifeline; for China's security it is akin to breathing itself."⁷³ Developing a credible maritime force to deal with China's "Malacca dilemma" may emerge as one of Beijing's vital national interests. As Hu Jintao put it in December 2006, "we should strive to build a powerful navy that adapts to our military's historic mission in this new century."⁷⁴

In addition to energy security requirements, China's economic confidence combined with the success of the Beijing Olympics, have fuelled national pride and a sense of recovering greatness. A combination of nationalism and security calculation are creating in China a power-projection naval capability as reflected in the March 2009 announcement by Defense Minister, Ling Guanglie, that the PLAN will be equipped with two conventional aircraft carriers as early as 2015.⁷⁵ What is the likely strategic significance of a Chinese carrier program? The answer requires a distinction between the naval assets required for China's national security interests—particularly in energy—and those that might contest U.S. naval dominance. The United States may accommodate the former, but it will almost certainly regard the latter as a threat to its maritime security. It is true that the arrival of a Chinese carrier over the next few years does not, in the short-term, threaten U.S. maritime power. As Ross accurately observes, "it will take decades before China's naval

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 92-94.

⁷² See Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and William S. Murray, eds, *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

⁷³ Quoted in Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, "Chinese Naval Analysts Consider the Energy Question," in Collins et al, *China's Energy Strategy*, p. 310.

⁷⁴ Peter Ford, "Fighter Jet Signals China's Military Advances," *Christian Science Monitor*, Jan. 11, 2007; James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "China's Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean," in Collins et al., *China's Energy Strategy*, pp. 117-42.

⁷⁵ Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security*, Fall 2009, pp. 46-81; John Frewen, "Harmonious Ocean: Chinese Aircraft Carriers and Australia's U.S. Alliance," (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategy Research Project Paper, March 2010), p. 1.

leadership can master the challenges associated with operating a carrier task force and managing aircraft landings in all weather conditions.”⁷⁶

Evaluations of the Sino-U.S. naval balance in East Asia depends on recognizing relative power differentials that stem from potential alterations in specific sea capabilities rather than in changes to aggregates of maritime power. The potential for Chinese naval expansion must be seen in clear perspective. The current PLAN remains a largely coastal force focused on “active offshore defense” against Taiwan and reflects a fundamentally conservative defense establishment dominated by “capabilities required for regime security, territorial integrity, national unification, maritime security and regional stability.”⁷⁷ Any future Chinese drive towards blue-water naval development will likely remain subject to the fiscal requirements and geostrategic constraints of a traditional continental power confronting fourteen neighboring states—four of which are nuclear armed—along its territorial borders. As a result, a Chinese carrier-program’s immediate impact will not be on the East Asian balance of power as much as on U.S. and Asian perceptions of Beijing’s long-term strategic intentions.

As the leading Chinese analyst, Zhu Feng warned in 2007: “Should China seek sea power by building aircraft carriers and thereby challenge U.S. maritime hegemony in Asia, it would likely exacerbate regional concerns about its ambition for regional dominance, thus undermining its international position.”⁷⁸ Given these risks, it is possible that China may settle for a single aircraft carrier group of three vessels, sufficient to satisfy both energy security requirements and national pride. If such a limited policy was adopted, Chinese carrier-acquisition would be modest and mirror that of India.

While the future character of Chinese sea power remains a riddle, one outcome is certain: any serious long-term challenge by Beijing to the East Asian maritime *status quo* would be met by expanded U.S. naval modernization and trigger an arms race. Indeed, a sustained Chinese quest for offensive power-projection in maritime East Asia would serve only to reinforce U.S. resolve for its naval superiority. Just as the 600 ship navy was a response to the Soviet naval build-up in the 1980s so too, in the short run, will the development of a large Chinese deep-water fleet accelerate the development of U.S. guided-missile submarines, cruise missile platforms and the building of post Nimitz-class, next-generation carriers. “China’s naval nationalism,” observes Ross, “will not challenge U.S. maritime security, but it will challenge U.S.-China diplomatic cooperation.”⁷⁹ In the face of any potential disruption of the East Asian maritime-continental balance of power, bilateral diplomatic cooperation

⁷⁶ Ross, “China’s Naval Nationalism,” p. 76.

⁷⁷ Fravel, “China’s Search for Military Power,” p. 138.

⁷⁸ Zhu Feng, “China’s Rise Will Be Peaceful: How Unipolarity Matters,” in Ross and Zhu Feng, *China’s Ascent*, p.54.

⁷⁹ Ross, “China’s Naval Nationalism,” p. 77-78.

between Beijing and Washington could be poisoned by an influential “China-threat” lobby in U.S. politics and anxiety among the capitals of East and South-East Asia.

If it chooses to become a serious blue-water power, China faces many obstacles in the future. Naval expeditionary development is hampered not only by a conservative land-centric strategic culture, but by multiple domestic weaknesses ranging from an inadequate domestic defense industrial base; lack of an intercontinental bomber force; and small numbers of advanced fighters, in-flight refuellers and airborne early warning aircraft.⁸⁰ As Jonathan Holslag has noted, “in terms of long-distance force projection, China ranks between India and Japan, and it will take at least ten years before it will be able to operate at brigade [expeditionary] level.”⁸¹ The development of real Chinese maritime power will, then, require decades of financial investment, the creation of a professional and popular domestic constituency for that investment, and a defense establishment that is prepared to reduce the traditional emphasis afforded to a continental strategy. It remains to be seen whether China’s rulers will risk the country’s growing international reputation as a nation dedicated to “peaceful rise” on the Zheng Bijian model in a serious pursuit of the kind of maritime might that promises to end only in strategic confrontation with the United States and its allies in Asia.

The Decline of the Yoshida Doctrine: The Implications of Japan’s Quest for “Military Normality”

Until recently, Japan’s approach to strategic affairs was defined by the post-1945 Yoshida Doctrine based on a pacifist constitution under which Japan became essentially a U.S. security protectorate and the center of the U.S. “hub and spoke” system of alliances in Asia. However, the rise of China, fears over North Korea’s missile and nuclear programs since 1998 and U.S. desire for a militarily stronger Tokyo, since the end of the Cold War, have gradually eroded the foundations of this doctrine. This had led to Japan’s quest to convert its large Self Defence Force into “a normal military” establishment capable of force projection operations.⁸² Christopher Hughes has argued that

⁸⁰ Richard A. Bitzinger and Barry Desker, “Why East Asian War is Unlikely,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* Dec. 2008-Jan. 2009, pp. 105-28.

⁸¹ Jonathan Holslag, “Embracing Chinese Global Security Ambitions,” *Washington Quarterly*, July 2009, p. 106.

⁸² See Toshi Yoshihara, “Japan’s Emerging Strategic Posture in Asia: Toward Leadership or Rivalry?” in Gupta, *Strategic Stability in Asia*, pp. 59-86; Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan’s Re-emergence as a “Normal” Military Power* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 368-9, London, 2004); idem, “Japanese Military Modernization: In Search of a ‘Normal’ Security Role,” in Tellis and Wills, *Strategic Asia 2005-06*, pp. 105-134; idem, *Japan’s Remilitarisation*, (Oxford: Routledge and The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009).

Tokyo's security policy is undergoing a long-term structural change that predisposes it towards a more assertive military stance. Japan, he argues, is the shield for the sword of U.S. global power projection with Tokyo "set upon a long-term trajectory that will see it assuming a more assertive regional and global security role."⁸³

In its quest for military normality, Japan has undertaken a "quantitative build down" of its Cold War forces in favor of a "qualitative build up" of new defense capabilities to deal with an uncertain security environment. The aim has been to produce improved ballistic missile defense, greater interoperability with the United States and, most controversially of all, increased power projection capabilities. In the latter realm, the Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF), traditionally strong in anti-submarine warfare and minesweeping, has invested in an increase in the number of Aegis warfighting *Kongo*-class destroyers (from 4 to 6), the acquisition of three *Osumi* transport vessels with flat tops for helicopters; an amphibious ship and production of a new class of DDH destroyers (Destroyer-Helicopter) along with long range in-flight refueling aircraft.⁸⁴

Japan's focus on the *Osumi* and DDH-class vessels has led some in China, and elsewhere in the region, to believe that Japan may be rehearsing carrier-building technology. This potential has increased the already fundamental strategic mistrust that exists between China and Japan.⁸⁵ In the future, as Wang Jisi reminds us, the dynamics of the Sino-Japanese relationship, hampered by unresolved historical animosities and antagonistic mutual nationalism could, if poorly managed, easily evolve from being political problems into "serious crises."⁸⁶ Indeed, Hughes believes that Japan and China may be engaged in the development of "a quiet arms-race dynamic" with Japan seeking to counter new Chinese air, naval and cruise missile capabilities with its own force-projection assets.⁸⁷ To date, however, despite Tokyo's stronger focus on force projection, the Japanese have acted within the context of their pacifist constitution. Japan's "remilitarization" remains a distinctly limited and incremental process. Tokyo remains a constrained military actor with its deployments being a blend of counter-piracy, humanitarian aid, and nation-building in theaters such as the Malacca Strait, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁸⁸

On current trends, barring a U.S. military draw down or a series of strategic shocks on the Korean Peninsula or over Taiwan, Japan is unlikely to seek channel its power projection capacity unilaterally. Rather it is likely to seek "normality" but within the framework of both the U.S. Alliance and UN multi-lateral security initiatives. Not surprisingly, given China's rise, the U.S.-Japanese

⁸³ Hughes, *Japan's Remilitarisation*, pp. 19-20; 143-44.

⁸⁴ Hughes, *Japan's Re-emergence as a "Normal" Military Power*, pp. 79-96.

⁸⁵ Akio Takahara, "A Japanese Perspective on China's Rise in the East Asian Order," in Ross and Zheng, *China's Ascent*, pp. 236; 218-37.

⁸⁶ Wang Jisi, "China's Search for Stability with America," p. 44.

⁸⁷ Hughes, *Japan's Remilitarisation*, p. 143.

⁸⁸ Hughes, *Japan's Re-emergence as a "Normal" Military Power*, ch. 5.

Alliance has reemerged to address Asian security issues.⁸⁹ In 2005, the United States and Japan held joint amphibious exercises and Japan participated in the U.S.-Thai-Singaporean “Cobra Gold” exercises in Asia. In March 2006, Japan joined the United States and Australia in creating a formal Trilateral Security Dialogue between the United States and its two major allies in Asia.⁹⁰ For some analysts, such as William H. Overholt, the greatest single paradox at work in East Asia is the United States’ growing strategic dependence upon Japan even as Washington becomes increasingly economically and geopolitically aligned with a rising China.⁹¹ Others believe that ultimately U.S. strategic fears will trump economic and geopolitical logic and resolve this paradox. “It is now possible to envisage a highly interoperable U.S.-Japan military alliance machine,” writes Hughes, “with even stronger mutually reinforcing ‘sword’ and ‘shield’ functions, capable of perpetuating US military dominance over the region. The impact on future East Asian security will be profound.”⁹²

The latter prediction is only one possible long-term outcome of Japan’s evolving security policy, however. For example, scholars such as Kent E. Calder and Mike M. Mochizuki have identified the possibility of a “quiet crisis” or “downward spiral” developing in U.S.-Japanese relations—a situation fuelled by a combination of growing Japanese insecurity and a tradition of political introversion. The rise of an intimate U.S.-Chinese trading condominium, a sluggish Japanese economy, ongoing disputes over U.S. basing rights, turmoil within Japan’s political leadership, and the reality of an aging population, have combined to sap Japan’s self-confidence.⁹³ As the Japanese scholar, Hikari Agakimi put it in 2006, Tokyo has no blueprint for the twenty-first century and “the Japanese are groping for a vision.”⁹⁴ Given the unlikelihood of any return to the militant nationalism of the 1930s, the post-1945 era will likely be an ideological refuge for Japanese uncertainty. For the foreseeable future, then, Tokyo’s quest for military normalization will be an ongoing, but discretionary process, and one that remains conditioned by the domestic politics of residual pacifism.

Rediscovering Curzon: Indian Geopolitics, Military Modernization and “Looking East”

India is rapidly emerging as a great Asian power and a potential economic giant. Geopolitically, the country is moving from a concept of

⁸⁹ Twining, “America’s Grand Design in Asia,” pp. 80-81.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

⁹¹ Overholt, *Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, p. 270.

⁹² Hughes, Japan’s Re-emergence as a “Normal” Military Power pp. 145-46.

⁹³ Kent E. Calder, *Pacific Alliance: Reviving U.S.-Japan Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), ch. 1; Mike M. Mochizuki, “China-Japan Relations: Downward Spiral or a New Equilibrium?” in Shambaugh, *Power Shift*, pp. 135-150.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Overholt, *Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, p. 80.

Nehruvian aloofness, regarding events in East Asia, towards a greater strategic appreciation of India's centrality in South and East Asian affairs. Some observers have described a nuclear-armed India as rediscovering geopolitics along the lines of Lord Curzon's celebrated 1909 book, *The Place of India in the Empire*, which upheld the wielding of sea power in the Indian Ocean littoral and East Asia.⁹⁵

Curzon, a former British Viceroy, wrote that India's "central position" in Asia meant that the country could exert influence in many directions—on Persia, Afghanistan and China—while controlling the sea routes to Australasia and the China Seas. As the Indian strategic analyst, C. Raja Mohan observed in 2004, "for sections of the Indian foreign policy elite who have long dreamt of a powerful role for India in its surrounding regions, Curzon remains a source of foreign policy inspiration."⁹⁶ In January 2002, one former Indian Foreign Secretary, J. N. Dixit, went so far as to describe Curzon as "among the greatest of the Indian nationalists."⁹⁷

India's main strategic concerns revolve around the rise and growing influence of China in Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, Beijing's links to Pakistan, the accelerating problem of energy access, and the long-standing Kashmir crisis. Traditionally, like China, India has had a Mackinderite continental strategic outlook with the Indian Army being the predominant service.⁹⁸ Yet this traditional focus on land power should not obscure the reality that the Indian Navy, which has a carrier, is the third largest in Asia (after the PLAN and the JMSDF) and is the most powerful maritime force in the Indian Ocean after the U.S. fleet.⁹⁹

Apprehension over China's "string of pearls" strategy, particularly regarding energy security and SLOC's in the Indian Ocean, reinforces India's evolving maritime strategy.¹⁰⁰ Although China has sought to engage various South East Asian navies over its "Malacca dilemma," significantly, it has not

⁹⁵ Lord Curzon of Kedleston, *The Place of India in the Empire* (London: John Murray, 1909). For Curzon's influence see C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004), pp. xvii; 204-205; and "India and the Balance of Power," *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2006, pp. 17-32.

⁹⁶ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. 204.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁹⁸ See Ashley J. Tellis, "South Asia," in Richard J. Ellings and Aaron L. Friedberg, eds., *Strategic Asia 2001-02 Power and Purpose* (Seattle: National Research Bureau, 2002), pp. 262-63.

⁹⁹ See Vijay Sakhuja, "Indian Navy: Keeping Pace with Emerging Challenges," in Lawrence W. Prabhakar, Joshua H. Ho and Sam Bateman, eds., *The Evolving Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific: Maritime Doctrines and Nuclear Weapons at Sea*, (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2006), pp. 95-116; and Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India's Navy Reaches for Blue Water Goals," *Defense News*, Oct. 27, 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen J. Blank, *Natural Allies? Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Sept 2005), pp. 77-78.

done so with the Indian Navy. Like China, India needs uninterrupted access to oil for its economic growth and both powers are increasingly competitors for global energy resources. Not surprisingly, energy security has come to occupy a salient position in India's evolving "Look East" approach in which South East Asia is part of India's "extended strategic neighborhood."¹⁰¹ Energy considerations motivate New Delhi's development of closer relations with the United States alongside improving Indian force projection capability along the Indian Ocean littoral. In 2007, the Indian Navy was a major participant in the Malabar exercises in the Bay of Bengal with U.S., Australia, Japan and Singaporean fleet elements.¹⁰² Indeed, in overall terms, Indian and U.S. interests have converged in Asia, ranging from countering terrorism and Islamist radicalism to ensuring that New Delhi becomes a major player in Asia to balance China.¹⁰³ In terms of both geopolitics and energy security concerns, India seeks to offset Chinese influence in the eastern Indian Ocean region and South East Asia. In particular, India's courting of Vietnam, with its long history of mistrust of China, is "a spear in the Chinese underbelly" to counter what is seen as a *de facto* Beijing-Islamabad-Rangoon entente.¹⁰⁴

The Indian Navy has been at the cutting edge of India's new engagement in Asia as symbolized by new maritime doctrine, tsunami relief in late 2004, and a projected 40 percent increase in naval spending from 2004-14. By 2012, the Indian Navy plans to deploy a refurbished Russian carrier, the *Admiral Gorshkov* as an "air defence ship." In the future, India could develop a two- or three-carrier force, and acquire the maritime version of the U.S. F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.¹⁰⁵ By 2020 any Chinese carrier group established to ensure the flow of energy through the sea lines of communication of the Middle East and Asia may face a similar Indian force.

Thus, while India's naval force projection capacity remains modest and its main strategic priority continues to be continental, a neo-Curzonian and Indocentric vision of geopolitics is emerging among Indian elites that encompass not only South Asia but also parts of East Asia. In the words of Vijay Sakhuja, "New Delhi's strategic geography now extends far into the South China Sea in the east and to the Red Sea in the west. This is predicated on long-range naval operations and the exercising of influence around the strategic choke points of the Straits of Hormuz, the Straits of Malacca and the Sundra Straits."¹⁰⁶ In the long-term, an economically vibrant and geopolitically confident India may emerge as a major player in the evolving geopolitical map of Asia. The future implications of India as an Asian "swing state" are summed up by Stephen J. Blank:

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power," p. 23.

¹⁰³ Edward Luce, *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India* (Little and Brown, London, 2006), p. 281.

¹⁰⁴ Blank, *Natural Allies*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Vijay Sakhuja, "Indian Navy," p. 112.

To the extent that Indian power contributes to an overall Asian framework backed up and promoted by Washington that restrains the projection of Chinese power, it will contribute to a broader, more comprehensive Asiatic equilibrium that keeps all powers in play and prevents any one power from making a bid for regional or continental hegemony.¹⁰⁷

Crouching Tiger, Crippled Eagle? The American Recessional and Asian Geopolitics

Since 2007, the fashion in various circles is to conclude that the United States is in long-term decline. From this perspective, the Iraq War functions as the U.S. Boer War—a conflict that has sucked the oxygen out of U.S. foreign policy—while the 2008 global financial crisis signals the end of the pre-eminence of the U.S. model of financial capitalism. William Overholt, sums up much of the “declinist” thinking that is abroad in Asia:

Throughout Asia, the talk is of declining U.S. influence. No one in Asia doubts that the United States is the world’s biggest military power, the world’s biggest economy and the world’s greatest cultural influence, but it is seen as a declining power because it is preoccupied elsewhere. . . . Events in the Middle East have weakened its moral standing, and it has allowed its leverage through organizations other than the U.S.-Japan alliance to wither.¹⁰⁸

Overholt provides a variation of Paul Kennedy’s “imperial overstretch theory, in which” the United States has fallen prey to “the perils of dominant military priorities”—conforming to Joseph Chamberlain’s famous 1902 lament on Britain as a “weary Titan [that] staggers under the too vast orb of its fate.”¹⁰⁹ Writers and analysts as diverse as Kishore Mahbubani, Parag Khanna, John Gray and Martin Jacques, have taken up this theme and see a future marked by long-term U.S. economic and geopolitical decline.¹¹⁰ Mahbubani and Khanna even advance the idea that we have reached “the end of history”—is this case the end of Western-dominated world history in general, and of Luce’s “American Century,” in particular. “The benign American world order conceived by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill and launched by Harry S. Truman in 1945,” writes Mahbubani, “has been responsible for the unprecedented global peace and prosperity of the past 60 years. Despite its enormous

¹⁰⁷ Blank, *Natural Allies*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁸ Overholt, *Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹¹⁰ Kishore Mahbubani, “The Impending Demise of the Postwar System,” *Survival*, Winter, 2005-06, pp. 7-18 and *idem*, *The New Asian Hemisphere*; Parag Khanna, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order* (New York: Random House, 2008); John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Modern Capitalism* (London: Granta Books, 2009 edition); Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

contribution to humankind, this world order is likely to die in our lifetime.¹¹¹ For Mahhubani, the West's political and economic influence is rapidly shrinking and the time has come to restructure global governance to accommodate Asia's growing power.¹¹² For his part, Khanna sees U.S. power undergoing swift contraction from a combination of imperial overstretch, domestic political gridlock, economic weakness and diminishing soft power.¹¹³

The leading British analysts, John Gray and Martin Jacques, also argue for the notion of U.S. decline. Gray believes that the global financial crisis of 2008 signals "the downfall of American finance-capitalism" and represents the end of a "Washington consensus" on global economics. The United States will undergo "a long, Argentina-style decline." Deep changes are likely to occur in the global political order and the world's reserve currency will likely replace the dollar. "With the unprecedented scale of American indebtedness," observes Gray, "it is hard to see how the U.S. can continue to project its military power as it did in the post-Cold War world. . . . When economic power wanes, military power normally follows suit."¹¹⁴

Like Gray, Jacques views the 2008 global economic recession as a seminal event in accelerating the demise of the *Pax Americana*. The supreme paradox of the 2008 global financial crisis is that the system that imploded and crashed was not China's hybrid of 'Market-Leninism' but U.S. neo-liberal capitalism.¹¹⁵ For Jacques, record levels of U.S. debt and long-term economic trends clearly favor the growth of Chinese power. As he bluntly puts it, the twenty-first century will mark "the end of the Western world" and its replacement by a dynamic *Pax Sinica*. In East Asia in particular, Chinese regional dominance will occur sooner rather than later and "the present Westphalian system of international relations in East Asia is likely to be superseded by something that resembles a modern incarnation of the [traditional Chinese] tributary system."¹¹⁶ Given China's rise to global supremacy, the real task facing the Obama Administration and its successors—comparable to Olivares's long administration of the Spanish Habsburg Empire in the seventeenth century—will be to manage the impact of long-term geopolitical decline. Indeed, confronted by an agonizing erosion of its power and influence, Jacques sees Washington's policy elites in denial and predicts that "the United States is entering a protracted period of economic, political and military trauma. It finds itself on the eve of a psychological, emotional and existential crisis."¹¹⁷

Yet, the proposition of a bleak and inevitable American decline needs to analyze long-term trends. One is reminded of the famous question posed by

¹¹¹ Mahhubani, "The Impending Demise of the Postwar System," p. 7.

¹¹² Mahhubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere*, pp. 235-38; 242.

¹¹³ Khanna, *The Second World*, pp. 326-34.

¹¹⁴ Gray, 'Foreword to the 2009 Edition' of *False Dawn*, pp. x-xxv.

¹¹⁵ Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, p. 433.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 430-31.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 412-13.

Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge as he grappled with visions of the future, "are these the shadows of the things that *Will be*, or are they shadows of things that *May be*, only?"¹¹⁸ The difference is fundamental because the trends of global power do not operate like neat linear arithmetic but behave more like tectonic plates that grind, interact and fluctuate.

Like Mark Twain's death, current notions of U.S. decline are almost certainly exaggerated. It is important to note that a declinist prophecy on the modern United States has a long pedigree – one that begins with the Soviet *Sputnik* scare in the 1950s through the oil shocks of the 1970s to the belief in the 1980s and 1990s that the twenty-first century would see the supremacy of the Japanese economic model.¹¹⁹ Such a record suggests a need for caution when assessing the new wave of declinist texts. As Lawrence Freedman wryly remarks, candidates for peer competition with the United States come and go and "at one point the future spoke in Russian, then in Japanese, and now the bets are on Mandarin."¹²⁰ A useful corrective to declinist literature is the work of Fareed Zakaria, C. John Ikenberry, Joseph Joffe, William Odom and Robert Dujarric.¹²¹

Zakaria's book *The Post-American World*—despite its rather misleading title—argues that the world faces not so much the decline of the West as "the rise of the rest." Moreover, the "rest's" rise has paradoxically been made possible by the very success of the *Pax Americana* and the open, liberal system of rule-based internationalism it has fostered for well over half a century.¹²² Similarly, for Ikenberry the combination of the U.S.-led Western-centered global system alongside the deterrent power of nuclear weapons makes the Western order highly resilient and "hard to overturn and easy to join." It is the West's very openness that has facilitated China's economic integration and—provided the United States reinforces a capitalist system that permits engagement, integration and restraint—China's rise has the potential to be peaceful and non-confrontational.¹²³

The work of Zakaria and Ikenberry highlights the crucial difference between the United States and previous hegemony—the United States is not a classical empire based on military expansion and colonial possessions but an

¹¹⁸ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1858), p. 9. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁹ For a useful discussion of "declinism" see Christopher Layne, "The Waning of US Hegemony – Myth or Reality? A Review Essay," *International Security* vol. 34.1 (Summer 2008), pp. 147-172.

¹²⁰ Lawrence Freedman, "A Subversive on a Hill," *National Interest*, May/June 2009, p. 39.

¹²¹ William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Josef Joffe, *Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006); Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (London: Allen Lane, 2008); C. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs* vol. 87.1 (Jan./Feb. 2008), pp. 23-37.

¹²² Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, pp. 232-59.

¹²³ Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," pp. 24; 31-32.

exceptionalist state that carries within it the spirit of Thomas Jefferson's "empire of liberty" for all peoples. U.S. global power is largely based on agreement and consent through a network of multilateral institutions and alliances. From NATO Europe to East Asia, despite disagreements and strains, this consensual network remains intact. "The United States," observes the German scholar, Joseph Joffe, "self-righteous and assertive as it may be, does not seek to amass real estate. It is more like a giant elephant than a Tyrannosaurus rex." It may value its primacy but it has never sought supremacy in the classical imperial fashion.¹²⁴

Because of its relatively benign attitude towards power, the United States is the only state in the new millennium that will be capable of playing the role of a geopolitical ringmaster—exerting an indispensable "power of balance" into international relations. U.S. power is likely to remain crucial to nations seeking genuine security for only Washington has a proven track record of offering the world the paradox of 'primacy without supremacy.'¹²⁵ For example, faced by China's rise, the regional powers of East and South East Asia will, in Joffe's view, encourage the United States to continue to underwrite global security. "By subtly balancing against China, [the United States] adds to the security of everyone else; by explicitly protecting Japan, it slows the pace of Japanese rearmament and so inhibits arms races throughout the region."¹²⁶

The impact of U.S. liberal exceptionalism is also central to the work of Odom and Dujarric, who classify the United States as "an inadvertent empire." Like Joffe, they believe the secret to U.S. strength and longevity is its character and behaviour as a "Liberal empire," rejecting colonial conquest, upholding the rule of law, valuing the principle of national sovereignty and upholding individual rights of belief and expression—all of which represent the antithesis of the classical imperial impulse from ancient Rome to Victorian Britain. Moreover, the vibrant multicultural character of U.S. society has obvious appeal throughout the world as a country willing to welcome immigrants from all corners of the globe.¹²⁷

Comparing the United States to China, Odom and Dujarric believe that a largely monocultural, politically authoritarian and illiberal China is unlikely to replace the United States as a global superpower. Their views echo the belief of the Sinologist Ross Terrill who in 2003 stated: "I do not believe a repressive China, however well-equipped with machines, missiles and dollars can play a dominant world role."¹²⁸

Central to Odom and Dujarric's thesis of China's inherent limitations as a superpower is their conviction that China's economic success cannot be

¹²⁴ Joffe, *Überpower*, pp. 218-19.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹²⁷ Odom and Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire*, chs. 1-2.

¹²⁸ Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What it Means for the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 341.

explained by the intrinsic strength or potential global appeal of Chinese culture but largely by the Middle Kingdom's comprehensive 30 year interaction with liberal Western capitalism—a process facilitated and supported by U.S. policy.¹²⁹ In this respect, the benefits of cultural “soft power” were evident when the Chinese Communist Party's lavish film, *Confucius* debuted in Asia only to be eclipsed at box offices by Hollywood's *Avatar*.¹³⁰

The hybrid Chinese system of ‘Market-Leninism’ in which economic liberalism co-exists with communist authoritarianism is, for Odom and Dujarric, not sustainable in the long term. “This [systemic contradiction] does not mean that China cannot achieve considerable wealth and industrialisation over several decades. It does mean that China cannot sustain that performance for the whole of this century without major institutional change.”¹³¹ Ultimately, given the ideological vacuum at the heart of China's political system, the arbitrary rule of party functionaries, the enormous problems of urbanization and unemployment and the residual poverty of hundreds of millions of peasants, China looks less like a superpower than a large developing country whose global supremacy cannot be regarded as a foregone conclusion. Indeed, without significant domestic political reform, China appears unlikely to match the United States in six critical dimensions of domestic and global power: military innovation, immigration and assimilation, economic entrepreneurship, university education, science, and the power of media and culture.¹³²

In short, the dynamism and appeal of U.S. liberal society will see the United States continue to dominate global mores for much of the twenty-first century. The real danger to American global pre-eminence comes not from China's rise but from the potential for mistakes and miscalculations in the United States. As Odom and Dujarric write:

The United States faces no rival, certainly not in the next several decades, but it could succumb to its own caprice and imprudence. No one else can take its power away, but it can throw that power away. The temptations for capricious American behaviour are great, and the probable consequences are grave.¹³³

In many respects, then, the future challenge the United States faces is not one of precipitate strategic decline as much as gradual geopolitical adjustment to transformed global conditions—an adjustment requiring careful calibration and disaggregation of contending and interdependent global economic and strategic interests. The United States needs to husband its statecraft and resources with skill and foresight to meet the multiple challenges

¹²⁹ Odom and Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire*, pp. 11-35.

¹³⁰ Daniel A. Bell, “From Communism to Confucianism: China's Alternative to Liberal Democracy,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* Spring 2010, p. 18.

¹³¹ Odom and Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire*, p. 33.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 36-62; 149-56.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

of greater multipolarity. Indeed, in some respects, such a reassessment of U.S. power has already begun. For example, the 2008 U.S. National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends 2025* report argues that, over the next two decades, the United States is on course to be *primus inter pares* in a multipolar international system that will effectively end what was always an artificial "unipolar moment."¹³⁴

When it comes to Asia, particularly East Asia, the geopolitical situation over the next two decades is unlikely to witness any swift U.S. decline on the Gray-Jacques "crippled eagle" model. This is because the bipolar Sino-American continental-maritime balance of power is complex and well-entrenched. It began after the Korean War, was cemented by the Nixon-Mao rapprochement of the 1970s and has consolidated itself in the new century. As noted earlier, because the United States never enjoyed a "unipolar moment" in East Asia after the Cold War, the sub-region is an exception to the post-1991 trend of U.S. global hegemony and *Pax Americana*. East Asia remains the geopolitical fulcrum in Asia overall, but it is a place where power is shrouded in multiple paradoxes—and where the fortunes of both Washington and Beijing are sealed by the greatest paradox of all—strategic bipolarity in the midst of economic interdependence. As a result, there is, and can be, no zero-sum game of Chinese rise and U.S. fall. Rather, Sino-American relations reflect a mutual accommodation of power and interest because neither nation can exert hegemony on both land and sea, or succeed geopolitically in Asia without significant ongoing cooperation. Indeed, the twenty-first century will require the United States and China to confront an array of mutual challenges ranging from North Korea and Pakistan to terrorism, insurgency and nuclear proliferation, and environmental degradation.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Presently, Asian geopolitics represents a complex blending of power and paradox, both stable and fluid, with change occurring against an unresolved tension between the direction of economic growth and that of strategic development. Military modernization is occurring but, so far, no arms race; China's geopolitical influence is rising in the region but maritime Asia's security remains, and is likely to remain, dependent on the *Pax Americana*'s system of alliances and offshore power projection. Yet, no formal anti-Beijing counter-alliance is rising among Asian nations whose pursuit of security includes a pragmatic and nuanced strategy of hedging.

At the heart of Asia's wilderness of paradoxes is the character of the Sino-American relationship. For both the United States and China, the realities

¹³⁴ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2008, pp. 93-95.

¹³⁵ See Kang, *China Rising*, p. 184.

of independent strategic power are disciplined by East Asian geopolitical bipolarity, the possession of nuclear arsenals, and the reality of intersecting economic-financial interests. This complex interdependence is nowhere better symbolized than in David M. Lampton's description of Beijing and Washington as being locked in a great "double gamble"—an initiative designed to try to ensure that peace and stability endure throughout Asia.¹³⁶ As he puts it:

For Chinese the gamble is that the Americans will countenance, indeed cooperate with, their rise, even as they have misgivings and as some in the US Government and elsewhere in society periodically contemplate taking a more confrontational path. And for America, the bet is that a powerful China two or more decades hence, woven into the fabric of international society and a beneficiary of the globalization that energized its growth in the first place, will become in the words of one Chinese scholar in Shanghai, "a responsible, decent role model for others."¹³⁷

Every responsible Asia-Pacific country has an existential stake in the success of this unprecedented geopolitical experiment where strategy and statecraft seek to make the Chinese economic miracle the benign twin brother of the U.S. security umbrella.

In contemporary Asia, then, prospects for future peace and cooperation are finely poised against an undertow of incipient conflicts and strategic rivalries. Imponderables could shatter the web of paradoxes that have given power in Asia a multifaceted but generally cooperative framework. These imponderables include a potential for the strategic imperatives inherent in the U.S.-Japan military alliance on the one hand, and those of the U.S.-China political-economic condominium on the other to become gradually irreconcilable over time; a breakdown in Sino-American strategic bipolarity and the rise of a destabilizing naval arms race; an outbreak of inter-state strategic rivalry between China and India over maritime energy resources, and nuclear crisis over North Korea or Pakistan. The central challenge of U.S. and Chinese statesmanship will be to ensure that, in Asia in general and East Asia in particular Ross's co-existent "geography of the peace" continues even as geopolitical conditions change. Neither nation has an interest to be propelled, by either accident or design, into the bleak conflict universe of Mearsheimer's "tragedy of great power politics."



¹³⁶ David M. Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid.