

sophistication; such leading-edge accomplishment is far more essential to long-distance warfare. Again, geography matters.

Such are the unrelenting undercurrents of China's meteoric military-security development, which faces meaningful constraints from the prospect of US opposition as well as long-range challenges, just as surely as it enjoys short-range opportunities and is working hard to exploit them.

10 WHAT DOES THE RISE OF CHINA MEAN FOR THE UNITED STATES?

Robert S. Ross

THE RISE OF China presents the United States with an unprecedented foreign policy challenge. For the first time since World War II, the United States faces a great power competitor that possesses both economic and military capabilities that may soon rival US capabilities. China is also the first great power since prewar Japan to challenge US maritime supremacy, a post-World War II cornerstone of US global power and national security. The rise of China challenges US security in a region vital to security. The United States waged World War II and the Cold War in East Asia to preserve a regional balance of power that assured American security.

The rise of China requires US-China policy to fulfill two strategic imperatives. First, US policy must balance the rise of China by enhancing its military forces in the region. Failure to offset China's improved military capabilities with increased capabilities of its own will undermine the ability of the United States to sustain its strategic partnerships in East Asia, and it will erode its regional presence, weakening US ability to preserve the balance of power.

Second, the United States must promote US-China cooperation and regional stability. The United States possesses many bilateral and global interests that require US-China cooperation. The United

States would incur significant costs should these interests become hostage to US-China strategic conflict. Heightened US-China strategic competition would also impose significant costs on US security and the US economy.

US-CHINA POLICY: SECURITY WITHOUT STABILITY

Since 2010, there has been a downward spiral in US-China relations. The US-China strategic relationship is now not only worse than at any time since 1972, but the US strategic position in East Asia is also worse than it was at the end of the George W. Bush administration.

During the Obama administration, the United States and China were on opposite sides of increasingly militarized territorial disputes involving China and Japan, and China and the Philippines. The US and Chinese militaries frequently challenge each other's presence in the air and at sea in Southeast Asia, with an increasing likelihood of an intended or unintended military incident. There has also been heightened US-China military competition. Washington and Beijing have each developed and deployed weapons with the explicit purpose of defeating the other in a war. Meanwhile, after reclaiming territory in the Spratly Islands, China now has maritime facilities in the southern reaches of the South China Sea, contributing to its ability to pressure US allies and carry out much enhanced surveillance of US naval operations.

The United States has responded to Chinese activism with expanded maritime strategic presence, seeking to consolidate its strategic partnerships and contend in the regional balance of power. It has strengthened its alliances with Japan, Australia, and, under President Benigno Aquino III, the Philippines. During the Obama administration, the United States also increased its military presence in the Philippines, Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore, and it has

deployed a growing share of its most advanced military technologies to East Asia.

Many US strategic partners in maritime East Asia welcomed expanded cooperation with the US Navy. The Obama administration had been "pushing at an open door." Similarly, the US Navy has had little difficulty deploying additional defense platforms in East Asia and challenging Chinese maritime activities. The challenge for the United States is to balance China's rise while contributing to regional stability and US-China cooperation. But, regardless of its intentions, US policy signaled that the US strategic objective is containment, seeking to counter any Chinese action that alters the regional status quo, thus contributing to heightened US-China conflict. Simultaneously, in significant respects US policy also has failed to advance US security.

Over the past decade, there has been no erosion of robust US-South Korean deterrence of North Korean use of force. Nonetheless, since 2010, the United States has increased its ground forces presence in South Korea and expanded military cooperation. In 2016, it pushed Seoul to allow deployment of the US Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile defense systems in South Korea. Yet missile defense cannot contribute to South Korean security. North Korean missile launchers are too close to South Korean targets to enable intercepts by THAAD. But the preferred US missile defense radar for South Korea can cover Chinese territory. Thus, expanded US-South Korean defense cooperation and efforts to deploy US missile defense systems signal to Beijing that the United States intends to contain Chinese influence on the Korean Peninsula and degrade China's nuclear deterrent.

As a result of the US-South Korean agreement to deploy THAAD, China has refused to cooperate with the United States in constraining North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Yet any

possibility of success in restraining North Korean proliferation requires Chinese cooperation. Moreover, the agreement has caused tension between China and South Korea, contributing to North Korean confidence. Finally, the agreement contributed to the 2017 victory of Moon Jae-in as president of South Korea. During the presidential campaign Moon criticized the agreement. After becoming president he quickly suspended deployment of the THAAD system and moved to improve relations with China.

Since 2010, the United States has increased naval cooperation with Vietnam and, in 2016, lifted its ban on arms sales to the country. But Indochina is a continental theater in which China possesses substantial superiority over the United States. Should Vietnam risk meaningful defense cooperation with the United States, Chinese ground forces can, at minimal cost, apply effective coercive military pressure on Vietnam's northern border. The United States would have no effective response, lacking the interest and capabilities to counter Chinese pressure in this region. Despite US efforts to improve relations with Vietnam, Hanoi has reassured Beijing that it will not challenge Chinese security. Thus, rather than contributing to US security, defense cooperation with Vietnam merely suggested the United States' intent to contain China's rise.

Regarding the East Asian maritime territorial disputes, none of the disputed islands have strategic significance for US-China relations. Even after Chinese reclamation, the islands are too small to support wartime operations or provide facilities to obstruct trade or strategic sea lanes. There are no significant mineral deposits in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, the economic significance of which is limited to fishing.

US declaratory policy is that the United States takes no position on these maritime sovereignty disputes. Nonetheless, US policy supported its allies' efforts to challenge China's claims. In 2012, after

the Japanese government ignored US advice and purchased disputed islands in the East China Sea, President Obama publicly guaranteed US treaty support for Japanese defense of the islands. Similarly, during the Obama administration, the United States strengthened defense cooperation with the Philippines and publicly warned China not to escalate tension with the country, but the United States did not publicly caution the Philippines, which could have helped reassure China of US intentions.

The United States encouraged the Philippines to challenge Chinese maritime claims at the United Nations Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), hoping to establish US resolve to support its allies and to use the "moral high ground" to isolate China in Southeast Asia. The Philippines won a victory at the PCA, but the ultimate outcome was a victory for China. Rather than isolate China, Manila's challenge to Chinese sovereignty isolated the Philippines in South East Asia as it encountered coercion from China, the region's rising power. Thus, new Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte quickly sought rapprochement with China. He announced that the Philippines' legal victory would have minimal effect on its negotiations with China and that the Philippines would hold bilateral discussions with China, rather than "internationalize" the issue, which had been China's original demand. He also signaled that he would scale back the level of US-Philippine defense cooperation. China rewarded the Philippines with infrastructure and military aid and eased restrictions on Philippine fishing in disputed waters.

US Navy fanfare around its exercises and its freedom of navigation operations in East Asia similarly contribute to Chinese perception of US containment. If the navy's purpose were simply deterrence or support for international law, low-profile operations would suffice. But the extensive publicity surrounding US Navy exercises suggests an effort to deny China greater naval presence in the South

China Sea and to bolster active regional resistance to Chinese territorial claims. US policy has only strengthened Chinese resolve to resist US pressure.

The US response to the rise of China has failed on two counts. First, it failed to develop improved security ties with South Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam, and it failed to constrain expanded Chinese naval presence in the South China Sea, principle objectives of the administration's East Asia Policy. Second, US policy failed to manage Chinese perceptions of US intentions. US initiatives toward South Korea, Vietnam, and in the South China Sea persuaded Chinese leaders that US intent is to thwart the rise of China.

A POLICY OF RESTRAINT

The rise of China ensures that US-China relations will become more difficult and contentious, no matter how accommodative or confrontational US policy is. The military competition will intensify as China continues to develop advanced naval capabilities and the United States expends increasing resources to balance the rise of China and sustain its East Asian alliance system.

But deterministic arguments that say war is the mechanical result of shifting structural dynamics are wrong. Leaders and policy choices matter. They contribute to the extent and cost of conflict, including the likelihood of hostilities. The United States and China may not be able to avoid conflicts with one another, but they do have some control over the duration, intensity, and escalatory aspects of such conflict.

US foreign policy does not require maximizing power. Nor does it entail an uncompromising strategic posture. These objectives are neither realist nor pragmatic. Rather, they are nationalist impulses. A realist foreign policy values negotiations and compromises as es-

sential elements of a restraint that seeks to protect American security at minimal cost in blood and treasure.

America's security interests lie in maritime East Asia. It is not helpful to US security for the United States to expand its military presence on the Korean Peninsula or to build military cooperation with Vietnam. If North Korea is not deterred by existing US and South Korean capabilities and the risk of massive conventional and nuclear retaliation, then it is undeterrable. No amount of US military assistance to Vietnam can offset China's conventional superiority on the Sino-Vietnamese border.

In the East China Sea and South China Sea, the United States can publicly restrain its allies' activism in sovereignty disputes and quietly deter Chinese belligerence without undermining US security. It can expand its military presence in its maritime East Asia strategic partners and thus reassure its partners of its commitment to collective defense, while constraining its allies from actively defending their territorial claims. In so doing, it can contribute to a shelving of this dispute by all of the claimants, rather than contribute to ongoing tension.

Regarding freedom of navigation operations, the United States should prioritize security over principle. Highly public and frequent freedom of navigation operations do not contribute to US security. In peacetime, such operations have no significance for intelligence collection. In wartime, access to disputed waters is determined by US capabilities, not by legal principle. Similarly, highly publicized naval exercises are not necessary either to reassure our allies or deter China.

TOWARD A BALANCED CHINA POLICY

China's contribution to US-China tension is clear. Since 2009-2010, Chinese policy has suggested impatience to transform the regional

order. In 2009, Chinese government ships expanded patrols of disputed waters in the South China Sea. In 2010, China seemed to support North Korea after it had sunk a South Korean Navy ship and shelled a South Korean island, killing civilians. That same year, China announced sanctions on US companies contributing to Taiwanese defense and threatened retaliation against Japan's arrest of a Chinese fisherman who had rammed his boat into a Japanese Coast Guard ship in disputed waters. In 2011 and 2012, Chinese government ships harassed Vietnamese fishing boats and government survey ships operating in disputed waters.

China exhibited even less restraint from 2012 to 2014. In September 2012, the Chinese Coast Guard challenged Japanese sovereignty in the East China Sea and Philippine sovereignty in the South China Sea. In 2013, China announced, with minimal international consultation, its air defense identification zone for the East China Sea. In and began land reclamation activities in the South China Sea. In May 2014, China began oil drilling in disputed waters in the South China Sea. Throughout this period, China increased its surveillance of US air and naval operations in East Asia.

This was all too much, too soon. China's multiple initiatives have suggested that it will exercise limited restraint in defense of its sovereignty claims and to challenge US alliances and naval presence, even at the risk of hostilities. Chinese leaders cannot be surprised that their policies have elicited heightened concern for Chinese intentions in the United States and throughout East Asia, as well as an unwelcome US response.

China may respond to US selective accommodation with continued assertiveness, but the United States does not have to sacrifice security to test Chinese intentions. By signaling strategic engagement while strengthening its strategic presence in maritime East Asia, the

United States can revert to overt, coercive diplomacy against impatient and coercive China from a position of strength.

The US-China relationship is at a strategic crossroads. China's increasing maritime power has contributed to destabilizing foreign policy activism. But US concern for its alliances and credibility to defend the balance of power has contributed to its resistance to compromise and to its military expansion on the East Asian mainland. For the United States, this trend in US-China relations has led to unnecessary and costly escalation of tension, strategic competition and regional instability, and diminished US security in East Asia.

The challenge for the United States is to respond to Chinese foreign policy with measures that signal to Beijing its interest in engagement and conflict de-escalation, all without undermining US security. This is also the challenge for the Trump administration. It has the opportunity to contribute to greater US-China cooperation and a more stable East Asia, as well as promote US security through the maintenance of the regional balance of power. It should grasp this opportunity while it still exists.