

MA INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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“Is Pivoting Necessary? A Critical Contextualisation and Assessment of the Obama Administration’s China Policy.”



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Date: August 27, 2014

Word count: 13876

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I confirm that my research did not require ethical approval.

Signed Svein Magnason

Date August 26 2014

ABSTRACT

The rise of China and the impact thereof on international politics is one of the great questions of the 21st century. Some structural realists have argued that violent confrontation between the United States as the current superpower and China as a contender for that position is preordained by virtue of an emerging security dilemma. While such a reading of the current power paradigm is an important analytical tool, this dissertation argues that the likelihood of conflict can, and indeed has been, mitigated through diplomacy and careful strategy by the United States.

Underpinned by a theoretical disposition derived from realism, this project first establishes a historical context of Sino-American relations since the end of the Cold War, and subsequently uses the theoretical framework and historical context to form an assessment of Obama's China policy. It finds that the United States remains superior to China in terms of capabilities and instead of 'Pivoting to Asia' by stepping up military presence in Asia-Pacific and becoming involved regional disputes in an attempt to contain China, the Obama administration ought to return to the strategy of engagement that ensured a mostly stable, albeit sometimes rocky, relationship between Washington and Beijing from 1989-2009. China has become more assertive, but not more powerful since 2009 – and Obama's response in the form of containment has triggered China to intensify its behaviour and to withdraw from international cooperation initiatives. The Pivot has been unnecessary because it has intensified the security competition between the United States and China, thereby increasing possibility of confrontation. The trend can only be reverted by retracting the military element of the Pivot and replacing it with diplomacy as the first tool of interaction and the promise of small concessions.

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Is Pivoting to Asia Necessary? A Critical contextualisation and assessment of the Obama Administration's Policy Towards China

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars and politicians alike have deemed the relationship between the United States and China the most important in international relations in the 21st century. The United States has been the lone global superpower for more than two decades, but China is at the moment arguably the fastest rising power in history. Underpinned by theory and supported by empirical observation this dissertation closely examines the relationship between China and the United States since the end of the Cold War in order to establish a context against which to assess Obama's foreign policy towards China. Inherent in the relationship is the danger of confrontation, but I argue that this outcome was avoided from 1989-2009 as the United States strategically engaged with China. Obama on the other hand launched a policy pivoting to Asia in 2011 after two years of increasingly heightened rhetoric. Unnecessarily boosting America's military presence in Asia-Pacific, Obama has attempted to contain a rising China as the global focus has shifted from the Middle East to Asia. The result has been an increasingly intense security competition. After conceptually framing and historically contextualising the rise of China vis-à-vis Sino-American relations, I critically assess Obama's 'Pivot' and offer informed strategies by which to mitigate the current dangerous security dilemma between the two.

Structural realist theory would suggest that war between China and the US is likely to break out as China rises to challenge US dominance (Mearsheimer 2001; 2006; 2014ab; Glaser 2011; Bernstein and Munro 1998). This project argues that such a reading of the situation is important in understanding the implications of a rising China, but that by looking beyond an abstractly theoretical reading of the situation and trying to understand the intricacies of China's rise – both in China and especially around the world – a clash between the two can be avoided. In moving beyond a structural realist 'explanation approach', I will look to features of classical realism and indeed liberalism to argue that what Glaser has called "selective engagement" is the best strategy by which to cope with a rising China. While appraising some elements of Obama's China policy – notably in terms of multilateral participation and maintaining relationships with allies – the study also finds the military aspect of the 'Pivot' policy is not necessary. Indeed, it enhances the likelihood of war due to China's insecurity in a changing world order and the United States' aggressiveness is unwarranted, as its dominant position remains relatively unchanged.

Structure

The literature review first sets the basics of structural realism in international relations as postulated by Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (2006; 2014). This is to make the case for why it is important to view the situation between the United States and China as a form of a security dilemma in which both parties are uncertain and suspicious of each other and therefore take measures to ensure their own security.

Mitigating the structural realist position with classical realism's normative strength and a liberal note on the importance of intricacies in bilateral relations, I argue that as the United States is currently in a strong position. It can therefore use the rise of China to its advantage by channeling power through international institutions, and to an extent overlook China's rise into a globalised international system, as argued by both Nye (2013) and Ikenberry (2008; 2011).

Examining key texts by China scholars such as Ross (1998; 2010; 2012), Glaser (2010; 2012), Johnston (2011) and Cooney (2009), the study finds that despite China's remarkable growth and military expansion over the last decades, it does not appear that their intentions are offensive. Rather, China has experienced a wave of nationalism and tense internal affairs, which reflect its outward looking agenda. Though assertive in certain areas of diplomatic relations, this should not be seen as more than it is – a display of power in relatively unimportant settings rather than a more aggressive foreign policy strategy. Furthermore, it does not at all appear that the United States is in decline. All these are elements, which the United States can take to its advantage and consider when designing a China policy.

The third chapter examines the rise of China since the end of the Cold War and asserts that the United States has and will continue to dominate the Western Pacific region. Although both economic growth and military growth in China since the fall of communism have been unprecedented that does not by definition mean that China must be met with the threat of force as strict adherence to structural realism would suggest. Given the United States' powerful position in the wake of the Cold War, it maintains a

firm and vigilant eye on China, while at the same time try to make the most of a new massive economic market as derived from a hybrid vigour of realism and liberalism.

Having established the trend of relations as one of engagement between the United States and China since the Cold War by looking at foreign policy and diplomatic incidents from 1989-2009 in chapter 4, I reached the bulk of this project, which examines the Obama administration's China policy. Chapters 1-4 contextualise China's rise both conceptually and empirically in order to form a foundation on which to base an assessment of Obama's China policy. That is the topic of chapters 5-8.

Chapter 5 looks specifically at how the post-Cold War US engagement with China came to an end in 2009 and 2010 as relations intensified between the two powers. China's foreign policy behaviour began to change and was perceived to have become more assertive. The following chapter critically outlines Washington's response – namely the 'Pivot to Asia' – which I argued is containment in disguise of China, as the United States has bolstered its military presence across Asia-Pacific and become unnecessarily involved in regional disputes.

China's response to Washington's Pivot is the topic of the 7th chapter – and clearly demonstrates how the 'Pivot' has triggered China to challenge the US's newfound interest in Asia and, as theory would dictate, a security competition has emerged between the two powers. The 8th chapter explores how the military emphasis of Washington's 'Pivot to Asia' can be reversed and offers both historically and theoretically informed options that can mitigate the current Sino-American security

competition – the emphasis ought to be on how to integrate China into the current international system. The United States must also recognise its superior capabilities over China and allow China to pursue its inherent security interests, rather than challenge those as the ‘Pivot’ does.

The analysis of Obama’s approach to China relies in part on the theoretical framework and historical context set out in Chapters 1-4, and I conclude that the ‘Pivot to Asia’ has in security-political terms is an unnecessary overstatement that has blocked prospects for cooperation between China and the United States and intensified the security dilemma between the two powers. There are, however, ways to mitigate that dilemma by attempting to return to the policy of engagement in which firm diplomacy rather than military displays are the foremost tool of interaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview: two strands of realism

In order to understand the dynamics of relations between the United States and China, this chapter will first outline the concepts that constitute realism in international relations. The dissertation places itself within the realist school because of its focus on power, the state and potential for a security dilemma – but does divert from structural realism in trying to search for ways to mitigate such a dilemma.

Despite the theoretical framework of the project, it is important to note from the onset that theory here is used as an analytical tool, enabling analysis and justifying conclusions – it does not lay claims to truth as such.

Kenneth Waltz's structural realism was an attempt to make Hans Morgenthau's classical realism more 'scientific'. Morgenthau's premise was that 'political realism is not a science,' (Williams 2005, p. 96-105) but a theory that 'spoke truth to power'. In addition to its analytical ability, classical realism was to serve as a guide for statesmen engaged in international affairs. Waltz, on the other hand, wanted to depart from the normative foundation of Morgenthau's realism and instead establish a 'scientific' approach based on a positivist epistemology, i.e. that knowledge must stem from measureable materialist variable, as opposed to the interpretive and often immaterial variables that are important to an antipositivist epistemology (Jackson 2011, p. 1-22). The implication is that neorealism remains a descriptive theory able to predict while classical realism has descriptive features, but maintains a normative or prescriptive role.

Despite the cleavage between the two strands of realism, both focus on the importance of power, balancing and issues of security in international politics. Furthermore, both explicitly state that international politics is fundamentally different from domestic politics in that states are sovereign and do not answer to an overarching authority.

In analysing the way in which the Obama's administration has coped with the rise of China and launched The Pivot, I will to an extent depart from the typical neorealist approach and its 'scientific' purpose in that I do take a stand on the issues at hand. It is not merely a descriptive account – rather, it uses theoretical concepts as analytical tools. Based on the theoretically informed analysis, I will develop a normative argument critical of the Pivot strategy since such an assertive and defense oriented foreign policy of the US can trigger a similar reaction by China, thus increasing the possibility of conflict between the two powers.

An emerging security dilemma

In his seminal work *A Theory of International Relations*, Waltz argues that to explain outcomes in international politics, we must view it on a structural level. He argues that international politics take place in a system by which is meant a structure of interacting units (Waltz 1979, p. 85-87). In order to distinguish between variable at the unit level (domestic politics) and system level (international politics), structural realism omits personal characteristics, national character and behavior, because “the structure

will endure even if personalities, behaviour and interactions vary or come and go” (Waltz 1979, p. 78-82).

Implicit in a structural analysis of international politics is the concept of “anarchy as the ordering principle” – anarchy not referring to chaos, but politics in the absence of government or an overarching authority. Subsequently, states must rely on themselves to survive. As Mearsheimer bluntly put it, “in international politics, God helps those who help themselves” (2001, p. 31).

The first of two basic premises of this approach to international relations is that as the primary actors in the system, all states seek power, and the behaviour of states is determined by their position against other states in the system (Waltz 1979, p. 93-94). On the structural level, the object of study is not how states interact, but how they stand in relation to one another. The way in which states are positioned against one another relates to the second basic premise of neorealism: power (in terms of material capabilities) is only relevant when seen in comparison to the power of other states. Put differently, only relative gains matter. Hence, as Mearsheimer concludes, power is a means to an end, and that end is ultimately survival (2006, p. 161).

In order to facilitate a discussion of an emerging security dilemma between China and the United States, I have set out an overview of the crux of realism – and the following will deal with the most pertinent analytical feature of realism to this project: the security dilemma.

Because survival is the core motive of a state and there is no authority in the international system to answer to be held accountable to, states do not trust one another and can never be certain about the intentions of other states. All states will therefore aim to maximise their own security, resulting in a dilemma of how far to go to ensure one's own security (Bernstein and Munro 1998 ; Baylis and Smith 2010, pp. 60-81): if states refrain from asserting their security, they risk occupation – but on the other hand, if they assertively pursue occupation, they may risk attack as others attempt to defend against them.

While Waltz argues that states are defensive power maximisers, Mearsheimer argues that states are offensive power maximisers. Offensive realism assumes that states prefer master their own neighbourhood, and will take offensive measures to actively reach that goal (Bernstein and Munro 1998; Mearsheimer 2006, p. 160).

In summation then, it seems clear that states always view each other with some level of fear and suspicion – and the task of this dissertation is to question to what extent the US and China fear each other, if the current 'Pivot' supplements that fear and what can be done to ease fear and tension in favour of a more mutually beneficial relationship.

Mitigating realism: a liberal touch

To be able to steer around the possibility of a dangerous clash between China and the United States and overcome the seductive forces of realism, I argue in favour of also looking towards the liberal approach to international relations and its focus on

economic interdependence, trade and the global prominence of western political structures and institutions. As a realist it is important to be able to see the world as it is – and an evident fact in today’s globalised world is that the United States and China are highly interdependent economically. Ikenberry (2008; 2011) has argued that China is not merely up against the United States, but “the entire liberal western order” (2008, p. 36). He further argued that the United States can use its power to influence international institutions as China grows to accept it must take a seat at the table in such institutions (Ikenberry 2011, p. 346-7).

By actively engaging China into the international community and exploring areas of mutually beneficial economic cooperation, the United States can keep the stronghold on the situation while at the same time forging what Hedley Bull astutely referred to as an ‘overlapping interest’ (1977, p. 13).

How to cope with a rising China

It comes as no surprise then that Mearsheimer, amongst others, for more than a decade has claimed that as China rises to challenge the United States, a violent conflict is likely to occur (2006, p. 160; 2014a-b). The current conditions in the international system are such that the United States is a powerful actor in China’s neighbourhood, East Asia. To ensure its security and hegemony in the region, Mearsheimer, along with Bernstein and Munro, argues, it may resort to offensive measures. The United States, in response, must retaliate to demonstrate strength against a rising power.

From a theoretically abstract point of view, following all the neorealist assumptions and not accounting for the intricacies of foreign policy and interaction between the United States and China, such a scenario is imaginable. However, this project, along with many scholars takes issue with Mearsheimer's claim, because a carefully considered strategy can put a damper on the intensity of the security dilemma between the powers.

Less fixated realist scholars of China including Ross (1998; 2012) and Glaser (2011) have pointed out that in addition to military capabilities, variable such as demographics, geography, economics and technology have an important say in any context in which international politics takes place and also influence decision-making. Based on a realist reading of a rising China, Ross has gone as far as to call the Obama administration's policy toward China "counterproductive" (2012) because, Ross argues, its assertiveness feeds into Chinese insecurities and can cause China to take aggressive measures.

Glaser (2011) takes a position between Mearsheimer and Ross in arguing that although the emerging security dilemma between the United States and China clearly carries in it the possibility of war, the "current international conditions could enable both the US and China to protect their vital interests without posing large threats to each other" (Glaser 2011), given that the United States is willing to make concessions and refrain responding to threats from China.

Whereas according to Mearsheimer the danger of conflict is an inherent part of the international system and therefore a clash between the United States and China is likely, Ross and Glaser make the case that such a conflict can be avoided if the United States leads a carefully considered foreign policy towards China.

China's intentions

Despite what should be considered an overreaction by Mearsheimer regarding the rise of China, his contribution to realist theory of international relations has been important. His core assumption that states can never be sure of other states' intentions is a valuable tool when examining bilateral relations in international politics. To only assume the worst without conducting inquiry into the situation is not thorough scholarship.

Ross (2009) in a different piece attempts to understand China's military expansion and argues that although it may appear that China's is preparing to challenge the United States by developing a blue-water navy, it should instead be seen as "a 'prestige-strategy' whereby international success is sought to bolster the government's popularity" (Ross 2009, p. 50). China being a traditionally land-seeking state, their experience at sea, the only arena where the US can be challenged, is limited and fumbling (Ross 2009; 2012).

Ross further refers to massive gap between rich and poor in a self-claimed egalitarian communist state that has resulted from the economic expansion and observes that a strong navy can forge a sense of unity between the Chinese and their

government. It remains true that a military expansion inherently poses some type of threat to the current status quo – as postulated by the realist security dilemma – but such a paradigm is manageable and ought not rush the United States to respond by jeopardising its security interests in the Western Pacific region.

Johnston (2011) also makes important observations about Chinese diplomatic behaviour since Obama took office. Although there have been incidents where China has been seen to be more assertive towards other regional powers and the United States. Examples include pressuring the US not to receive The Dalai Lama as a visitor, a tough rhetoric when a major US-Taiwan arms deal took place in 2010 and an encounter between Japanese coast guard vessels and a Chinese trawler near the Senkaku/Diaoyudau Islands.

Johnston, like Ross, argues that both the United States and the international community at large have overestimated China's behaviour, because the assertive incidents were of an isolated and specific nature rather than a general change in its major foreign policy approach. China's perceived assertive shift is, he argues, taken out of context and poorly analysed. He illustrates with a lucid example:

“Similarly, in the wake of US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq it would have been too simplistic to conclude that these actions reflect a wholly revisionist and unilateralist United States. In other words, it is possible to be newly assertive on a limited range of specific issues, while leaving major policies unchanged” (Johnston 2011, p. 46).

As Vasquez (2009) demonstrates, language affects foreign policy directly and can alter the way in which situations are conceptualised. China's perceived assertive trends therefore influence the way in which US policy makers approach the China problem because "the prevailing description of the problem narrows acceptable options" (Johnston 2011, p. 47; Entman 1993). Similar to Ross' argument about 'naval nationalism', Johnston's questioning of how assertive China's actually is does add tension to the security dilemma, albeit the contextual importance may be overstated. What remains clear is that Mearsheimer's conflict prediction is theoretically feasible, but there are several variables and intricacies in the relations between the United States and China, within China, within the United and in the international community at large which have the potential to influence and mitigate the security dilemma facing the United States and China. Structural realism is therefore helpful to conceptualise the issue at hand, but we must look beyond it to understand how conflict can be avoided in favour of a more beneficial outcome.

Having established that structural realism is both helpful and important to conceptualise the issue of a rising China because it inherently carries the possibility of a tense security dilemma, it is necessary to move beyond the realist perspective and examine China's recent history and the US position towards China to understand how conflict can and ought to be avoided in favour of a more constructive outcome. Such an outcome is possible through a policy of 'selective engagement' derived from a hybrid vigour of realism, liberalism and highly rigorous scholarship on the rise of China.

Before moving on to critically examine Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' policy – and assess whether it is necessary or not along with what alternative options there are, the next two chapters will place the rise of China in a context pertinent to the immediate post-Cold War era. The former of the two deals with China and the latter with how the United States responded to China after the Soviet threat had faded away.

3. THE RISE OF CHINA IN CONTEXT

Overview

The structure of this chapter reflects its aim to examine two elements that contextualise the rise of China since the end of the Cold War and enable a critical discussion of the current United States foreign policy towards China. First, I look at the international systemic condition under which China has risen as a global power since the end of the Cold War. Second, the ways in which China has grown and expanded will be elaborated upon in order to gain an understanding on its power and significance since the Cold War ended.

By analysing the two elements outlined above, the chapter aims to establish a historical and political context for examining current relations between the United States and China with particular reference to US foreign policy towards China.

Setting a timeframe: a question of polarity

As postulated in the previous chapter, structural realism requires us to look at how states are positioned or arranged against one another (Waltz 1979, p. 95-98). The rationale behind the timeframe used to set up this project – the post-Cold War era – has been derived from the systemic change that took place in the wake of the Eastern Bloc's collapse as the international system went from being a strictly bipolar paradigm with an American and a Soviet superpower competing for dominance.

Due to the bipolarity that drove the system for most of the latter half of the 20th century, China was a secondary priority for the United States. As Nathan and Scobell

note “Washington shaped a policy towards Beijing based on China’s status as an ally of Moscow, and strove to drive the two apart” (2012, p. 89). Similarly, the United States was not the foremost concern of China during the Cold War given the near proximity of the Soviet superpower to the Chinese mainland.

As the bipolar system ceased to exist in the beginning of the 1990s, the United States assumed a position of global supremacy. In his famed article “Command of the Commons” Barry Posen argued that the United States had reach a ‘unipolar moment’ (Posen 2003, p. 5). Demonstrating that the US achieved a command of the global commons, that is: the subsea, the oceans, airspace and space, Posen observes, “is the key enabler of the global US power position” (ibid. p. 8), allowing the United States to conduct a foreign policy of primacy.

The former speaker of the US House of Representatives Tip O’Neill has been credited for the shrewd observation that ‘All Politics Is Local’. Considering Posen postulation, if we then look at the East Asia region, the United States has had historically long and fruitful alliances with both South Korea and especially Japan. But albeit influential in the region, both by proxy and by a firm military presence, the United States has not entirely dominated the East Asia region in the wake of the Cold War ending. China has used the “post collapse phase to institutionalise cooperative relations with Russia and Central Asia successor states” (Nathan and Scobell 2012, p. 89). Still concurring with Posen’s unipolar-superpower definition, it is useful in the context of China to also consult William Fox’s classical understanding of a superpower as one which has the status of a great power in a region other than its home region. Fox,

accordingly, defines a conventional great power, as being “great only in a single theater of power conflict” (1944, p. 20). Emerging from such a systemic reading of regional dynamics in East Asia is that both the United States and China ought to be seen as competing great powers or poles in the East Asia region since the Cold War ended. Given its size and the potential threat China can pose to the United States, it became the focal priority of the United States as soon as the Soviet superpower had dissolved (Jones, Khoo and Smith 2013, p. 12-13).

The new sources of threat: military modernisation

In terms of security policy, no other area of China’s growth is more pertinent than that of its navy. It is an expansion signifying the outward looking mindset of the Chinese authorities.

As Cole has found, Beijing started to reexamine its naval strategy to develop it to become capable of more than just defending the Chinese coastline (Cole 2010, p. 174). The rapprochement of the Nixon administration probably rendered China more autonomy from the Soviet Union in international affairs, encouraging more a naval build-up to strengthen China’s standing toward both the West and the Soviet Union. There is a scholarly consensus, however, that although the expansionist plan of General Liu Huaqing was conceived in the late 1970s, it caught wind in its sails when the Cold War ended and the main contender of China was no longer separated by a land border, but by the world’s greatest ocean. To facilitate economic expansion it is furthermore necessary to develop a maritime infrastructure and ensure that infrastructure be protected at all times.

To meet that challenge, the People's Liberation Army Navy commander Liu Huaqing argued that a blue-water navy is the pre-requisite (Ross 2011, p. 60). An expansion of the Chinese navy therefore became one PLA's top priorities, the goal of which has been to materialise General Huaqing's 'island chain' vision, whereby the Chinese line of defense is pushed into the Western Pacific and connected by islands. His first 'island chain' was outlined in the late 1970s as an offshore defense line spanning from the Kurile Islands, south along Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, isolating Taiwan and down to the Philippines and Borneo. The implication of the 'island chain' defense was to demarcate the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and much of the South China Sea as "near-home-waters" (Cole 2010, p. 175-176). A second 'island chain' has later been proposed by the PLA's Navy and reaches much further into the Pacific – thereby seriously challenging commons that today are under the command of Washington, to use Posen's conceptualisation.

Although China has yet to establish its first island chain, the strategy does offer a view of how China sees its role both in East Asia and beyond. Furthermore, in order to set up the 'island chain' defense line, the PLA's navy has undergone a remarkable modernisation, perhaps best encapsulated by the rather extravagant launching of China's first aircraft carrier in 2012. The celebration of the carrier also clearly signifies the gratification China takes in the process of establishing a blue-water navy.

A Department of Defense commissioned report in 2013 also made clear that the Chinese navy's new anti ship ballistic missiles give the PLA the ability to launch attacks on large vessels such as aircraft carriers far into the Pacific (DOD CMSD 2013, p. 5). It is

also thought that the PLAN has acquired and built more than 50 new submarines since the late 1990s, and one analyst estimates that the growth is likely to continue (O'Rourke 2013, p. 13-19). The PLA's nuclear capabilities have also become better over the last years and in due course, Glaser argues, can become a force of real deterrence (Glaser 2011).

The implications of the developing military threat that China is posing to the United States will be examined in detail in the next chapter as we also look at how Washington has responded to China's rise. But another important element of China's rise with respect to the United States on the global stage is its economic growth and power. As Posen argues regarding the United States' unipolar position after the Cold War, the "sources of US command of the commons" are derived by supreme economic power and resources (Posen 2001, p. 10). In addition to China's military growth, it is also necessary to briefly dwell on how economic expansion over the last three decades has changed China's standing in world politics.

China's economic transformation

Parallel to the military growth, China has experienced an unprecedented economic growth since Deng Xiaoping launched state controlled free market inspired reforms in the late 1970s (Zhou 2012, p. 103-105). From being among the poorest countries in the world in 1978, the Chinese economy has grown to become the world's second largest with at a staggering 8 to 9 percent GDP growth per year for three decades (ibid, p. 103). Recently, the International Monetary Fund presented an

estimation that by 2020, that China's GDP would be great than that of the United States (Economist Intelligence Unit, Nov. 2013).

The rapid expansion of the Chinese market has both opened up to opportunities and challenges for the United States, and by extension, the rest of the West. On the one hand, a country with nearly a fifth of the world's population hold great opportunities for investment and export of goods – especially as the spending power of the Chinese middle class continues to grow (Kerschner and Huq 2011, p. 1-2). However, on the other hand, the rapidly growing Chinese economy has also presented a challenge to the US economy with cheaper labour and high outputs.

Although both scholars and experts (Cooney 2010, p. 50-53; Haltmaier 2013, p. 19) seem to agree that China's staggering economic growth is unlikely to continue indefinitely into the future, it is an issue too potent to ignore because the size and growth of China's economy fuels military growth, thereby intensifying the security dilemma between the United States and China.

In order to contextualise an understanding of the rise of China, this chapter has demonstrated the challenges China is posing to the United States by virtue of a new systemic international order in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The great game in international power politics has evolved to centre on China and the United States as the former has modernised its military, in particular naval, capacity. Regardless of motives or intention, such a massive and rapid development has ramifications for the perception of China by the United States, as the next chapters will demonstrate.

Alongside military advances, China's economy has expanded at an unprecedented rate since the late 1970s. Its size is expected to overtake that of the United States by 2020, making China an integrated partner in the global economy with potential – its military and economic might are therefore difficult to ignore. As we shall find in the next chapter, the United States policy toward China since the Cold War ended has been one of engagement, although the trajectory of the relationship has often been rugged and rocky as both are in competition for power. As Nathan and Scobell elegantly put it “Washington's intentions are ambivalent – wishing Beijing both well and ill” (2012, p. 90). Certainly, as this chapter has outlined, that reasoning can also be used to describe China's role vis-à-vis the United States.

4. BEFORE OBAMA: The Bushes and Clinton

The previous chapter established the United States as the global hegemonic power after the Cold War ended, but nonetheless argued that China has experienced remarkable growth – military and economic – in the same period, displaying a willingness to not accept the current status quo of the international systemic dynamics. Following what leading scholars such as Ikenberry (2008), Ross (2001, p. 39) and Jones, Khoo and Smith (2013, p. 12) unanimously agree is the most important bilateral relationship in international politics in the twenty-first century, this chapter will evaluate relations between China and the United States since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 up until the Obama administration took office in 2009.

Bush Senior

As a legacy of the Cold War, the United States had a relatively heavy military presence in East Asia at the end of the 1980s. Recognising that fact, along with a Chinese military force that had barely begun its previously discussed modernisation process, the question of security does not appear to have been the main concern of the first Bush administration. Instead, the question of how to deal with China politically and economically, and how the country would develop its foreign policy in the new world was the leading issue (Sutter 2013, p. 150). Ross argues that Bush senior's vision regarding China was one of engagement, aimed at negotiating cooperation between the two powers (2001, p. 39). But although Bush took a keen personal interest in developing and managing relations with China, they were off to a rocky start.

The Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 forced the United States to impose a set of sanctions on the government in Beijing (Jones, Khoo and Smith 2013, p. 14). It seems clear to conclude that the sanctions by Washington signalled a message to China that its internal affairs were now a matter for the international community. The rhetoric remained tough against China and by 1991 Bush senior announced a more assertive China policy and subsequently sold some 150 F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan, infuriating Chinese authorities (ibid. p, 16).

Despite the tensions between the two, Bush senior did manage, in other areas, to keep relations civilised and away from serious escalation as negotiating and sanctioning were the preferred method of interaction over disagreements (Ross 2001, p. 36-39; Cohen 2010, cha. 9).

Clinton

However, Bush senior's commitment to cooperative relations, even during periods of tensions, was exploited by Clinton during the 1992 US presidential campaign as Clinton accused the president of "coddling with dictators" (Lampton 2001, p. 33). Clinton was heavily critical of China's human rights record, and upon assuming office he attempted to put China under pressure by tying trade relations to the country's human rights in an effort to coerce incentive. This policy, according to Jones, Khoo and Smith was very unsuccessful because China ignored it – and for Clinton there was too much at stake to risk trade for human rights. As they put it, "China practically called Clinton's bluff" (2013, p. 17-18).

At this point - in the mid 1990s - it seems, Tucker argues, that the United States had failed to delineate a clear strategic interest regarding China (2001, p. 45), but the crisis of the Taiwan Strait in 1995-96 forced Clinton to take action. After the Chinese had conducted military exercises and a nuclear test in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan was forced to retaliate with displaying exercise, which in turn fuelled China to undertake more belligerent action and attack oriented offensives (Jones, Khoo and Smith 2013, p. 19; Tucker 2001, p. 56-57). Eventually responding to the situation, the United States sent two aircraft carriers to the area and issued a threat about “grave consequences” (ibid. 2013, p. 19) unless China would cease its activities.

To date, this was the most severe incident between China and the United States since the Cold War had ended. The implication seems to be that Taiwan was not to pursue independence as China showed willingness to use force to prevent that. On the other hand, the United States also followed up on its rhetoric about protecting Taiwan and about maintaining stability in the region – but it did take a serious attempt to exploit a declined American interest and lack of clear strategy in the East Asia region to get a reaction from Washington.

The trajectory of relations between the United States and China by 1997 was, as is demonstrated above, negative. By 1998, it seems Clinton wanted to change that trajectory and get off the rugged path – for the first time, the US president was speaking about China as a “strategic partner” (Jones, Khoo and Smith 2013, p. 21). A dampening rhetoric about Taiwan was also well received by the Chinese until relations took another blow when an American bomber under NATO command targeted (mistakenly it

is thought) the Chinese embassy in Serbia in 1999, leaving three Chinese officials dead. The incident led to mass demonstrations and protests against the United States in China and deep suspicion by Beijing about American intentions. Almost simultaneously, a spying scandal exposed China in the United States meaning that the deep-rooted suspicion went both ways. As a consequence, relations were cold between the two powers until, through engagement despite differences, led to United States to agree to allow China to enter the World Trade Organisation a month before Clinton's tenure in office was over.

Bush II

As Bush junior took office, relations with China continued to be on a rugged path. His rhetoric was less convivial than that of his predecessor, and tensions escalated for the third time in five years when a US spy plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet. Forced down, the American personnel were detained (Sutter 2013, p. 124-125). It took a visit from Secretary of State Colin Powell to have the detainees released, and many saw China as a real threat after the incident (ibid, p. 125). Following his predecessors' precedence, George W. Bush resorted to engagement and used diplomacy at the very highest level rather than talk of threats and display power in times of crisis. The tension came to an abrupt end by virtue of an unrelated event took place and in effect made Sino-American relations the most harmonious in recent history – namely 9/11 and the War on Terror that followed (Cohen 2010, p. 269).

China's support for fighting al-Qaeda and the promise not to veto an invasion of Afghanistan in the United Nations Security Council quickly normalised relations

between the two. Jones, Khoo and Smith point out that in return for China's support in the global War on Terror, the United States declined to sponsor a UN condemnation of China's human rights record (2013, p. 24). The United States furthermore facilitated China's actual entry into the WTO at the end of 2001, kicking off a new round of expansion for the Chinese economy (Cohen 2010, p. 268-9).

From an East Asian security perspective, the Bush II administration's relationship with China is a point of interest because the harmony between the two prompted China to lead talks with North Korea and the regional powers about North Korea's nuclear agenda on several occasions between 2002 and 2008 – and when North Korea tested a nuclear warhead in 2006, the reaction from China was strong and direct (Sutter 2013, p. 189; Khoo, p. 5). Similarly, the United States restrained Taiwan, taking sides with China and against Taiwan regarding the question of independence and defense. There were a number of highly publicised visits by Chinese top leaders to the United States and vice versa and relations remained harmonious between Washington and Beijing from 2001-2008 despite continued disagreement over certain trade related issues and a continued military build-up in a quest for power by China (Jones, Khoo and Smith 2013, p. 26).

Issues and trends

In characterising how the United States responded to China in the aftermath of the Cold War it is clear, as realism suggests, that suspicion and tension have been dominant. They emerged as rivals although it was undisputable that in the early days of

the new polarity paradigm, the United States had the upper hand in terms of security by virtue of its capabilities and political influence.

However, a mutual recognition of the pivotal importance their relationship with one another contains and a subsequently continued engagement have ensured stability between the China and the United States and in the East Asia region at large, in spite of rows and clashes over specific incidents. From a more liberal perspective, allowing China a seat at the table in international institutions had fostered fruitful relations and economic cooperation has mitigated the security competition between the United States and China. Continuity by engagement is therefore a fair conclusion regarding US-China relations in the immediate two decades after the Cold War.

It is fundamentally important to keep in mind that every US administration through the 1990s and 2000s has been preoccupied with military campaigns and warfare, primarily in the Middle East – twice in Iraq, once in Afghanistan and former Yugoslavia. Such external elements do, as is also evident from the War on Terror, impact US-Sino relations – meaning that either, or sometimes both, the United States and China have had a more important adversary, thereby mitigating the security tensions between the two. It also seems to be the case that when both powers stand to lose from a situation, as both Ross and Jones, Khoo and Smith argue with respect to the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, then stability endures.

The big question, therefore, is how the United States responds to China as there has been a focal shift from the Middle East, making East Asia a top priority. The next chapter looks at changes in China's since 2009 when Obama took office and attempt to

understand those changes based on both the theoretical and empirical work presented in this project so far.

5. OBAMA'S CHINA CHALLENGE 2009-2011

Beginning the analysis of Obama's foreign policy towards China, it is useful first to establish a clear point of departure. Based on the previous chapter's analysis, it seems that the legacy of the Bush II administration's relationship with China is perhaps best encapsulated by Sutter, who described it as a "positive equilibrium" (2013, p. 153). It was a relatively harmonious relationship marked by engagement, albeit differences in certain areas remained clear. As the theoretical underpinnings of this project outlined in chapter 1 set forth, the realist-oriented issues of competition and potential aggressiveness was for the most part mitigated by bilateral interdependence, focused towards external issues.

From the onset of his succession in the White House, Obama was keen to continue his predecessor's positive relations with Beijing (Bader 2012, p. 1-3). But Obama was tasked to deal with two daunting crises – one abroad and one at home – by the end of 2008 as the global recession hit the American market hard. Furthermore, the United States' involvement in the Middle East and South Asia did not seemingly look promising as troubles endured with the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, a weak government in Pakistan and increased fighting in Afghanistan (Sutter 2013, p. 161).

Obama's outlook on foreign policy was one of global multilateral cooperation to tackle potent international issues. It represents a stark contrast to Bush II's unilaterally oriented approach to international affairs as a whole, which China seemed to have preferred. Sutter notes that the Obama administration made efforts to find common ground with China regarding cooperation about the global economy and climate change,

but that Chinese authorities' interest to cooperate was limited at best (Sutter 2013; p. 157-163). One reason could be that China may have seen responsibilities of a global nature as an obstacle for further development (Indyk, Lieberthal and O'Hanlon 2012, p. 26-29). The issue of the massive trade deficit the United States has had with China also became a hot topic in the American public discourse and Obama faced domestic pressure to cope with the problem of China's competitive advantage in terms of cheap labour, creating suspicion about American intentions vis-à-vis cooperation over the economic crisis (Bader 2013, p. 1-9).

Obama's problem was, it seems, at this point dual. On the one hand, the United States needed to recover by means of internal reforms and by trying to cooperate with other significant international economies to stimulate growth, including China. However, although Obama displayed clear signs he wanted to continue to engage positively with China as his predecessor had done, China seemed less willing to accept that pattern. The United States certainly took a blow when the economic meltdown hit in 2008-2009 and Obama's multilateral outlook on international affairs as a whole may have disengaged China and given Beijing an image of Washington as having been weakened. This was seen throughout 2009 and 2010 when China's diplomatic activities towards the United States stepped up and became more assertive and challenging, leading to a new and tense trajectory of relations between the two powers.

A wave of provocations

The first incident signaling that change was on the horizon in relations between the United States and China took place in early 2009 when Chinese coast guard vessels

confronted two unarmed American surveillance boats in the South China Sea. The confrontation was an effort to demonstrate that China wanted to establish a right to tightly control what it referred to as 'military movement' within its 200 nautical mile economic exclusive zone (EEZ). The incident was not directly a clash – water cannons were supposedly used – but Washington saw it as an infringement (Sutter 2013, p. 10).

Stepping up its rhetoric three months later – during the summer of 2009 – Undersecretary of State James Steinberg stated that “China must reassure the rest of the world that its development and growing global role will not come at the expense of the security or well-being of others” (Steinberg, September 2009). Steinberg’s statement was the Obama administration’s first major policy statement on China (Nathan and Scoubell 2012, p. 110) and does indeed represent a departure from Bush II’s China orientation. On behalf of not only itself but also the international community China received conditions on how to behave by Washington. The Obama administration further wanted to “monitor China’s military modernisation” in order to be able to “prepare accordingly” (ibid, p. 110-111). The Chinese reaction to the sharpened American rhetoric appears to have been a reignited mistrust in the United States, as it seemed Washington was trying to prevent or interrupt further military advancement by China.

Later in 2009 two more cases that hinted towards a slight change in China’s foreign policy behaviour took place. First when the Dalai Lama’s visit to the United States was postponed so as not to damage the atmosphere during the Chinese premier Hu Jintao’s first visit to Obama. When His Holiness eventually was allowed to make a

visit to America in early 2010, Beijing expressed serious opposition to the occasion (Johnston 2013, p. 17).

The second incident was one of the more globally publicised episodes of more assertive or provocative China, at least in diplomatic terms, was during the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009. Obama had made clear already during his campaign and again upon taking office that among his top priorities was finding common international ground for dealing with the issue of climate change (Bader 2012, p. 21). According to one observer China continuously throughout the summit tried to spoil the chances of a positive outcome (The Guardian, December 22 2009) as its leverage to negotiate a settlement on pollution was minimal having just become the world's leading pollutant of greenhouse gases. By the time top-level negotiations were due, the Chinese premier Hu Jintao had left the summit, leaving international leaders including Obama to negotiate with lower level Chinese officials (Jones, Khoo and Smith 2013, p. 19).

Also in terms of territorial disputes does there seem to be a change in China's foreign policy trajectory as China in 2010 declared the South China Sea to be a core Chinese interest, and subsequently made its military activity in the area more conspicuous (Johnston 2012, p. 19). Although little in terms of further assertions or pursuits that would indicate this was an integrated part of a Chinese national strategy has taken place, the declaration points to a more forceful role in East Asia. In 2011 some in the Chinese military establishment argued for the use of force against the Vietnamese navy after a Vietnamese seismic boat had conducted surveys in the South China Sea, but nothing came of it (Ross 2012).

Responding to the new diplomatic style US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said these were 'tests', manifesting a new 'assertiveness' by China (Sutter 2013, p. 164) and noted that China's previous attempt to display a benign image of itself had been damaged (ibid. p. 164-166). A much stronger reaction from the Obama administration came in January 2011 when Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed explicit worry about China's military build up and modernisation. He said in an interview with the New York Times that the time had come to respond to China's increased military strength because "they have the potential to put some of our capabilities at risk...we have to pay attention to them, we have to respond appropriately with our own progress" (NY Times January 11, 2011).

Although relations between the two powers spiralled down a more negative trajectory after Obama took office in 2009, it is at the same time important to note that cooperation continued in a great number of areas – including, importantly, North Korea at this point. Taiwan was not a source of tension either. Nonetheless, seeing the United States respond to China's increased provocativeness with accusations and assertions about military concerns, it is evident that the 'positive equilibrium' that governed Sino-American relations during the Bush II years was coming to an end and being replaced by promises and prospects of an intensified security competition. This became manifested throughout 2011. The last US troops were due to exit Iraq at the end of that year and Osama bin Laden was caught and killed, somewhat easing Washington's focus on the Middle East and the War on Terror. The new paradigm prompted Washington to

design a new East Asia policy focused on re-engaging with the region and competing with China both regionally and globally (Sutter 2013, p. 165-172; Bader 2013, p. 109).

From a structural realist point of view, it is palpable that two years into the Obama administration a much more fierce competition was taking place between the United States and China, underpinned by suspicion and mistrust. Jones, Khoo and Smith contend that the sources of the emerging competition and move away from the previously discussed positive equilibrium is a Chinese attempt to delegitimise America's hegemonic position by resisting the conformity of the current positioning in the international system (2013, p. 31). The United States government under Obama reacted from 2009-2011, as realism would dictate, by putting pressure back on China, first by means of rhetoric and in November 2011 by launching its 'Pivot to Asia' strategy, which some also refer to as rebalancing to Asia.

6. RESPONDING TO THE CHINA CHALLENGE: THE PIVOT TO ASIA

This chapter will demonstrate how Obama's Pivot to Asia represented a break from the engagement era that categorised the first twenty years after the Cold War in US-China relations. Instead, Obama's Asia approach is a policy of disguised containment directed at China's role as a rising regional and global power, thereby possessing a threat to the dominance and national security of the United States. Embedded in that containment are dangerous implications that indeed have surfaced empirically since the Pivot was officially launched at the end of 2011.

Obama's early foreign policy rhetoric emphasised the need for a liberal institutionalist approach to internationally issues – both in terms of security and other challenges. On his first trip to Asia in 2009, Obama claimed in a speech that “cultivating spheres of cooperation – not competition – will lead to progress in Asia” (Obama 2009). But the stressing upon adhering to rules and norms for a harmonious international community had two years later turned into balance of power game underpinned by an intensified security competition. In November 2011 US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton published an article in *Foreign Policy Magazine* under the title “America's Pacific Century” in which the Pivot was first outlined, and the focus of Washington's foreign policy formally shifted from the Middle East and Afghanistan to Asia – East Asia in particular. This measure was taken under the pretense that the Asia-Pacific “has become a key driver for global politics...a key engine of the global economy and home to many emerging powers, including China” (Clinton 2011, p. 1).

The new interest in East Asia taken in 2011 and its corresponding policy is the most comprehensive US strategy in Asia since the Cold War (Ling 2013, p. 150). It rests on six main pillars: enhanced security alliances, stronger relationships with emerging powers, economic expansion into the region, interaction with multilateral institutions, a newfound emphasis on democracy and human rights and, most importantly, a significant increase in American military presence in Asia Pacific. What is genuinely new about the Pivot policy are its military initiatives – a point highlighted by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, saying that the United States “will out of necessity rebalance towards Asia-Pacific” (Panetta 2012). As the chapter will delineate, the use of ‘Asia-Pacific’ is Washington code for China – as all the policies are directed towards attempting to challenge China as it rises.

In tangible terms, Panetta’s “necessary rebalancing” has included a number of features that increase the United States’ military capabilities and capacity in East Asia. 2500 US marines have been stationed in Darwin in Australia as the two countries have agreed to collaborate over naval facilities in the Western Pacific. In Singapore, Washington has bolstered its presence with combat ships and vessels tailored for ‘quick deployment’ into the South China Sea (Ling 2013, p. 151). Troops and equipment have furthermore been located in the Philippines and Malaysia. In 2012 the annual Balikatan military exercise conducted jointly by the United States and the Philippines included involvement from Japan, South Korea and Australia for the first time. Ross furthermore points out that whereas Bush II withdrew more than 40,000 US servicemen from South Korea, Obama has reversed that trend by sending a large number of servicemen back to South Korea. The largest military exercise since the Korean War also took place in 2012,

during which the concept of air-sea battle in confrontation with China was materialised. And perhaps best illustrating Obama's commitment to more militarised relations with Asia, i.e. China, is the fact that in light of the Pentagon's most severe budget cuts in recent history, spending on East Asia has not decreased the slightest bit (Glaser 2011; Ling 2013, p. 149).

Alliances

As far as alliances go, the Pivot also makes a clear statement. In addition to renewing substantial defence contracts with South Korea and Japan, it is, according to the latest estimate by the acknowledged Avacent Analytics, likely that the United States will significantly increase the sale of arms and equipment to regional actors in Asia-Pacific such as Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia and Singapore (AWIN November 2013). The Obama administration has normalised relations with China's neighbour Burma – an attempt to win Burma's favour previously displayed towards Beijing. Obama's expanded involvement in East Asia vis-à-vis allies is problematic because of what Logan refers to as the 'Georgia scenario' (2013, p. 14). It is the situation whereby regional actors must side with either of two competing powers – the United States or China in our case – and having committed to one – the US in almost all cases – the regional actors rely on that chosen power to provide security at a high cost. Such allegiance carries in it the danger of states taking on greater confrontation than they themselves are able to manage, and therefore expect the United States to support them although involvement at such level is not at all the national interest of the United States. In the context of a zero-sum security dilemma however, power advancements by either competing side are seen as a victory. The clever strategy is therefore not to allow such a scenario to arise in

the first place by not over-committing to unnecessary military commitments and alliances.

An overreaction

The central question, however, is how necessary such a prop up in terms of military initiatives [re]asserting American power in the region is. As chapter 3 points out, the United States assumed a command of the global commons after the Cold War, meaning that no other power had the ability or capacity to challenge the United States on the world's oceans. Nonetheless, the chapter also outlines China's rapid military modernisation and commitment to a blue water navy. But as of today, there is a scholarly consensus that while China has made giant leaps forward over the last three decades, most of its capabilities will "pale in comparison" American technology and kit (Ross 2012, p. 177; Glaser 2011, Cooney 2010, p. 48-49). The point is that China's modernising naval capacities are splendid when seen in the light of the former PLAN, but that comparison is useless, because the comparison must be made with the current capability of the United States. The best example of comparison is perhaps that China has one aircraft carrier, which has yet to become fully functional for battle – the United States navy has eleven carriers fit for battle. Washington has with the Pivot overestimated the realistic potential for China's power and threat (Glaser 2011) and underestimated its own capabilities.

China is unquestionably rising to become a giant in international politics and a main component of future security scenarios as chapter 3 makes clear. To understand rise, it is obviously important to put the rise of China discourse into a conceptual and

empirical context. As explicated above, the United States' military is far superior to that of China and although the Chinese economy may grow to be greater than that of the United States by 2020 or so, it will remain marginal when compared in size per capita (Cooney 2010, p. 40-51). Moreover, the United States still has the upper hand in soft power with famous brands, a film industry that reaches every corner of the world and universities desired by students, academics and scientists across the entire globe.

As China has risen, it has naturally developed a self-evident security interest in its own region, as it wants to ensure continued growth and regional stability. During the two decades after the Cold War and until Obama took office, Washington's strategy of engagement represented continuity in Sino-American relations in which there seemed to be a mutual recognition of interests and the need to avoid clashes over those interests. That recognition was derived from superior American power globally, and an understanding that China's need for security and development can be accommodated. Breaking with continuity, Obama has undermined, or even dismissed as Ross puts it, China's unquestionable security interests in its home region (2012, p. 175-177). Obama's changed approach turned cooperation into a dangerous competition between the United States and China that carries in it the threat of confrontation.

7. CHINA'S POLICY SINCE THE PIVOT

The problem of Chinese nationalism

The United States' more dominant role in East Asia since the Pivot was launched in 2011 has fuelled an already fierce nationalism in China. Although in the grand scheme of things the Chinese economy remained relatively intact in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis (Schmidt 2009, p. 1-4), it did lead to high inflation and hikes in housing costs in some of the country's larger urban areas. Coupled high inequality rates, areas of China saw moments of civil unrest directed towards the government's domestic policies (Ross 2009 p. 72-76; Ross 2012, p. 177). Both Glaser (2011) and Ross in part attribute China's more provocative or assertive foreign policy since 2009 to a new way of tackling nationalism by turning the public's eye outwards in order to reestablish full legitimacy domestically. Firstly by wrongly conveying that the PLA's capability have modernized to the extent of being able to challenge the United States and secondly by placing blame for the economic turndown on Washington as it attempts to stagnate China's economic growth (Nathan and Scobell 2013, p. 113-117; Ross 2012, p. 177). Beijing's motivations do not appear to have been directly hostile or aggressive, but rather, in part at least, an effort at domestic appeasement.

Both Vasquez (2009) and Jervis (1976) have noted the important role that discourse, rhetoric and perception have in foreign policy and decision-making among leaders in international politics, and that internal pressures often drive such features. In a more assertive policy, Beijing has let its insecurities surface by exaggerating rhetoric (Cole 2010, p. 174; Ross 2012). The efforts to manifest its security needs to

accommodate growth and meet public demands has been taken rather literally by Washington with the launch of the Pivot in seeing the developments as a direct challenge to American power. The new American focus on attempting to contain China has fed into China's insecurities and sparked more nationalism and anti-American sentiments, and exacerbated the security dilemma as China has backfired against the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia.

China fires back to the Pivot regionally

Just as set out by realist theory, China has moved to take measures that counter America's new role in the Asia Pacific. More than just behaving provocatively on select diplomatic occasions, China has systematically distanced itself from the United States in terms of international cooperation and become more aggressive in its home region.

As soon as Hilary Clinton officially launched the Pivot in 2011, China retaliated by reversing its policy towards North Korea. Multilateral talks over North Korea's nuclear development programme that had continuously taken place since 2002 at the behest of China ceased. Instead, China made substantial investments in North Korea (Bajoria and Xu April 2014) as well as direct foreign aid to from China was increased – by economic support and food was also sent. When North Korea tested its third nuclear bomb in February 2013, China merely said it opposed the move (China Daily News February 14, 2013). Previously, when North Korea conducted nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, China expressed outrage and along with the rest of the international community vowed to impose sanctions. After the 2013 test, Chinese officials also told the United

Press International news agency that trade relations between China and North Korea would remain unaffected (UPI February 19, 2013).

In the South China Sea, vessels have under Beijing's command harassed Vietnamese ships and a deadlock of an aggressive nature between the Philippines and China regarding a territorial claim to a sand reef has caused disruption (NY Times October 27, 2013). China also rushed to drill for oil in disputed sea area – and to protect its operations, the PLA's navy has surrounded oilrigs with military vessels.

The Pivot, and China's reaction to it, has of course also been observed by Japan, which seems content with the United States' new and assertive role in the region as it attempts to contain China – Japan's fiercest adversary. A more belligerence-oriented China in the South China Sea has led Japan to preemptively flex its muscle in the East China Sea as the government in Tokyo acquired the disputed Senkaku/Daioyu Islands from a private owner in 2012. The acquisition sparked both public and official anger in China fuelling another wave of nationalism. The situation escalated to become, according to the noted scholar Christopher Hughes, "the most serious for Sino-Japanese relations in the post war period in terms of the risk of militarised conflict" (BBC Magazine February 8, 2013).

Both China and Japan mobilised forces to the area surrounding the archipelago, and at its most tense Chinese and Japanese frigates and destroyers were only few miles apart. Towards the end of 2013 China set up an 'Air Defense Identification Zone' stretching over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands to protect them against hostile threats from

Japan (AJE News 23 November, 2013). Getting involved in the issue of the disputed islands for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the United States flew a couple of B-52 bomber jets over the islands in a political statement in support of Japan and defying China's position in the issue. Tokyo too flew aircraft into China's defense zone without any major repercussions.

In an unprecedented move taking an even greater stake in the dispute, President Obama personally reassured Japanese authorities of America's commitment to defend all of Japan – including the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands – when he visited Japan in the spring of 2014 (White House April 14, 2014). Obama's announcement was met with a more intensified defense plan of the disputed islands by Beijing.

The reignited dispute that led to the brink of confrontation has created a cleavage both between Japan and China and indeed the United States and China. It is an unnecessary involvement by the Obama administration as it hinders cooperation with China, increases suspicion, has led to a more militarised East China Sea and has a very real potential to drag the United States into a conflict over a tiny archipelago extraneous to the US national interests. While China and Japan desire claims to fishing rights and energy exploration around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, they have no strategic interest or value for the United States.

China fires back to the Pivot internationally

Not only has the amplified security competition involving the United States and China been seen in the Asia-Pacific region. The new paradigm of competition has also

had ramifications on the international political arena as China has realigned with Iran since 2011. From 2006-2010 when Sino-American relations were marked by cooperation and a 'positive equilibrium' (Sutter 2013, p. 150), China voted with the United States in the United Nations Security Council to sanction Iran for its nuclear development programme (Ross 2012, p. 177). In 2012 a proposal about sanctioning Iran was to be presented to the UN Security Council, but China said it would exercise its right to veto it. Later that year Iran and China reached a new oil contract, while at the same time much of the international community banned imports from Iran.

China's insatiable demand for energy to fuel its continued growth and modernisation now comes before stable relations with the United States, presenting another example of the zero-sum relationship between the China and the United States since Obama took office and moved away from engagement.

Sun (January 31, 2013) has furthermore observed that China has begun to 'March West' to try to establish a new sphere of influence across Central Asia. Most notably, Beijing has taken on a unilateral role in Afghanistan with official visits and a commitment "train, fund and equip Afghan police" (ibid.). In addition to manifesting an increased interest in Central Asia and Afghanistan, China's commitment should be seen as an attempt to undermine America's effort in Afghanistan by stepping in as the other withdraws.

8. LOOKING AHEAD: CRITICALLY CONSIDERING THE PIVOT

It emerges clearly when we consider the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia that after twenty years of engagement – with several rocky episodes along the way – this continuity came to an end. China altered its diplomatic behaviour to become more assertive or provocative on certain occasions to which the United States promptly responded by firstly tuning up its rhetoric and in 2011 with the launch of the 'Pivot to Asia'. An attempt to check a rising China from becoming increasingly powerful by reaffirming allies and boosting military presence in East Asia, the Pivot has carried in it a paradox. As Washington has gradually pulled out of the Middle East and wound down the War on Terror, its focus has shifted towards China. In return China has declined to cooperate and belligerently displayed power since the Pivot was launched. Sino-American relations have intensified and a deep cleavage from suspicion and mistrust has emerged between the two powers due to Obama's premature policy of increasing military presence in Asia-Pacific and becoming involved in regional disputes over territories that are indifferent to American national security. From a 'positive equilibrium' in 2008, the trajectory in US-China relations is now overshadowed by a security dilemma that inherently carries dangers of conflict and confrontation.

It is important to note that more than only setting out to contain China as it rises, Obama's 'Pivot' also has features that attempt to foster cooperation and genuine diplomatic interaction both with China and Asia at large. This has included forums for economic collaboration and, importantly, the United States has increased its diplomatic cohorts across Asia to demonstrate willingness not just to dictate but also to listen and interact with the region (Ling 2013, p. 149-152). Nonetheless it appears to be the case

that the more liberally minded efforts to cope with China since 2009 have been overshadowed by the military initiatives, which merely have ignited China's quest as a rising power to challenge the United States.

The military features of the Pivot are therefore problematic because they have overshadowed the aspects of relations between the United States and China that possess the potential to mitigate a continued security dilemma. The United States ought to revise its China policy and replace its current containment with a policy of integration and restraint by seeking to find common ground for a mutually beneficial relationship that recognises each power's need for security. From an analytical point of view, new dimensions must be added to the American relationship with China in order to overcome the current security dilemma.

Institutions

Ikenberry argues that the United States is in an advantageous position to cope with China as it rises because the latter is "up against the entire Western liberal order" (2008, p. 37). When Clinton negotiated and George W. Bush formalised China's entry into the WTO at the turn of the century, it had positive ripple effects both on Sino-American relations and on the outlook for global economic growth as new opportunities for trade and investment arose. By giving China seat at the table and integrating its economy globally, China also inevitably becomes part of Ikenberry's Western order where certain rules and norms must be observed and followed. Johnston reiterates this point that China's participation in international institutions from 1990-2000 had a 'socialising effect' on Chinese foreign policy whereby restraint and cooperation was

exercised by China as its multilateral international role grew in light of engagement with the United States (2008, p. 197-199).

Given that the United States and other Western countries designed most of today's influential international institutions to maintain their current order and interact with others on a formal level (Ikenberry 2001, p. xi-xiii), Washington has the sway to channel power through such institutions to maintain a strong influence at the same time as China also gets a say. To focus on economic interaction and cooperation within a fixed set of rules and norms also helps foster what Hedley Bull called an 'overlapping interest' – a bedrock concept behind peaceful coexistence and development in international politics. Such liberal initiatives are the best way by which to steer away from the inherent danger of the realist security dilemma.

Direct interaction

To overcome the suspicion and mistrust between Washington and Beijing that the 'Pivot' has fostered, the United States should first of all recognise its own superior capabilities over China both in terms of hard and soft power. Secondly, Washington must recognise that China has inherent security interests in the Asia-Pacific region that are greater than those of the United States. While not at all giving up on its important interests in Asia, those recognitions can facilitate a policy of restraint and a revised version of Sino-American engagement in which firm diplomacy is the primary tool of interaction. Persistently taking a stand in regional territorial disputes does not serve the US national interest and neither does an unnecessarily heavy military presence that in China is perceived as a belligerent threat.

When the United States eased its support for Taiwan's nationalists during the Bush II administration, China was willing to cooperate. Glaser (2011) has surfaced the controversial idea that Washington can afford to make small concessions, without giving up on its commitment, on Taiwan because it does not qualify as a vital American interest. A revised approach to Taiwan could "remove the most obvious and contentious flash point between the United States and China" (ibid.). While such a move is bold and bound to be called appeasement by some, the strong alliances Washington has with Japan and South Korea – as well as the point that Taiwan and China have progressed their relations in recent years – concessions on Taiwan could be a starting point for a new era in Sino-American relations.

To reverse the security dilemma that has emerged since the Pivot was launched, the United States has to make certain concessions and look to add new dimensions to its relationship with China. The current status of the situation possesses inherent dangers – but a smooth and careful withdrawal of the military feature of the 'Pivot' and a revised engagement based on diplomacy can mitigate the dangers posed by a security dilemma, and open the playing field to new common grounds regarding cooperation. Restraint in the form of forward-minded diplomacy instead of antagonism in the form of military boosting is the way ahead that best serves the United States national interest and the rest of the international community.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings of this project are clear. Using realism as a conceptual framework to understand the relationship between the United States and China since the end of the Cold War, the case for an emerging security dilemma between the two is made. China continues to rise economically and modernise militarily to potentially pose a challenge to Washington's unipolar position in a post-Cold War world. Nonetheless, the US economy and military capabilities have remained far superior to those of China, rendering Washington an advantageous position over Beijing. In the first two decades after the Cold War the United States recognised its own strength as the world's lone superpower, but also acknowledged that as China rises, it will have increased security interests that may juxtapose problematic situations with the United States and its allies.

From 1989-2009 three consecutive US administrations strategically engaged with China in an effort to mitigate the emergence of a security dilemma. To be sure, the trajectory of Sino-American relations was often rocky and highly charged – especially over issues regarding Taiwan. But the United States also facilitated enhanced participation from China in the international community as the country entered the WTO. Finding a common external adversary in the threat of extremist terrorism, Washington and Beijing's relationship reached a positive equilibrium during George W. Bush's time in the White House. The engagement between China and the United States in this period served a mitigating role, preventing a security competition from arising.

The entire world felt the repercussions of the 2008 economic meltdown, and when Obama took office in 2009 China gradually asserted a more provocative

diplomatic behaviour both towards other powers in East Asia and the United States internationally. The United States may have appeared weakened in the wake of the 2008 crisis and it seems Beijing sought to step up its game in international politics, displaying its potential as a rising power. Some have argued that China's more assertive behaviour originates from a compounding nationalism that requires the government in Beijing to look outwards. Breaking with his predecessors' engagement approach to China, Obama first responded to China's assertiveness with heightened rhetoric. By 2011 the War on Terror had wound down and the United States withdrew from Iraq, shifting its focus by 'pivoting to Asia'. The Pivot has included a significant boost of American military presence in East Asia and reiterated ties with allies manifested in direct involvement in regional disputes and military exercises designed to contain and deter China.

Beijing has seen its inherent regional security interests violated by the Pivot and has instead of yielding to Washington retaliated by refusing to cooperate internationally, declining to use leverage against North Korea and harassing maritime neighbours. A deep cleavage of mistrust and suspicion has opened between Washington and Beijing since Obama took office. The Pivot has ignited an unnecessary security competition between China and the United States, paving the way for an intensified security dilemma that inevitably increases the chance of confrontation. It is unnecessary because the United States still has superior capabilities in comparison to China and a much stronger standing in international politics than does China. Based on the conceptual framework and historical contextualisation presented, the best course of action to seek to mitigate the current competition by looking backwards.

Given that the current structural arrangement in international politics is likely to endure for a while yet, Washington ought to endeavour to tame rather than contain China as it rises. It is necessary to recognise that China has strong security interests in its own region, surpassing those of the United States. Gradually retracting the military elements of the 'Pivot' and making small concessions on Taiwan combined with engagement, restraint and firm diplomacy along with multilateral interaction can mitigate the inherent risk of a security dilemma and add new dimensions to the Sino-American relations, which has become increasingly zero-sum since the Pivot was launched.

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