

US Grand Strategy, the Rise of China, and US National Security Strategy for East Asia

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In the twenty-first century, the foremost US national security interest remains what it has been since 1776—to ensure a balance of power in its two transoceanic flanking regions that keeps them internally divided. US security has continually depended on this balance of power to prevent European and East Asian powers from considering expansion into the Western Hemisphere. Whereas, in the early years of the republic, the United States could count on power balancing among European and East Asian great powers, since World War II, it has had to participate directly in balance-of-power politics in both regions. During the Cold War, it faced challenges in Europe and East Asia that required simultaneous strategic engagement in both regions.

The current balance-of-power challenge for the United States is in East Asia. Unless balanced by the United States, China's rise could yield regional hegemony. None of its Asian neighbors has the resources necessary to balance China's rise. Japan's decline has been precipitous, and China's other neighbors are too small to present a challenge. A balance of power in East Asia will require direct US strategic involvement to maintain a divided region.

During the first term of the Obama administration, the United States undertook a strategic initiative to strengthen its presence in East Asia. Often called the US “pivot” toward East Asia, this policy has been characterized by development of enhanced strategic cooperation with a wide range of East Asia countries, including traditional allies and new security partners. In many ways the pivot to East Asia has redefined US

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policy there, with potential implications for great-power relations and regional stability.

The first part of this article examines the underlying and fundamental national security interests that have informed US grand strategy since the nation's founding and its implications for US national security interests in East Asia, both in the past and in the twenty-first century. The second part considers the long-term implications of the rise of China and post-Cold War objectives and policies that have sustained the regional balance of power. The third part looks at the Obama administration's pivot to East Asia and its implications for US-China cooperation and for US national security interests. The article concludes by examining implications of the pivot strategy for balancing the rise of China and the long-term prospects for US security and regional stability.

US Grand Strategy since 1776

Fundamentally, US national security interest in East Asia is no different than in Europe. Both regions are contiguous to the oceans that border US coastal regions—Europe across the Atlantic Ocean and East Asia across the Pacific. Because these two major regions flank the North American coasts, US security policy since its founding has depended on balance-of-power politics in these regions and the strategic imperative of a divided Europe and a divided East Asia, lest a regional hegemon develop the capability and the ambition to reach across the oceans and challenge US security.

President George Washington first explained this national security interest in his 1796 Farewell Address. His admonishment to avoid “interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe” and its “frequent controversies” did not imply that the United States should not involve itself in the international politics of Europe. On the contrary, he merely warned the United States from engaging in “permanent alliances” and “artificial ties,” for such entanglement would constrain its flexibility to maneuver among the contending European states to maximize its security. Flexibility and detachment from European interests would enable the United States to “safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.”¹

Washington learned the value of “temporary alliances” during his leadership of the war for independence against Great Britain, when the

Anglo-French rivalry and corresponding French assistance to US forces were critical to the military successes of the former colonies. This was especially so during the pivotal Battle of Yorktown. Not only did France contribute approximately 40 percent of the troops and much of the heavy armaments deployed in the siege of Yorktown, but it also used its navy to block the British navy from supplying critical reinforcements and aid for its troops, thus contributing to the surrender by Lt Gen Lord Cornwallis in October 1781. The Battle of Yorktown was the last major battle of the war and ultimately persuaded the British to negotiate independence.²

The importance of a transoceanic divided flank to the new republic was evident throughout the Napoleonic Wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Although the terms of the peace agreement of 1786 called for Great Britain to withdraw its forces from US territory, it continued to deploy them at posts along the Canadian border. Only in 1794, when faced with Napoleon's growing continental coalition, did Great Britain finally agree to the terms of Jay's Treaty, which required it to withdraw its forces from the frontier posts.³ Spain agreed to US navigation rights on the Mississippi River and settled the US-Spanish boundary dispute (Pinckney's Treaty, 1796) because it feared British retribution after Madrid defected from the Anglo-Spanish alliance and signed a peace agreement with Napoleon.⁴ President Thomas Jefferson's opportunity to purchase the French territory of Louisiana in 1803 resulted from the heavy cost of Napoleon's continental ambitions and his need to replenish France's treasury to finance continuation of the war.⁵ The United States also benefitted from Anglo-French rivalry during the War of 1812. The young US Navy fared poorly, including in the Battle of New Orleans. Nonetheless, Napoleon's escape from exile on Elba in March 1815 forced Britain to accept a peace favorable to the United States so it could redeploy its forces against a resurgent French army and defeat Napoleon's forces on 18 June 1815 at Waterloo.⁶

The United States continued to benefit from European rivalries through the nineteenth century. Following a series of Southern military victories during the US Civil War, Napoleon III gave serious consideration to intervening on behalf of the Confederacy to alleviate the French shortage of cotton. But in 1862, he told Confederate diplomats that he was too preoccupied with conflicts in Italy and Greece to risk war with the United States. Moreover, he was concerned that if Great Britain did not also intervene in the US Civil War, it would aim to entangle France

and thus destroy French commerce.⁷ Shortly thereafter, Russian rivalry following the Crimean War and preoccupation with its European security conflicts contributed to its eagerness to sell Alaska to the United States in 1867.⁸

US interests also benefitted from a divided East Asia in the late nineteenth century. In the Spanish-American War of 1898, no European power was willing to support Spain for fear it would undermine security vis-à-vis the other powers. Great Britain played a leading role in blocking European support for Spain, but Germany, France, and Russia were all reluctant to jeopardize their interests in Europe and Asia by assisting Spain.⁹ The resulting isolation enabled the United States to defeat the Spanish navy not only in Cuba, but also in the Philippines, where it secured the islands as a colony and established a strategic presence in East Asia. Subsequently, US security benefitted in the early twentieth century from the multiple European countries vying for influence throughout East Asia, including Great Britain, France, Russia, and Germany, as well as Japan. The McKinley administration's "Open Door" policy regarding trade with China was premised on the unwillingness of the many great powers, especially Great Britain, to allow any single power to dominate the Chinese market.¹⁰

On the other hand, danger clearly emerged for the United States in the absence of balance-of-power politics in its East Asia flanking region following the 1939 battle at Nomonhon and the subsequent 1941 Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact. The Soviet Union's preoccupation with German ambitions and its corresponding vulnerability in East Asia led Joseph Stalin to secure the eastern borders by conceding Japan's superiority in Northeast Asia. The resulting absence of a great power that could balance against Japanese regional power encouraged Tokyo to extend its military occupation to all of East Asia and ultimately to send its navy across the Pacific Ocean to launch its preemptive attack on US forces at Pearl Harbor.¹¹

The strategic lesson of World War II for the United States was that it could no longer rely on balance-of-power politics to maintain its security by dividing its flanking regions. Instead, it would have to directly involve itself in European and East Asian politics to maintain the balance of power and US national security. It fought World War II to resist German dominance of Europe.¹² In East Asia it acquiesced to Japanese expansion until Japan moved from occupying simply the Korean Peninsula

and China to seeking dominance throughout maritime East Asia, as well.¹³ US resistance to German and Japanese expansion thus prevented the emergence of a regional hegemon across its coastal flanks.

In the aftermath of World War II, US policymakers sought the same grand strategy objectives—a balance of power that assured divided regions opposite the eastern and western US coasts. It thus balanced Soviet and Chinese power in Europe and East Asia. For US planners, the lesson of World War II was that the United States could no longer “free-ride” on other powers to assure its security. Rather, it had to assume that responsibility by participating in the balance of power in Europe and East Asia.¹⁴

US Grand Strategy and the Rise of China

The rise of China poses a challenge to US security in East Asia because, unless balanced, China could achieve regional hegemony. This could occur regardless of Chinese intentions and policies. Given the historical pattern of great-power politics, once China possesses the capabilities to challenge the regional order, it will presumably seek a dominant strategic position throughout East Asia. This has been the European experience, repeated many times over the past 500 years and often characterized by war. It has also been the experience in the Western Hemisphere since 1823, when the United States proclaimed its regional ambitions in the Monroe Doctrine. And it has been the recent experience in South Asia, where only Pakistan’s possession of nuclear weapons has prevented India from achieving dominance throughout the subcontinent. Great powers in search of security seek a region-wide sphere of influence. Should China have similar aspirations, it would be neither good nor bad nor reflect hostility toward the United States; it would simply reflect great-power politics. On the other hand, even should China not have aspirations for regional leadership, it will emerge as the regional hegemon unless its rise is balanced by another great power. Local powers, responding to China’s growing advantage in the balance of capabilities in the region, will gravitate toward it rather than risk its hostility. In the absence of balancing, the rise of China will challenge a cornerstone of US security—a divided flank across the Pacific Ocean.

The United States requires sufficient military and political presence in East Asia to balance the rise of China and to deter it from using force

to achieve regional hegemony, should it become frustrated at the pace of change. US strength will also reassure local powers that their security does not require accommodation to China's rise.¹⁵

The optimal US grand strategy for East Asia will secure balance-of-power objectives at the least possible cost to US blood, treasure, and honor. To do otherwise would divert scarce strategic resources from capabilities and missions that would better serve US security elsewhere and would undermine achievement of critical nonstrategic objectives, including economic development and social welfare. Balancing China's rise at the least possible cost will require continual modernization of US capabilities while managing US-China relations to avoid unnecessary yet costly conflict. The former is a military challenge; the latter is a political challenge.

US Military Presence in East Asia and Balancing China's Rise

The United States requires sufficient military capability in East Asia to deter China from using force to realize its strategic ambitions and to reassure US security partners that they can rely on the United States to provide for their security against a rising China. This is how to maintain the balance of power in East Asia.

China's long-term strategy to challenge US military presence focuses on access-denial capabilities. Rather than fund a large power-projection and sea-control naval capability dependent on large and numerous surface ships, it has developed low-cost, secure platforms that may challenge the ability of the United States to protect its war-fighting ships, especially aircraft carriers. Chinese efforts primarily focus on the use of relatively quiet and increasingly numerous diesel submarines.¹⁶ By 2000, China's submarine force had awakened concern in the US Navy over the wartime survivability of its surface fleet, especially its carriers. More recently, Chinese research and testing of an antiship ballistic missile system and antiship cruise missiles deployed on submarines and surface ships suggest China may eventually pose an even greater challenge to the US fleet.¹⁷ Should China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) develop an effective intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) targeting capability to inflict critical attacks on US naval assets, it may be able to deter US intervention in its hostilities with local states or create

region-wide doubts that the United States has the resolve to defend their security at the risk of war.¹⁸ If China believes it can deter US intervention, it may be encouraged to use force against US allies.

Over the past 15 years, the United States has responded to Chinese military modernization with an ongoing effort to sustain a military presence in East Asia for power projection. Following the 1996 confrontation in the Taiwan Strait, the Clinton administration initiated the US strategic transition toward East Asia with the first redeployment from Europe to Guam of a *Los Angeles*-class submarine. Since then, the United States has deployed nearly every type of air and naval weapon system to East Asia, including its most modern ones as they come into operation. The US Navy plans to deploy six *Los Angeles*-class submarines to East Asia. It has also deployed the *Virginia*-class submarine and a converted *Ohio*-class SSGN (nuclear-powered, guided-missile-equipped submarine) to East Asia, and it has home-ported an additional aircraft carrier at San Diego for western Pacific operations. As early as 2006, the Department of Defense (DoD) *Quadrennial Defense Review* called for the US Navy to deploy 60 percent of its submarine force and six of its 11 aircraft carriers to the Pacific theater.¹⁹ In addition to its forces based in Japan, the US Air Force has deployed F-15s, F-16s, the B-1 and B-2 bombers, and the F-22 Raptor, its most-advanced aircraft, to Guam. It has also based air-refueling aircraft on Guam and stockpiled air-launched cruise missiles there.²⁰

The United States has also strengthened its forward presence in East Asia through cooperation with its regional security partners. Despite domestic political complications in Japan over Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa, cooperation has continued to expand between the US and Japanese militaries, including exercises focused on defending Japanese-controlled islands claimed by China. The 1999 completion of the deep-draft-vessel pier at Singapore's Changi port facility provided the US Navy with a modern and comprehensive aircraft carrier facility in the South China Sea. In 2005, Singapore and the United States signed the Strategic Framework Agreement, consolidating defense and security ties and enabling greater cooperation in joint naval exercises.²¹ During the George H. W. Bush administration, the United States developed greater defense cooperation with the Philippines. It expanded access for US naval ships to Philippine waters, and between 2001 and 2005, annual US military assistance to the Philippines increased from \$1.9 million

to approximately \$126 million, making it the largest recipient of US military assistance in East Asia.²² The US Navy also expanded its access to Malaysia's Port Klang in the Strait of Malacca.²³ More recently, during the Obama administration, the United States further expanded US-Philippine cooperation with increased arms sales, including coastal patrol ships and the expansion of US-Philippine naval exercises, while reaching agreement for US Navy access to its former base at Subic Bay.²⁴ The administration has also developed improved defense cooperation with Indonesia and New Zealand and reached agreement with Australia for stationing US Marines on its military training base in Darwin.

Ongoing modernization of US defense capability has been especially important for balancing the rise of China. The development of ISR-based weapon systems, including remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV), is an effective response to China's development of antiship missile capability. These systems will reduce the vulnerability of US regional power-projection operations while contributing to its antisubmarine warfare capability vis-à-vis China's growing and advanced submarine fleet.²⁵ The deployment of advanced armaments in underwater platforms, including Tomahawk cruise missiles on *Ohio*-class submarines, is a similarly effective response to Chinese military modernization.

US defense modernization has sustained the ability to deter Chinese use of force to challenge the regional order. Although the PLA dominates China's land borders, its navy remains grossly inferior to the US Navy.²⁶ It continues to depend on small coastal administration and coast guard ships for its maritime activities in disputed waters in the South China Sea, and its antipiracy activities in the Gulf of Aden consist of unsophisticated operations conducted by very few ships. China's surface ship capability remains weak; its new aircraft carrier is undersized, lacks aircraft, and is highly vulnerable to US forces. It is primarily a prestige ship rather than a war-fighting ship.²⁷ China has just begun construction of its next-generation guided-missile destroyer. Both the quantity and quality of these ships will be vastly inferior to US Aegis-equipped destroyers. The DoD reported that in 2011 less than 30 percent of PLA surface forces, air forces, and air defense forces were "modern" and that only 55 percent of its submarine fleet was modern.²⁸ The recent eagerness of US regional strategic partners to consolidate defense cooperation with the United States reflects its

continued dominance vis-à-vis China and confidence that it can provide for their security despite Chinese opposition.

The challenge for the United States in balancing China's military modernization is developing an effective response to its missile program and thus neutralizing a developing access-denial capability. The growing accuracy of China's land-based medium-range missiles increasingly challenges the long-term efficacy of US aircraft carriers.²⁹ US development of SSGNs, RPAs, and UUVs is an effective response to this problem. Nonetheless, continued US commitment to the aircraft carrier imposes high financial costs on its defense budget that may undermine its long-term ability to contend with Chinese defense modernization, thus undermining US security in East Asia. Although the carrier is an effective platform for maintaining a maritime "presence" in East Asia, evaluation of its financial value ultimately rests on its war-fighting capability compared to the cost and effectiveness of other platforms. Given the carrier's expense and its growing vulnerability to land-based and sea-based missiles, it may become a long-term liability rather than an asset in the effort to balance China's rise. This is especially true given the relative cost advantage of the offense versus the defense in the missile-carrier balance.

Given the growing constraints on the US defense budget, the significant domestic social welfare demands, and the likelihood of slow economic growth, continued funding of aircraft carriers may challenge the US ability to balance China's rise.³⁰ It will limit funding for more-capable and cost-effective platforms, including submarines, RPAs, and UUVs deployed on smaller, less vulnerable, and less costly surface ships and/or submarines. Moreover, China is better able than the United States to contend in a cost-based arms race; its annual defense budget increases will continue to be greater than annual US increases.

US Strategic Partnerships in East Asia and US-China Relations

As a geographically external power, the United States must determine with which East Asian countries it must develop strategic partnerships to enable it to deploy and operate forward-based forces and maintain the regional balance of power. This determination must reflect the geopolitical significance of the regional real estate rather than historical relationships or ideological affinity. It will thus necessarily reflect the unique geopolitical characteristics of East Asia.

Large insular countries encircle mainland East Asia from the northeast to the western reaches of the South China Sea. Together Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia possess considerable assets, including energy resources, well-situated and modern port facilities, large land masses to enable critical deployments, and sophisticated infrastructures that can support maritime operations. Further offshore from the mainland, Australia and New Zealand offer substantial and secure rear-basing facilities. This geopolitical environment enables the United States to maintain a large and defensible regional presence that can dominate maritime East Asia and thus contend with a mainland great power.

The geopolitical contrast between Europe and East Asia is instructive.³¹ Following World War II, the United States determined that a significant military presence in Europe was necessary to balance the power of the Soviet Union. Great Britain did not offer sufficient land mass or the geopolitical location necessary to maintain adequate forward-deployed maritime presence to control Europe's western coastal waters should a continental hegemon emerge. On the other hand, in early 1950—as the Truman administration returned US forces to the European mainland and funded the economic recovery of Western Europe to maintain a divided continent—after the Chinese Communist Party defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China government, Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared that the United States did not have a significant national security interest in a strategic presence on mainland East Asia. His definition of the US Pacific “defense perimeter” excluded the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and mainland Southeast Asia, including Indochina, Burma, and Thailand. According to Acheson, the US defense perimeter only encompassed the region's insular countries, particularly Japan and the Philippines, and by extension, the South China Sea countries.³² US military leaders concurred with Acheson's assessment, and between late 1949 and early 1950 they argued that US national security did not require a strategic presence on the Korean Peninsula or on Taiwan.³³

Eventually the United States developed strategic alliances with South Korea, Taiwan, South Vietnam, and Thailand, but these alliances did not reflect the intrinsic importance of their geopolitical location to US security interests in a divided region. Rather, the United States intervened in Korea to establish its determination to contain Soviet-led communist military expansionism, wherever and whenever it occurred. It

fought the Korean War to defend US credibility, not to defend strategic territory critical to its security.³⁴ Once North Korean communist forces invaded South Korea and the United States perceived China as a hostile and expansionist country, previously secondary interests assumed greater military importance. In the aftermath of the Korean War, the United States signed alliances with South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand and extended an alliance commitment to South Vietnam. These developments tied the US reputation for resolve to defend its offshore allies, including Japan, to the defense of its mainland allies and thus drew it into wars and multiple crises, despite the secondary importance of these countries to US interest in a divided East Asia.³⁵

The US post-Vietnam War retrenchment from the East Asian mainland underscores its secondary importance to US security. The greatest “tragedy” of the US involvement in Vietnam is that after 10 years of war and significant losses of American blood, treasure, and honor, the withdrawal from Indochina and the loss of military bases in Thailand had an imperceptible impact on US security. The defense relationship with Taiwan has been equally peripheral to US security. A military presence on Taiwan in the 1960s supported US operations in Vietnam. Thus, in early 1972, President Richard Nixon could easily concede to Beijing that once the Vietnam War was over, the United States would withdraw all of its military forces from Taiwan.³⁶ In the twenty-first century, the United States has not resisted Taiwan’s political accommodation to the PRC’s growing coercive capabilities and its economic absorption into the PRC economy. On the contrary, the George W. Bush administration supported Taiwan’s effort to expand economic and political cooperation with the PRC.³⁷ The Obama administration has continued this policy. Because the PRC has relied on its growing economic and military capabilities to compel peaceful accommodation with Taiwan, it has not challenged US credibility or the US defense commitment to its maritime security partners. This has allowed the United States to disengage from the mainland China–Taiwan conflict without any measurable effect on US security.

Also during the Bush administration, the United States began to disengage from the Korean Peninsula. By 2008, as South Korea expanded political and economic cooperation with China and increasingly relied on it to manage the North Korean threat, the United States reduced its forces in South Korea by 40 percent, ended its military deployments

between Seoul and the demilitarized zone, committed to relinquishing operational control (OPCON) over the South Korean military by 2012, and significantly reduced the size and frequency of US–South Korean joint exercises. As with its disengagement from the Taiwan issue, the United States could acquiesce to peaceful South Korean accommodation of the rise of China without any evident concern for its credibility to defend its alliance commitments or for the effect on US security.

The Obama Administration and US Strategy for East Asia

The Obama administration's pivot toward East Asia reflects a significant departure from prior US efforts to balance the rise of China. Whereas prior administrations focused on strengthening security cooperation with the region's offshore states, this administration has expanded relations with mainland states on the Chinese periphery—in Indochina and on the Korean peninsula. Not only are these initiatives unnecessary to sustain the traditional US effort to maintain a divided East Asia, but they also impose potentially costly relationships on the United States that ultimately cannot contribute to balancing the rise of China.

After the US withdrawal from Indochina in 1975, successive administrations avoided security cooperation with Vietnam, despite Hanoi's apparent interest in developing relations since 1991, and US administrations all but ignored Cambodia. This changed in 2010, when, for the first time since the end of the Vietnam War, the United States pursued a strategic presence in Indochina. That year, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Hanoi, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the city twice. She expressed US interest in developing a "strategic partnership" with Vietnam.³⁸ Additionally, the United States carried out joint naval exercises with Vietnam in 2010, 2011, and 2012. In June 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta visited Cam Ranh Bay, where the US Navy was based during the Vietnam War, and announced that "access for United States naval ships into this facility is a key component of this relationship [with Vietnam] and we see a tremendous potential here for the future." During the visit a senior defense department official observed that "we are making significant progress in our military relationship with

Vietnam.” The United States and Vietnam have also signed a memorandum of understanding regarding civil nuclear cooperation.³⁹

The United States has also strengthened security cooperation with Cambodia. Visiting Phnom Penh in 2010, Secretary Clinton encouraged Cambodian leaders to exercise greater independence from Chinese political influence. Cambodia then joined for the first time the annual US-led Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) regional naval exercises, and US Marines based in Okinawa conducted interoperability exercises and maritime exercises with the Cambodian military.⁴⁰

The Obama administration has also reversed Bush administration policy toward South Korea. Following the 2010 North Korean sinking of the South Korean naval ship *Choenan*, the administration reasserted US strategic presence on the Korean Peninsula. It deferred relinquishing wartime OPCON of South Korean forces from 2012 to 2015 despite South Korea’s significant conventional military superiority vis-à-vis North Korea and its increasing ability to contend with North Korean forces unassisted. Since the summer of 2010, the scale and number of US–South Korean joint military exercises has significantly expanded, with their largest ever that year, and the United States has increased its troop presence in South Korea. The two nations have reached four new defense agreements: the South Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue, the first joint South Korea–US Counter-Provocation Plan, the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee, and an agreement on military space cooperation.⁴¹ In 2012, the Pentagon developed plans to upgrade its capabilities in South Korea, and the US Navy led the first US–Japanese–South Korean joint naval exercise, which took place in the Yellow Sea and included a US aircraft carrier. It was the largest one-day, live-fire military exercise since the Korean War.⁴²

These initiatives in Indochina and South Korea cannot enhance US security. Because both regions are on China’s immediate periphery, US naval power cannot effectively challenge Chinese coercive power. The coercive capability of China’s contiguous ground force capability (with support from its economic power) cannot be adequately mitigated by US offshore presence. Even as a primitive fighting force in 1950, the PLA held the US military to a draw in Korea. During the Cold War, the PLA contributed to the defeat of France, the United States, and the Soviet Union in Indochina. Today, PLA ground forces are far more

capable than its neighbors along the entire Chinese periphery and the US military.⁴³

From 2008 to 2012, South Korea's conservative leadership eagerly sought improved defense cooperation with the United States. But during the 2012 South Korean presidential campaign, both candidates promised to improve relations with North Korea and to restore greater balance in relations between China and the United States. In January 2013, President Park Geun-hye sent her first presidential envoy to Beijing. Chinese capabilities are far greater in Indochina today than in 1979, when the PLA suffered massive losses in its border war with Vietnam. In the twenty-first century, Chinese leverage vis-à-vis Vietnam will undermine US efforts to expand US-Vietnam defense cooperation. Unless South Korea and the Indochina countries are willing to once again host significant US ground-force deployments and extensive basing facilities—therefore once again incurring Chinese hostility—they will ultimately succumb to the rise of China by distancing themselves from the United States, thus accommodating China's national security interest in border regions secure from US strategic presence. Moreover, because China possesses superior leverage on its periphery vis-à-vis the United States, US challenges to Chinese security along its borders cannot induce cooperation with US interests.

Not only are recent US initiatives on mainland East Asia neither necessary nor effective, but they will ultimately be costly to US interests because they will destabilize US-China cooperation. Chinese leaders view US policy toward Indochina and South Korea as an effort to reestablish a strategic presence on China's periphery.⁴⁴ They view this as a challenge to Chinese national security.

Since 2010, China has significantly strengthened economic and political relations with the North Korean leadership, undermining US sanctions. It continues to provide North Korea with significant oil shipments and free food aid, which increased substantially in 2011. Chinese investment in North Korean mining, infrastructure, and manufacturing and its import of North Korean mineral resources have also significantly increased since 2009. It has also expressed little interest in cooperating with the United States in pressuring North Korea to participate in the Six-Party Talks.⁴⁵ That structure is now irrelevant to Northeast Asian security, and the United States has had to negotiate bilaterally with Pyongyang. Washington negotiated the short-lived 29 February 2012

agreement with North Korea outside of the Six-Party Talks venue. Since then, it has continued to negotiate bilaterally with North Korea. Meanwhile, North Korea continues to expand its nuclear weapons capability.

China has used coercive diplomacy to pressure local powers to rethink their cooperation with US strategic advancement on its periphery, contributing to instability in the South China Sea. Sino-Vietnamese tension over disputed waters escalated in spring 2010, with many Chinese advocating use of force against the Vietnamese navy.⁴⁶ China's prolonged maritime confrontation with the Philippines in 2012 over fishing near Scarborough Shoal, which included the presence of combat-ready Chinese naval patrols in disputed waters, similarly reflects Beijing's eroding tolerance for small-power cooperation with the United States. Before 2011, China had not detained any Philippine ships operating in disputed waters nor sent government ships within disputed waters surrounding the Spratly Islands, but since 2012, PRC ships have been operating within 12 miles of Philippine-claimed islands. While Chinese oil companies had not previously operated in disputed areas of the South China Sea, in 2012 Beijing announced that its companies would commence oil exploration there.⁴⁷ Since US intervention in the territorial dispute, there has also been greater tension within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Whereas the Obama administration has tried to promote ASEAN unity on the South China Sea territorial conflicts and had hoped to work with the ASEAN to promote US presence in Southeast Asia, China has relied on its partners within the ASEAN to resist US policy. The ASEAN is more divided today than at any time since its formation.

There is also reduced Chinese cooperation with the United States on global issues. In the 1990s, Beijing cooperated with the United States on humanitarian intervention, Indonesia, and, as recently as 2011, in Libya. It also cooperated with both US military operations against Iraq, but more recently, it has resisted cooperation over the violence in Syria. It has blocked US initiatives in the United Nations, merely informed the United States of its initiatives toward the Syrian government, and contributed to Russia's efforts to support the Syrian leadership. Regarding proliferation of nuclear weapons, China now undermines US efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear program. Whereas from 2006 to 2010 China voted for five UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran, in 2012 it opposed US efforts to tighten those sanctions, compelling the

United States to impose sanctions outside the UN framework. Following agreements by the United States, European countries, and Japan to sanction Iranian oil exports, China reached agreement with Tehran to purchase Iranian oil.⁴⁸ In South Asia, China has not assisted US efforts to enhance Pakistan's cooperation with the war in Afghanistan, and it has not restrained Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs.

Ongoing US strategic cooperation with the mainland states on China's periphery will not contribute to US security, but it will elicit increased Chinese suspicion of US intentions and greater Chinese resistance to US interests in East Asia and elsewhere. It will also lead to a deterioration of US-China relations, contributing to more destabilizing Chinese behavior in the South China Sea, higher Chinese defense spending, and diminished PRC cooperation on bilateral issues, including economic conflicts and military-to-military cooperation. And it will contribute to greater regional tensions and a greater likelihood of US-China conflict over insignificant maritime territorial disputes.

Conclusion

Since 1776, US grand strategy has sought a balance of power in its transoceanic flanking regions. When multiple great powers contended in Europe and East Asia, the Western Hemisphere was secure from the presence of extraregional powers, and the United States was secure from challenges from rival great powers that might threaten its survival. Only when a great power threatened to achieve hegemony in Europe and/or East Asia was the United States gravely threatened, as from Japan and Germany during World War II. Since World War II, the United States has assumed the responsibility from the regional great powers for the balance of power in the transoceanic regions, thus preventing flanking powers from threatening its homeland. During the Cold War, it kept Europe and East Asia divided, and in the twenty-first century it maintains the balance of power in East Asia.

In 1943, Walter Lippmann wrote that "foreign policy consists in bringing into balance, with a comfortable surplus of power in reserve, the nation's commitments and the nation's power."⁴⁹ An effective great-power national security strategy requires awareness of the "Lippmann gap," and failure to maintain such a balance results in a costly squandering of resources. At times the United States has fallen victim to the

Lippmann gap, such as when it waged a costly and protracted war in Indochina while simultaneously contending with Chinese power in East Asia and Soviet power in Europe. US leaders erroneously believed that the United States possessed important security interests in Indochina.

In the twenty-first century, the United States has responsibility for maintaining the balance of power in East Asia. The cost of contemporary US policy in East Asia does not remotely approach the cost of the Lipmann gap during the Vietnam War era. Nonetheless, the US defense budget will face increasing difficulties contending with China's rise should it continue to fund twentieth-century capabilities, including aircraft carriers, even as it transitions to ISR-based twenty-first-century platforms.

Whereas post-Cold War US administrations refrained from asserting US power on mainland East Asia, the Obama administration has reversed course and is expanding US strategic presence on China's mainland periphery. The United States lacks the capabilities to sustain this effort. China's strategic advantage on mainland East Asia is greater today than at any time since 1949. It now possesses the capability to coerce its neighbors to accommodate its security. China's economic resources are also greater than ever and are increasing. On the other hand, the United States is developing an expanded presence on mainland East Asia just as constrained financial resources challenge the US military's ability to sustain its current level of spending. Moreover, the cost of US policy on mainland East Asia will grow as its challenge to Chinese national security will elicit ever greater Chinese challenges and contribute to heightened and costly tension in US-China relations.

Since the end of the Cold War, US national security policy has enabled the United States both to contend with the rise of China to sustain a divided East Asia and to manage US-China relations to contain the cost of US policy. The United States consolidated its strategic relationships with its maritime security partners and benefitted from regional stability and US-China cooperation on a wide range of regional and global issues. Moreover, this policy elicited at most minimal controversy in the United States. There were few voices calling for a more proactive US policy toward mainland East Asia. The challenge for the United States is to recognize the essential requirements for a national security strategy that secures US interests in a divided region and to avoid the

temptation to adopt policies that unnecessarily raise the cost of US national security. **SSQ**

Notes

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