

A Tamed Struggle for Influence: The Future of U.S.-China Relations

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August 2012

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I. Introduction

What will be the character of military relations between China and the United States in 2025? Will they be embroiled in a competition for power or will they have forged a cooperative relationship? If elements of competition and cooperation coexist, what will be the nature of that coexistence, and which aspect will prevail to what degree? This paper aims to answer these questions by utilizing international relations theory and empirical data on the national powers of China and the United States.

This paper has both academic and practical significance. In the year 2025, the United States and China will be the two greatest nations in terms of national power, and their military relations will not only define the basic atmosphere of the Asian security environment, but will also affect the international security order. Given that security problems occupy the core of international relations, changes in U.S.-China military relations could have great ripple effects in economics and other issue-areas. In particular, it could be said that South Korea's fate depends on the bilateral relations between the United States and China, since they exert the greatest influence over the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, an accurate analysis of that crucial relationship is essential for South Korea's search for a long-term national strategy enabling the country's wise adaptation to the international environment and maximization of its national interests. Besides this practical necessity, the central question has an academic importance as well: the future of U.S.-China military relations is one of the most heatedly debated subjects in the discipline of international relations. Schools of thought and individual scholars have offered a variety



of projections, seeing this debate as an ideal chance for testing their theories. It is expected that as the passage of time makes new facts available for assessing the accuracy of predictions, it will be possible to distinguish gems from pebbles among numerous contending theories. As eminent philosophers of science have stressed, the process of prediction and verification constitutes the foundation of scientific advances (Lakatos 1976; Hempel 1933). This research has an academic value in that it participates in this process.

I argue that moderate competition will take place between the United States and China by 2025. As Beijing's regional leadership strategy and Washington's offshore leadership strategy come into collision, each country will form its own sphere of influence. The United States will remain the leader of maritime Asia by relying on its superior air and naval forces; China with its superior ground forces will be able to establish its leadership in the adjacent continental region, except for Russia and India. Beijing and Washington will engage in competition, particularly over gray zones where the two spheres of influence abut (for example, the Korean Peninsula) and over sea-lanes that both powers need. However, the two states can avoid an all-out power competition, since neither of them will strive for regional hegemony. Also mitigating the competition is the fact that China will accommodate the United States in regions outside of Asia, due to China's lack of effective power-projection capability.

The rest of this paper comprises five sections. The first section, which presents an analytical framework, lays out key theoretical assumptions and concepts. In particular, this section offers exposition on the elements of national power and interests, as well as a typology of security strategies and military relations. The second section seeks to portray the Chinese and U.S. national interests, drawing upon international relations theory and historical experience. It also examines the past and current trends of national power and predicts future trajectories. Building upon the analysis of national power and interests, the third section predicts the two countries' security strategies. The fourth part analyzes the nature of military relations produced by the interaction of those security strategies, and considers other factors that are believed to shape international relations. The last section summarizes the research findings and attempts to predict U.S.-China relations beyond 2025.



II. Analytical Framework

U.S.-China military relations are primarily dependent on the type of security strategy each state adopts. The properties of their security strategies will determine the nature of the mutual relations between them. Again, those properties are substantially affected by their national interests and power. The causal relationship is depicted in the figure below.

<Figure 1> Determinants of Military Relations



This research assumes that the United States and China will rationally choose optimal security strategies, taking into consideration their given national interests and power. Although policymakers do not always make the best choice in reality, it is relatively rare that they make an irrational decision that diverges widely from the optimal one. Also, the rationality assumption is highly useful for predicting the future, by allowing pertinent simplification of reality. Assuming rational policy decisions is reasonable for this research which aims to predict the future, since it is practically impossible to predict an irrational choice.

1. Types of Security Strategy

It is security interests and national power that mainly determine the nature of security strategy. Other factors including domestic politics may have some impact. However, when national survival is at stake, states will primarily pursue national interests based on their evaluation of national power—the most important policy instrument. Power is defined as military force that a state possesses for self-defense, along with tangible and intangible assets (economic power, population, technology, natural resources, and so on) that can be used to cultivate military power. Among numerous factors comprising national power, military strength (which is readily available for responding to a security threat) is the most important, followed by diverse resources including economic power that are necessary to support military power. Hard power clearly has limitations, and soft



power—cultural and ideological attraction—can be useful for security under certain circumstances.¹ However, it is less important than hard power. Therefore, military power can be viewed as the most important factor determining the nature of security strategy.

National interest is multidimensional, comprising security, economic prosperity, and protection of values. Concerning security strategy, the most influential factor among them is security interests. National security is defined as the protection of territory, citizenry, and sovereignty of a state.

States set and pursue major strategic goals in consideration of their security interests and the international environment under which they operate. That is, a state's security goals reflect both its fundamental preferences and realistic opportunities and limitations. And the goal is a crucial element defining the character of security strategy. Security strategy can be categorized into four basic types according to its primary goal: hegemonic strategy, leadership strategy, balancing strategy, and accommodation strategy. In reality, there are many cases in which a state's security strategy contains characteristics of multiple types. In addition, a state may adopt different types of strategies in different regions.

Hegemonic strategy literally means a strategy that aims to achieve hegemony (Mearsheimer 2001). Hegemony means a situation in which a single state possesses overwhelming power. When a state becomes the sole great power in the international system, it can be said that it has reached the position of hegemon. A regional hegemon is the only great power in a region. And the only great power across all the key regions becomes a global hegemon. A hegemon differs from a preponderant power. When a state possesses markedly superior power to other great powers, the state is called a preponderant power, but not a hegemon. Germany right before World War I is an example of a preponderant power. At the time, Germany was the strongest state in Europe with respect to overall power and military strength. However, Germany was not a hegemon because there were other great powers in the region, notably France and Britain. On the other hand, in today's western hemisphere, great powers are nonexistent except the United States; therefore, the United States is viewed as the regional hegemon. However, it is incorrect to call it a global hegemon, because there are powerful states in Eurasia like Russia and China in possession of sufficient power to escape subjugation by the United States. In fact, the United States has even failed to take over the Middle East, where a great power is absent.

There are many ways for a state to enhance its relative power in order to achieve hegemony. Sometimes, a state wages a war against or coerces an enemy into surrender. At other times, a state instigates a war of attrition among rival states to take advantage of the situation by remaining on the sidelines.

In theory, hegemonic strategy is the most preferred, since achieving hegemony max-



imizes national security. It is virtually impossible for other states to conquer the hegemon or coerce it into submission. Also, fears of retaliation dictate that they try not to encroach upon even minor security interests of the hegemon (Gilpin 1981; Organski 1958). At best, states can adopt so-called soft balancing, or passively blocking the hegemon's unilateral military actions by means of non-military instruments such as international institutions and diplomacy (Pape 2005). However, there is a higher chance that states would bandwagon to win the goodwill of the hegemon. A regional hegemon is less secure than a global hegemon, since it could face threats from great powers in other regions. Nevertheless, a regional hegemon enjoys a superior level of security, compared with a state situated in an international system where power is evenly distributed.

The problem is that it is extremely difficult to achieve hegemony against other great powers' checks and the general advantage of defense over offense. History clearly depicts the difficulty: Napoleonic France, Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan all failed in their bids for hegemony, not to mention the collapse of the Soviet Union. Achieving global hegemony is significantly more difficult than attaining regional hegemony, since an aspiring hegemon practically has to confront the whole world. Even the United States, the greatest power throughout history, has not been able to establish global hegemony. Therefore, hegemonic strategy is a security strategy that is available only for first-rate great powers occupying a preeminent position. When successful, it could bring maximum benefits; however, it is accompanied by huge costs and risks.

When the level of national power to execute hegemonic strategy effectively is unattainable, many states adopt leadership strategy instead. Leadership strategy literally means exercising leadership in the international system. Under this strategy, a state forms a bloc by establishing a sphere of influence in a certain region or by commanding a group of states. Then as leader of the bloc, it exerts influence over the international order and strives to enlarge its sphere of influence further. The strategy is distinguished from hegemonic strategy in that the former aims to gain predominant influence, but does not seek to control the entire international system. The primary goal of leadership strategy is to become one of the leading states, whereas that of hegemonic strategy is to become the sole leader of the system. (The secondary goal of leadership strategy is to become the leader with the greatest influence). Regional leadership strategy is a type of leadership strategy in which a state builds a sphere of influence within the region to which it belongs. On the other hand, offshore leadership strategy is another type in which a state builds a sphere of influence outside its home region.² In order to establish leadership and sustain the relationship of tutelage, a state may make security commitments in forms of asymmetric alliance and military assistance, and offer economic benefits such as financial aid



and commercial opportunity.

Leadership strategy is a highly attractive alternative to hegemonic strategy in that it does not accompany huge costs and risks, while allowing the exertion of critical influence over the international order. A state can use its influence to forge an international order that favors it, and thereby promote not only security but also economic and other interests.

Balancing strategy is a strategy that aims to prevent a state or a group of states from accumulating predominant power. When there is a rough equivalence of national power between states, they can defend against each other's attacks; in other words, effective deterrence or defense is available. Therefore, there is a high probability of avoiding domination by another state. The ultimate goal of balancing strategy is to prevent the emergence of a hegemon, which carries the danger of conquest or coercion.

There are basically two ways to carry out balancing (Waltz 1979). One way is to enhance a state's indigenous power. If an enemy or a potential competitor increases its defense spending, the state secures sufficient military power to counterbalance it. That is to say, the state enters into an arms race. If an opponent raises industrial production capacity or acquires strategic resources, the state takes corresponding measures in response. Building power to an equivalent level with an opponent via these counteractions reduces the likelihood of being attacked or conquered. This approach is called internal balancing, because it does not rely on external help and is achieved by the state's own efforts.

The other way to preserve the balance of power is to forge an alliance. Alliance points to joining power with other states in order to counter a threatening state.³ Alliance formation becomes necessary when a state's power is inferior to its adversary's. States may form an alliance even against an enemy state that does not possess preponderant power, in order to cut back on the cost of balancing. Alliance formation is often referred to as external balancing because it seeks to preserve the balance of power by mobilizing foreign resources.

When these methods are unavailable, more aggressive alternatives can be adopted to maintain the balance of power. To hinder an opponent's expansion of power, a state may wage a preventive war, impose economic sanctions, or employ military coercion. It also can prompt a third country to coerce or fight its enemy. This bait and bleed strategy is a type of buck-passing strategy which seeks to preserve the balance of power by exploiting other states' power (Christensen and Snyder 1990; Mearsheimer 2001, 157-162 and chapter 8). Finally, there are cases in which a state attempts to split an enemy alliance by making use of coercion and inducement.

Accommodation strategy denotes compromising with a threatening state in order to avoid confrontation and conflict (Mearsheimer 2001, 164-165). This strategy often involves conceding to an enemy and consequently a (temporary) diminution of relative power.



Arms control is an example of accommodation. Another type is bandwagoning strategy – joining forces with a threatening state. The accommodation strategy may deliver an adverse effect of encouraging hostile actions by giving a meek impression and strengthening the competitor’s position. In particular, if bandwagoning empowers a threatening state to achieve hegemony, the bandwanger should become highly vulnerable.

Due to these risks, bandwagoning is used only as a last resort. In most cases, an isolated small power confronting a great power by itself employs this strategy. Bulgaria and Rumania, which took sides with Germany during World War II, are cases in point. Also, a state may make momentary concessions to an adversary when it needs time to enhance its power. In particular, a state whose relative power is on the rise has a tendency to adopt an accommodation strategy to buy time and to escape other states’ containment. At times, a state makes concessions due to temporary vulnerabilities. Britain’s decision in 1938 to cede a part of the Czechoslovakian territory (Sudetenland) to Germany was partly driven by a motive to buy time for rearmament. A state also adopts an accommodation strategy when it confronts multiple opponents. It makes concessions to lesser competitors in order to deal with its strongest competitor effectively. A typical example is Britain’s rapprochement with the United States in the early twentieth century, leaving behind a long history of complicated relationship, in order to cope with the increasing German threat.

2. Types of Military Relations

The nature of military relations originates mainly from the interacting security strategies of the states involved. The more contradictory the goals of security strategies are, the more competitive the military relations become. Applying this logic, one can match different combinations of security strategies with distinct types of military relations, as shown in <Table 1>.



<Table 1> Types of Military Relations According to Combinations of Security Strategies

| Combination of security strategies* | Nature of military relations |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Hegemonic strategy – hegemonic strategy Hegemonic strategy – leadership strategy Hegemonic strategy – balancing strategy | Full-blown competition |
| Leadership strategy – leadership strategy Leadership strategy – balancing strategy Balancing strategy – balancing strategy | Limited competition |
| Accommodation strategy – hegemonic strategy Accommodation strategy – leadership strategy Accommodation strategy – balancing strategy Accommodation strategy – concession strategy | Cooperation |

* From the upper row, in order of the intensity of competition

In a dyadic relationship, when at least one state adopts an accommodation strategy, there is a high probability for cooperation, since national goals do not contradict. When two accommodation strategies meet, the most enduring cooperation is established through mutual concessions. On the other hand, when accommodation strategy meets hegemonic strategy, the most precarious cooperation forms; this is because it is difficult to make enough concessions to satisfy the aspiring hegemon.

In contrast, in the event that one state pursues hegemonic strategy, a contradiction of national goals and a consequent all-out competition are unavoidable—unless the other state adopts an accommodation strategy that even tolerates hegemony. One state’s hegemonic strategy (which aims to become the sole leader) is bound to clash with the other’s pursuit of leadership (leadership strategy) or prevention of hegemony (balancing strategy). Especially when both states in a dyad seek hegemony, a zero-sum game is established and intense all-out competition is inescapable.

When both states adopt leadership strategies, there emerges a struggle for influence; however, the competition is limited since neither state attempts to dominate the other. Since neither of them seeks to become the sole leader, there exists room for accepting the counterpart’s leadership in some areas in which that state enjoys prevalence. Similarly, when leadership strategy is pitted against balancing strategy, limited competition arises. Since a state



seeking leadership acts similarly to a state seeking hegemony on the surface, there is a high probability that it will be entangled in a competition launched by a balancer's attempt to contain it. However, the intensity of competition is lower than when two leadership strategies meet, because a balancer does not strive to attain superiority. Finally, a more limited competition is likely to come into play between two balancers: while each state's efforts not to lag behind the other generate competition, it is mitigated by their lack of interest in superiority.

This paper assumes that great power politics is fundamentally conducted on a regional level (for example, Asia and the Middle East). That is, it is possible for the United States and China to engage in different types of relationships in separate regions. The overall nature of military relations is understood by aggregating the regional relationships. Considering that regions have varying strategic importance, relationships in critical regions are assigned with greater weight. In the case of relations between the United States and China, interactions in Asia (especially East Asia) are viewed as shaping the overall nature of their military relations to the greatest extent.

III. Security Interests and National Power of the Two Powers in 2025

1. National Interests

China is no different from ordinary nation-states in that its primary security interests include the protection of its territory, citizenry, and sovereignty. From these primary interests arise secondary interests that can contribute to promoting the primary ones. China's priority lies in deterring an attack or conquest of its mainland, preventing secession of the territories inhabited by ethnic minorities such as Xinjiang and Tibet, and preserving domestic stability. In addition, it seeks to control areas that it considers part of its territory but fails to govern in practice. In this regard, impeding Taiwan's *de jure* independence and ultimately achieving unification are interests of great importance. Controlling the territorially disputed regions of which China claims possession (for example, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Sino-Indian border region) is also deemed of core national interest. The Chinese government believes that failing in these areas is never tolerable, since it means territorial loss of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) understands that failing to protect its territorial integrity could lead to the deprivation of its authority in the face of a public absorbed in strong nationalism.



Albeit secondary to the above-mentioned territorial interests, expanding its influence in neighboring regions such as East Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia is an important interest as well (Swaine 2005). China views international influence as a requisite for creating a peaceful and stable external environment needed for its security and development. China hopes that its neighbors will not violate its interests and furthermore cooperate on China's side. Neighboring states can pose direct military threats, stimulate ethnic unrest, and provide natural resources including oil. Another incentive for increasing influence is to secure buffer zones inhibiting other great powers' military forces from reaching its territory. Attempts to block America's military intervention in the South China Sea and the Yellow Sea and to establish an exclusive sphere of influence can be understood as a part of this endeavor. By expanding and solidifying its sphere of influence, China hopes to become the strongest regional state, and ultimately reach the status of a great power with global influence (Tow 2011, 25; Sutter 2008, 135). (Some argue that China aspires to become Asia's hegemon in the future. This argument is plausible, considering the enormous advantage a hegemon enjoys and the precedents of great powers in the past, including Imperial Japan. However, there is not sufficient empirical evidence to support the claim that the CCP recognizes establishment of hegemony as in its national interest.)

China understands that it needs wealth and military might to promote its security interests effectively. To promote "comprehensive national power," covering economic power, military might, technological capacity, and national solidarity, the Chinese government seeks to avoid hasty military confrontations with its neighbors and the United States, while it progresses its economic development and military modernization. In particular, it recognizes urgency in enhancing the economic power which forms the basis of military strength. In the military realm, it prioritizes improving its capabilities for projecting power into the surrounding regions.

Likewise, the United States promotes the primary interests of protecting its citizenry, territory, and sovereignty, along with the expansion of international influence.⁴ It attempts to actively engage and exert influence in Asian international politics for the purpose of preventing the rise of hostile powers and eliminating or managing the elements of danger. At the moment, Washington is preoccupied with weakening or eliminating terrorist organizations and rogue states, and preventing nuclear proliferation. However, the United States traditionally has considered it an important interest to prevent the emergence of a rival great power. Accordingly, it seeks to proscribe China, rising as the strongest regional power, from challenging the United States or achieving regional hegemony, thereby protecting its status as the supreme leader of the world. In order to achieve this goal, the United States continues exchanges with China while preserving its military su-



periority at the same time. Washington makes efforts to guide Beijing into accommodating the existing international order, by spreading democracy and market economy in Asia. Also, in order to maintain predominant influence in the region, the United States tries to consolidate alliances with East Asian states including Japan, by providing security commitments such as its nuclear umbrella and protection of sea lanes (Art 2008, 278-279). Furthermore, it hopes that major continental powers, such as Russia and India, establish friendly partnerships with it, rather than aligning with China to confront it.

The security interests of the United States and China will not change greatly over the next fifteen years. Core national interests reflecting geopolitical conditions and national values have a general tendency not to change easily. This is demonstrated by the fact that the above-mentioned national interests have not gone through fundamental changes in the past several decades. The priority of national interests is more variable, but direction of that change is very difficult to predict. Therefore, it is suitable for this analysis to assume that security interests in 2025 will not exhibit marked differences from those of today.

2. National Power

Since the reforms of the late 1970s, China has achieved spectacular economic development. From 1978 through this year, its rate of economic growth has averaged over 9 percent annually.

With its economic resources rapidly expanding, China has steadily invested in enhancing its military power since the 1990s and has achieved substantial results. After experiencing escalated tension with the United States over the 1989 Tiananmen Incident and witnessing the terrifying power of modern military technologies demonstrated in the 1991 Gulf War, the CCP has spurred itself to modernize its military. Accordingly, defense spending has been on a steady rise. Between 1996 and 2006, China's official defense budget increased by 11.8 percent per year on average, which is higher than the average growth rate of its gross domestic product (9.2 percent per year).⁵ As a result, China's defense spending has topped Asia and ranked second globally following the United States.

With China's increased defense spending, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been able to develop or import the latest-model weaponry. The navy has purchased Sovremenny-class destroyers from Russia and developed a new model of destroyer by itself. Also, it has deployed Kilo-class diesel submarines purchased from Russia and developed indigenous nuclear-powered attack submarines. It has built an underground nuclear submarine base in Hainan, and introduced newer-type supply ships, transport vessels, landing craft, and so forth. Recently, it has test-driven an aircraft carrier for training,



and is constructing several additional ones. The air force has deployed advanced fighters such as the Su-27, Su-30, and F-10, and introduced air-to-air missiles including the HQ-9, SA-10, and SA-20 to reinforce its air defense capability. Also, IL-78 refueling tankers and early warning aircraft have been deployed to extend the range of operations. The PLA has recently carried out test flights of domestically developed stealth fighters. Moreover, by developing and deploying ballistic missiles with enhanced range and precision, China significantly raised its missile capability in both quantity and quality. In particular, since the mid-1990s, it has strengthened its strategic nuclear capability by introducing sophisticated intercontinental ballistic missiles and increasing the number of nuclear warheads. It also added to its ballistic and cruise missiles that can attack American aircraft carriers and military bases within Asia. Although the Chinese army has received relatively little policy attention for military modernization, it has succeeded in acquiring the latest tanks, armored vehicles, and field artillery.

The PLA has made accomplishments not only in hardware but also in software, including doctrine, organization, and training. It has adopted a new concept of “local wars under condition of informatization” in order to gain the upper hand in military intelligence through effective space and cyber warfare, and to develop the capability of integrating multiple weapons systems. In addition, it has enhanced efficiency through reorganization and force reduction. It also has concentrated on the education and training of forces—especially on raising the joint operation capability of ground, air, and naval forces. Through these efforts to reinforce military power, China has succeeded in considerably improving its anti-access/area-denial capability in the near seas including the Taiwan Strait as well as its power projection capability in broader areas.

Nevertheless, even if China continues to develop at this rapid pace, it will not have enough power to reach the position of a potential hegemon by 2025.⁶ To begin with, it will be unable to surpass the United States in the economic arena at that point. According to research conducted by the Carnegie Foundation, China’s GDP will catch up with that of the United States only in 2032 (Dadush and Stancil 2010).⁷

<Table 2> estimates the national power of major Asian countries in 2025, using a computer model. According to this estimate, China’s GDP in 2025 will amount to \$9,299 billion, which is at the level of 61 percent of the estimated American GDP (\$15,351 billion). China’s comprehensive national power covering population, technology, and defense spending along with GDP will amount to 16.28 percent of the world total. This too remains at the level of 85 percent of that of the United States, which will constitute 19.22 percent of the world total. Excluding the United States, China will definitely be the strongest state in Asia; however, its comprehensive national power will not overwhelm



the sum of the national power of the major regional states, including Japan, India, Russia, and South Korea.⁸ The sum of these regional states' GDPs will be higher than that of China. This means that if the regional states join their power, they will have sufficient capability to prevent Chinese hegemony without U.S. help.

<Table 2> Projected National Power of Major Asian States in the Year 2025

| | USA | China | India | Japan | Russia | Korea |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| GDP (US\$ bn) | 15,351 | 9,299 | 3,286 | 5,662 | 814 | 1,385 |
| Power index | 19.22 | 16.28 | 9.287 | 3.729 | 2.243 | 1.793 |

From a military aspect, China will also be unable to obtain overall superiority. Above all, China will not be a match for the United States in military expenditure due to its inferiority in economic power. A RAND Corporation study predicts that China's military expenditures will range between \$65.4 billion and \$197.3 billion, while those of the United States will amount to \$583.9 billion.⁹ The accumulated expenditures until 2025 will also demonstrate overwhelming American superiority. China can invest a larger share of GDP to armaments over the long haul to narrow the gap with the United States, as the Soviet Union did. However, prioritizing defense is a difficult policy to adopt under normal conditions because it risks hindering economic development and raising social discontent. Lower defense spending will restrain investment in research and development for military technology and cause the war industry to fall behind, thereby forcing reliance upon the import of advanced weaponry and technology. However, most of China's partners lag behind the United States and its allies in technological sophistication, making it difficult to overcome such disparity in military technology through reliance on foreign capabilities. The handicap in defense spending and technology will put capital and technology-intensive air and naval forces and nuclear capability at a disadvantage.

China's geopolitical condition adds another reason that it will remain inferior in air and naval forces. China must maintain a formidable army to restrain adjacent continental powers like India and Russia, and to control nearby small and middle powers. Without any clear military threat from the continent, ground forces still make up approximately two-thirds of the PLA today (Ross 2009, 56). Despite current amicable relationships with Russia and India, China cannot lower its guard against them, since they are traditional rivals and potential competitors (Tow 2001, 27-32). Especially when border disputes are



not permanently settled, military preparation is indispensable.¹⁰ In addition, it is possible that conflict will arise from peripheral states. Pakistan or Myanmar could drag China into a conflict with India. China has continued its military assistance to these neighbors, whose relations with India are strained, thereby arousing deep anxieties for India (Swaine 2005, 279). Another potential danger is geopolitical competition between China and Russia over the former Soviet territories in Central Asia. China also needs powerful armies to maintain and expand influence over nearby small and middle powers, since their present cooperation with China is not purely voluntary, but also reflects fear of China's power. In fact, nationalist resistance against China's penetration has escalated into violent uprisings in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Higgins 2010). Finally, ground forces are needed to control frontier regions inhabited by ethnic minorities seeking independence, including Tibet and Xinjiang.¹¹

For these reasons, the maintenance of strong ground forces is indispensable for China, and it cannot concentrate on raising air and naval forces. Supporting this argument is the fact that China's navy barely makes up one-tenth of the PLA despite sustained reinforcement (Ross 2009, 56). Also, nearly all the uniformed vice-chairmen of the Central Military Commission—the supreme commanding body—and all commanders of the military region are army officers (Minnick 2010).

In contrast, the United States does not border on any great power, and is at an advantageous position that allows concentrating its resources on raising air and naval forces. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for China, lagging behind in economic power, to catch up with American air and naval forces. The United States has a weakness in that it needs to disperse its forces across several regions. However, it can minimize this weakness by reducing military presence in relatively stable regions like Europe. Also, Washington can countervail the disadvantages geographic distance imposes by utilizing military bases in Asia. Moreover, the United States does not need to maintain superior air and naval forces in the Asian region since it can make use of allies' supports. Island nations, including Japan, can acquire notable self-defense capabilities through concentration on their naval and air forces, despite the relatively small size of their economies. With limited support from the United States including its nuclear umbrella, they will be able to possess sufficient military strength for containing China.

On the contrary, the Chinese navy does not possess foreign military bases, and therefore faces difficulties with power projection. It is uncertain whether China will be able to secure a foreign base by 2025. (The first candidate appears to be Myanmar, with which China has maintained close ties, including a crude oil pipeline currently under construction and permission to use naval facilities.) An expert projects that the Chinese navy will



be capable of patrolling within one thousand nautical miles, conducting sea and air denial operations within five hundred nautical miles, and carrying out a naval blockade within two hundred nautical miles of China's continental coastlines (Swaine 2005, 272). This level of power projection capability will not be enough to prevail in a naval battle against the United States and its allies.

However, China will have the capacity to control small neighbors, against which land power can be more easily projected. The labor-intensive nature of land power permits a state like China, possessing a large population, to maintain military superiority vis-à-vis small neighboring states. However, it is difficult to build sufficient military power to gain control over India and Russia. India, in particular, is capable of building land power that could stand against the PLA, utilizing its progressing economic power and equivalent population. It is estimated that the population of India in 2025 will be approximately 1.39 billion, approaching to that of China (1.41 billion) (International Futures 2012). India will have more men at the ages of 20-35. Moreover, India will be able to build an effective nuclear deterrent based on its improved technology and wealth. Albeit falling behind in population and wealth, Russia will also be able to build effective capabilities for defense and deterrence against China based on its superior military technology and nuclear capacity. Despite quantitative disadvantages, the Russian army would maintain qualitative competitiveness, if its organizational reforms (reducing the officer corps and emphasizing brigades as core units) and equipment modernization since 2008 produce results (McDermott 2011). Russia will also make great efforts to build a potent nuclear force, thereby making up for its inferior land power. Consequently, India and Russia will not fall into the Chinese sphere of influence, and will remain as independent powers and potential competitors of China.

IV. Security Strategies

Taking into consideration the national interests and power discussed in the preceding section, there is a high probability for China and the United States to adopt the following security strategies.

1. U.S. Security Strategy



In 2025, the United States will adopt an offshore leadership strategy, which will rely primarily on air and naval forces along with nuclear power and eschew use of ground forces. In Asia, the region of primary concern, the core strategic goal of the United States will be to preserve its maritime sphere of influence while expanding its influence further at the expense of China. The coalition built around U.S. security commitments to regional maritime powers will be an important instrument for sustaining the American leadership. Above all, the alliance with Japan—the strongest regional maritime power capable of providing naval support and bases—will be the main pillar. Although the United States will attempt to expand its influence, it will not overexert itself in pursuing hegemony in Asia where prosperous China stands.

It is highly unlikely—if not impossible—for the United States to attempt to directly control regions such as the Middle East that are strategically important yet void of local great powers. The relative deterioration of national power and antagonistic sentiments against overseas armed intervention arising from the wounds of the Iraq War will work as constraints. Admittedly, contingent events like the 9/11 terrorist attacks might spark an excessive response culminating in an attempt to directly control a distant area like Afghanistan. However, it is far more likely for the US to diminish security commitments and interventions to an extent that does not undermine its leadership, than to adopt aggressive postures. Washington will do its best to avoid employing the army in particular.

2. Chinese Security Strategy

Likewise, it is unlikely for China to pursue hegemony, because it will lack the required military capabilities. Asia's geographic condition, containing major insular states, dictates that preponderant naval power is essential for becoming the hegemon. In Europe, all of the major industrial and resource-rich states except Britain are continental powers; therefore, one can become a regional hegemon by simply securing control of the continent. Thus, possessing superior air and naval forces is not a necessary condition for hegemony. Contrary to Europe, top-ranking industrial states, including Japan, and resource-rich states, including Indonesia, are sea powers in Asia. Therefore, one cannot achieve hegemony by dominating the continental region only. As the foregoing analysis revealed, it will be highly difficult for China to attain dominance in air and naval power. In addition, it is almost impossible to achieve the nuclear superiority needed for incapacitating regional states' nuclear deterrents and gaining control over them—because it requires overwhelming advantages in wealth and technology. Furthermore, Beijing will find few capable allies interested in challenging Washington directly (Goldstein 2005, 32-34). There is no reason



why Japan would join an anti-American coalition when it is a maritime power and China's regional rival. India and Russia also will be hesitant to take sides with China, having been traditional continental rivals and skeptical of China at heart. Luring them will require considerable compensation and carry a risk of becoming entrapped in unwanted conflicts. Unless regional states join forces with China either voluntarily or through coercion, Chinese hegemony is virtually impossible (Art 2008, 272).

However, China will try to expand its international influence as much as possible, and as part of this effort, will adopt a regional leadership strategy. Departing from Deng Xiaoping's old principle, China will establish itself as one of Asia's leaders.¹² China will keep narrowing the gap with the United States through economic development and military modernization, and will selectively resist or oppose the United States. There is a high probability that China will risk confrontation with the United States when it comes to territorial issues, including the Taiwan question and strategic resources such as oil. On the other hand, in distant regions like the Middle East, China is likely to accept U.S. leadership due to its lack of power-projection capability.

China will seek opportunities to build and expand its sphere of influence while reducing that of the United States. It will try to establish exclusive leadership over small and middle-sized continental neighbors, including North Korea. It may even attempt to directly control strategically important yet weak neighboring countries. North Korea could become a case in point, in the event that it fails to revive its economy and stumbles on the path of a failed state. China will also direct its attention toward gaining exclusive control over the near seas, including the South China Sea and the Yellow Sea, as the United States did in the Caribbean. China's coastal areas experienced economic development ahead of its inner provinces, and their share of the entire national economy has been growing steadily since the 1970s (Lampton 2008, 41). Accordingly, China is keenly aware of the strategic importance of controlling the near seas. The U.S. spy plane incident of 2001 in the South China Sea and the military exercises of July 2010 in the Yellow Sea signaled the beginning of China's attempt to control the near seas (*Economist*, March 14, 2009).

However, China's leadership strategy will seldom be aggressive. China has an incentive to avoid a full-scale challenge to the United States, insofar as its power remains inferior. The U.S. cooperation is critical for China's economic development, and this situation will not change (Garver 2005). The United States is a major consumer of Chinese exports and supplier of capital and technology. American institutions of higher education contribute to raising China's human capital by training its students and scholars. Falling into an all-out conflict with the United States carries the risk of losing the driver of economic development. Any exposure to U.S. military coercion also could lead to a marked increase



in defense spending. If the United States draws support from its allies, China's risk and burden will be doubled. (This is probable because a dozen years from today, Asian states are likely to be more sensitive to China's potential threat.) Consequently, economic growth could slow down, and social and political instability could rise (National Intelligence Council 2008, 93-94).

If China shows a steady trend of national growth, this will be yet another reason to avoid a full confrontation with the United States. The continuation of growth corroborates the validity of an accommodative approach represented in mottos such as "cover light and nurture in the dark" (韜光養晦) and "peaceful rise" (和平崛起); there is no reason to abandon this effective method (Zhang and Tang 2005, 56). Also, if China bides its time patiently, it will be able to face the United States from a more advantageous position, while a premature challenge could risk the danger of U.S. preventive attacks. It is also improbable that China will assume an offensive posture against regional powers like India and Russia. China needs to alleviate their anxieties and mitigate security dilemmas, so as to evade a situation in which they join the American bloc and complete encirclement (Goldstein 2005, 12; Zhang and Tang 2005). Therefore, China will show a friendly attitude and cultivate partnerships with these states, thereby creating a favorable environment in which it can focus on competing with the United States.

V. U.S.-China Military Relations in 2025

1. Strategic Interactions and Military Relations

The United States and China will construct spheres of influence respectively and compete in a limited fashion as their leadership strategies meet. Chinese supremacy in land power will enable it to control most part of the continental region. It is highly probable that East Asian states, including Mongolia, North Korea, Laos, and Myanmar, and Central Asian states, including Kirgizstan and Tajikistan will be incorporated into the Chinese sphere of influence. American supremacy in air and naval power will enable it to consolidate its leadership over the maritime region. South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand are likely to be under the American sphere of influence. (These states are currently reinforcing their security cooperation with the United States.)



Powerful continental states, including Russia and India, will remain independent powers and compete with China to preserve their own influence in the peripheral areas. Even if China takes up a conciliatory attitude toward them, they will not place wholehearted trust in China. Due to their geographic proximity on the same continent, they are likely to perceive China as a threatening (potential) competitor. Also, China's compromising attitude, which is designed to alleviate security dilemmas, may fade as time passes. Chinese people, like citizens of ordinary states, tend to believe that their peaceful intention is self-evident.¹³ China tends to stress that its aspirations are for peace and that its military power is defensively oriented, but on the other hand, it views any state that expresses even a slight bit of suspicion as harboring ill intentions.

Because the two states will create separate spheres of influence in the sea and the continent respectively, they will be able to avoid severe power competition. However, it is unlikely that they will establish a condominium based on mutual cooperation because gray zones on the edges of the two spheres of influence will exacerbate security dilemma. In littoral areas where the sea and the continent meet, both land and naval/air power can work effectively; therefore, China and the United States can both intervene in these areas, but only to form a rivalry. Taiwan, a littoral island, and South Korea, which has long coastlines, are likely to become typical gray zones, and in these regions the United States and China could engage in a limited competition, clashing intermittently. Moreover, since it is difficult to fix a clear, easy-to-defend border in the sea, the littoral areas around China including the South China Sea would become a gray zone. The naval forces of the two powers could conflict in these areas. In addition, the states located along the frontiers of the two spheres of influence could employ tightrope diplomacy between China and the United States in order to avoid subordination on either side. This behavior also could give rise to the creation of a gray zone.

There is another danger of aggravated security dilemma concerning the race to secure sea lanes that China's major imports and exports pass through. At the moment, China is the world's biggest exporter, and it is the third biggest importer of natural resources, including oil, natural gas, uranium, iron ore, copper, and nickel, and other industrial parts from various places like the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America (Glosny and Saunders 2010; Lampton 2008, 91). Approximately 80 to 90 percent of total foreign trade, which is the main driver of China's economic development, depends on maritime transportation. For instance, oil tankers transport 86 percent of oil imports. This circumstance compels China to make increasing efforts for securing sea lanes. China has already been trying to project its naval power into the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca, which are passages for oil—a requisite resource for economic development. China has also been trying to build a blue-water



navy with a wider operational range. From China's perspective, when it comes to major transportation routes, it is not an option to totally neglect them or to relinquish them to a potential competitor like the United States, since they are the artery for China's economic development (Kaplan 2005). Therefore, China has reinforced friendly relations with states proximate to these routes including India and Singapore, while pushing forward the construction of a full-fledged blue-water navy that will include aircraft carriers. China's efforts will gradually intensify, as its economy grows and the volume of trade increases. Although China is not expected to maintain stronger naval forces than the United States in these regions, the United States and its allies may still perceive China's projection of naval power as a significant threat. Therefore, an arms race could arise, as the United States and its allies, including Japan, build up their naval power in response.

However, China's naval buildup will be limited, and a severe arms race will be avoidable. Securing sea lanes is not a life and death matter for China, which is fundamentally a continental state. It possesses a vast territory rich with natural resources and is not vulnerable to naval blockade.¹⁴ China depends on imported oil for roughly 50 percent of its oil supply, but the imported oil accounts for only 10 percent of total energy consumption in China (Ross 2010). There is also the alternative of building a land transportation route like the Silk Road of the past. China has already been constructing a pipeline connecting the oil fields in the Caspian region and China's industrial areas, along with railroads and road networks. Major candidates for these land transportation routes are pro-Chinese states like Pakistan and Myanmar. The strategic reality that China cannot beat the United States in an arms race will be another reason to limit the Chinese effort to strengthen its naval power. Likewise, the sea routes connecting East Asia with the Middle East and Africa are extremely important for the allies of the United States, but the routes are not a matter of life and death for the United States itself. Therefore, the U.S. response to China's restrained augmentation of naval power will also be moderate.

Outside of Asia, limited cooperation under U.S. leadership can be expected due to China's inferiority in naval power. Even if China builds an ocean-going navy, the relative shortage of economic resources will circumscribe China from acquiring power-projection capability comparable to that of the United States. Therefore, in geographically distant regions outside of Asia, the United States will preserve superior naval power and China will have no choice but to accept American leadership. This could take the form of China's limited participation in the U.S.-led Global Maritime Partnership (Pollack 2008). Nevertheless, indirect resistance through assistance to pro-Chinese regional states could be forthcoming, if the United States violates China's important national interests.

Sino-U.S. relations could diverge across regions; however, considering that Asia



stands as the most important region for both parties, it is fair to anticipate that the overall relationship will take form of moderate, limited competition. In the security arena, China will remain a regional power rather than a global power in 2025; therefore, interactions within Asia will determine the basic nature of their military relations. There is a high chance that limited competition will arise between the two leadership-promoters in Asia, while cooperation will form in other regions, thereby mitigating the competitive aspect of the overall relationship.

The United States will likely take the initiative in the competition. As mentioned above, the United States will keep its superiority in national power to China (see <Table 2>). The prospect does not change much when considering the role of other states. Support from allies, including Japan, is available to the United States, and furthermore, it could also cooperate partly with China's traditional rivals like India and Russia.¹⁵ On the contrary, it is very unlikely that China and Russia, both being continental powers, will form a coalition as some scholars argue. Sino-Russian cooperation against the United States at intervals in the past decade was made possible by U.S. pressure against Russia, including the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the penetration in Central Asia. Such U.S. pressure against Russia is improbable in the coming dozen years, when the United States will have to face a rising China from its relatively weakened position. Rather, it is more likely that the United States will accommodate Russia to contain China, just as it did to China in the 1970s to contain its main adversary, the Soviet Union. Even if Russia sides with China, U.S. initiative will not be threatened. Since the Sino-American struggle for influence will take place primarily in Asia's littoral areas, the outcome of the contest will be largely up to naval and air power. Therefore, a continental power like Russia will not be able to make a critical contribution. In this aspect, India—another continental power—is not very different.

The military relations of the year 2025 described above are more competitive in nature when compared to those of today. Current U.S. security policy has broken from the hegemonic strategy of the George W. Bush administration and is shifting toward an off-shore leadership strategy. China's security policy is still dominated by an accommodation strategy with a hint of balancing strategy. Thus, bilateral military relations have settled to be generally cooperative, however unstable (see <Table 1>). On the contrary, in 2025 the crossing of two leadership strategies will form essentially competitive military relations. However, compared to the full-blown competition that many pessimists anticipate, this competition will be fairly moderate and limited in nature.



2. Alternative Future

The prediction of security strategies and military relations presented above is deduced from analyzing only security interests and national power. However, there are other factors believed by experts to have important impacts on Sino-American relations. Will the incorporation of those factors into the preceding analysis have an impact on the research result?

(1) Economic Relations and Institutions

Most liberalists stress the impact of economic relations, democracy, and international institutions on international politics, and predict that Sino-American relations will be cooperative in nature. However, even considering these factors, the conclusion that the bilateral relations will form a limited competition still stands.

Several aspects of economic relations will have conflicting impacts on the security strategies of the United States and China, so economic relations will not cause a major shift in the nature of their military relations. If the trends in their economic relations from the past decade continue, China will have an additional reason to avoid a full-fledged competition with the United States. The share of Sino-American trade in China's GDP has been growing, and its trade surplus vis-à-vis the United States has also been increasing. Under this situation, military competition with the United States will bring enormous economic loss and opportunity cost to China. However, some economic trends that could countervail against these positive effects can also be found. Notably, for the past decade, the share of Sino-American trade in China's total trade has decreased, and for the recent years, the share of Sino-American trade in China's GDP has dropped as well (Yoo 2010). This trend weakens the economic incentive for China to make military concessions. The United States is facing conflicting economic pressures as well. The share of Sino-American trade in America's total trade has been increasing, economically motivating the United States to maintain harmonious military relations with China.¹⁶ On the other hand, due to the fact that the United States has been experiencing a huge trade deficit, it may not fear a decline of Sino-American trade after all. Since the United States sees both gains and losses in its economic relationship with China, it will not strongly pull U.S. security strategy in one direction.

Democratic peace (Doyle 1983) is hard to sprout since it is unlikely that China will transform into a mature liberal democracy by 2025. According to a projection made by a computer model, the level of political freedom in China will remain very low. It is projected that China will score 3.343 on the Freedom House Index (on a scale of 2 to 14



points) in the year 2025, which is below the level of Russia in 2010 (5.039) (International Futures 2012). Under this circumstance, it is unreasonable to hope for a democratic community to become established between the two states. Admittedly, not all models offer pessimistic predictions. It is estimated that China's GDP per capita in 2025 will reach \$11,700 (in terms of PPP USD in the year 2000). According to a famous study on correlation between economic development and democratization, the chance for democratic political institutions to advent is about 92 percent at this level of economic development, and once the transition to democracy is completed, there is no possibility of returning to authoritarianism (Przeworski and Limongi 1997).¹⁷ However, this study does not present only positive implications for the future of Chinese politics. At this level of economic development, the possibility of survival of authoritarian government rather tends to go up as the economy grows (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Also, even if China achieves the level of democratization that conforms to the minimum standard set by this model, democratic peace may not materialize. Democratic peace appears among mature liberal democracies, but China is unlikely to become one by 2025. In addition, the democratization process has a propensity to strengthen nationalism, thereby generating conflict (Mansfield and Snyder 2005).

If international institutions bring about effects hypothesized by liberalists, this might be another factor that would mitigate U.S.-China competition by reinforcing China's accommodative attitude. Institutionalists believe that the U.S.-centered hub-and-spokes system of alliances constituting the core of regional security order shows a high level of institutionalization and is comprised of democratic states; therefore, it does not pose a serious threat to China (Ikenberry 2008). Also, it is believed that numerous institutions in which both states participate can reduce distrust and strengthen a cooperative attitude (Friedberg 2005). For these reasons, China is likely to accept the existing international order and compromise with the United States, the defender of the order. Institutionalists assert that China's active participation in a number of international institutions and its adherence to relevant rules and norms confirm the validity of their argument (Johnston 2003).

If the reality meets the expectations regarding international institutions, cooperative U.S.-China military relations will form; however, for now, reliable empirical evidence cannot be found. There is no clear indication that China does not perceive the U.S.-led institutionalized alliance system as a threat; rather, the opposite evidence is easily found. The Chinese government has denounced America's regional alliances including the Korea-U.S. alliance as the legacy of the Cold War in a sharp tone. Also, although China has been participating in several international institutions recently, it should be noted that most of its activities are limited to economic and other non-military areas; this does not



provide any grounds to view that China has accepted the security order. Also, there is little empirical evidence to believe that international institutions in other issue areas will help reduce China's security distrust and bring about a cooperative military posture. Besides, it is not easy to find a Chinese person who genuinely believes that international institutions will prevent conflicts with the United States. Favorable attitudes toward institutions reflect a realistic assessment that institutions have made positive contribution to the development of their country, not genuine trust in the authority of the institutions (Lampton 2008, 30-34). Joining economic institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) promotes China's exports, and participating in regional security organizations like the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) allows institutionalists in other member states to discredit the "China threat" theory. If the situation changes and these advantages noticeably diminish, China's attitude toward international institutions could rapidly change.

(2) Ideas

A group of scholars stressing the importance of ideas asserts that China's neighbors, including Japan and South Korea, are accustomed to the traditional Sinocentric order from long historical experience; therefore, they are likely to compromise (or bandwagon) with China rather than confront it (Kang 2007). If pro-Chinese governments come into power in major maritime states, this could affect U.S.-China military relations. However, the possibility for this scenario is small. Even if pro-Chinese doctrine gains support, U.S.-China military relations will not divert much from the prediction in the foregoing analysis.

Japan is a regional state situated in a geopolitically important location and possesses the strongest local navy. If it bandwagons with China, the United States will have difficulty in effectively pursuing offshore leadership strategy. However, Japan's caution and fear will prevent its bandwagoning with China, even if pro-Chinese leaders come into power. The Democratic Party administration is generally China-friendly in advocating the East Asian community. However, in times of elevated tension regarding territorial disputes with China, the administration has shown an inclination to strengthen security cooperation with the United States while keeping China at a distance (Fackler and Johnson 2010; Wong 2010). Also, the Japanese public has shown a tendency to be more alert as China becomes militarily stronger (Takahara 2008). By 2025, Sino-Japanese conflicts will not have been settled completely, and fear of powerful China will be more accentuated. In this strategic situation, even a pro-Chinese administration will not be allowed to take sides with China in the military area. Also, China will be unable to build naval and air power strong enough to force Japan, an insular nation, into submission. Throughout the history



of Sinocentric regional order, China has never been able to put Japan under its direct control. There is a bigger chance for Japan to stand neutral between the United States and China, but it will not bring about a revolutionary shift in the military domain. Even without Japanese support, the United States will be able to preserve its leadership in the sea areas, utilizing strategic military bases like the one in Guam.¹⁸

Since the rest of the maritime states are not powerful, their siding with China will not change the strategic balance significantly. South Korea will be the strongest middle power in the region, but still will show a great disparity in comprehensive power (1.793) and GDP (\$1,385 billion) compared to the great powers (see <Table 2>). Therefore, the emergence of a pro-Chinese government in Seoul and its bandwagoning with China will not constitute a major setback for U.S. strategy. The emergence of a pro-Chinese reunified Korea would not transform the circumstance either. Although a reunified Korea might possess significant land and nuclear power, it would not be able to build naval forces strong enough to threaten the United States and its maritime allies by 2025, under the pressure of huge reunification costs. (Of course, there is no guarantee that South Korea will take sides with China, since it is involved in territorial disputes with China. The majority of Koreans assume an attitude of mistrust against China.)

The preceding argument does not mean that South Korea's strategic value is trivial. The geopolitical position of the Korean Peninsula grants it a valuable role as an ally beyond its national power. If South Korea remains allied to the United States, it will further consolidate the American strategic position. The reunified Korea, located closely to China's coastal heartlands, could add a burden to the PLA, binding a fair amount of its forces to the northeast and the Yellow Sea regions. (If U.S. forces remain stationed in Korea, the burden will be doubled.) This means that Chinese military pressure on Taiwan and other places will decrease. On the other hand, if Korea leans toward China, provides military bases, and builds naval and air power in the long run, this would pose a notable menace to Japan, a keystone of the U.S. regional alliance system. It would also threaten advance bases in Guam and Hawaii. South Korea already possesses world-class shipbuilding capacity and harbors, and is geographically adjacent to Japan and the U.S. military bases in the region.

An ideational factor that could significantly shape U.S.-China military relations is not pro-Chinese sentiments of regional states but the nationalism of China and the United States. If their nationalism is reinforced, their bilateral military relations will show a more competitive predisposition. Nationalism can amplify China's ambitions in international politics. If it is expressed as naval nationalism, China will spur the construction of a blue-water navy and enter a heated naval arms race with the United States (Ross 2009). Also, Beijing could plunge into a full-scale competition with Washington, in an attempt to re-



gain the hegemonic position it enjoyed before the advent of western imperialism (Gries 2005, 106).¹⁹ This ambition is already taking roots in China's popular nationalism, and shows a tendency to strengthen with the elevation of national power and confidence. If China enters the path of democratization, nationalism could be further amplified and it could be more directly reflected in government policies (Mansfield and Snyder 2005). If this trend coincides with a reinforced American nationalism, it could go beyond a simple clash of interests to an emotional battle of national pride.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has sought to predict the character of U.S.-China military relations in 2025, and has reached the conclusion that moderate competition will take place between the two great powers. Beijing's regional leadership strategy and Washington's offshore leadership strategy will meet to create separate spheres of influence in Asia. China's superior land power will place neighboring continental region, except for Russia and India, under Chinese leadership, while America's superior naval and air power will subject the maritime region to its leadership. Both powers will not seek regional hegemony, thereby avoiding full-front power struggle. However, Washington and Beijing will engage in limited competition in the gray zones like the Korean Peninsula (where their spheres of influence meet) and in the sea lanes that both need. However, outside of Asia, it is likely that the two powers will cooperate under U.S. leadership, due to China's lack of ability to project its military power effectively.

If China builds sufficient latent power for pursuit of Asian hegemony in a more distant future (for example, in 2050), the great powers would be drawn into a full-scale competition. If China becomes a potential hegemon, the United States will fear China just as the former feared the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and will actively set out to diminish Chinese power. Under this circumstance, China's reassuring mottos such as "peaceful rise" will not suffice to ease American anxiety and suspicion. If the United States begins to contain and coerce China, there is a good chance that China will confront the United States out of fear. All the more, there is a possibility that China will adopt a hegemonic strategy, setting the goal of driving the United States out of Asia and becoming the hegemon. A large-scale war is unlikely, due to mutual nuclear deterrence; however, if Chinese hegemonic strategy and American countervailing strategy (leadership or bal-



ancing strategy) collide, full-front military competition will arise.

The key question here is whether China will be able to build enough military power to bid for hegemony. The prospect is not very positive. In Asia, a maritime region contains a considerable amount of industrial and natural resources. Therefore, hegemony requires building superior naval and air power. China will almost certainly desire such power: the strategic values of protecting sea lanes and building power-projection capability will increase, as China's foreign trade and investment expand quantitatively and geographically. Land transportation routes relatively cost more and are not suitable for trade with distant regions (for example, Latin America and Africa), so it cannot replace sea routes completely (Mearsheimer 2010). The real question is whether China has the capacity to build naval and air power that surpasses that of the United States. There is a low possibility that China can succeed in doing this. To become a hegemon in Asia, China first needs to maintain a superior army capable of deterring continental powers like India and Russia; this task requires gigantic financial expenditure. On the contrary, maritime states like the United States and Japan can concentrate most of their defense spending on naval and air power, thereby enjoying a major advantage in the arms race. In addition, in today's nuclear era, nuclear superiority capable of incapacitating nuclear deterrents of regional states is a prerequisite for hegemony. However, to achieve this, a state has to invest far more economic resources than its counterparts which strive to build an effective nuclear deterrent (Jervis 1989). There is only a small possibility that China will be able to overcome these handicaps successfully. ■

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the East Asia Institute for its generous financial support, and participants of the Project on U.S.-China Relations 2025 for their helpful comments. He is also grateful to Ye Jin An for her excellent research assistance.



Endnotes

¹ The concepts of hard power and soft power were proposed by Joseph S. Nye (Nye 2004)

² Offshore leadership strategy is different from offshore balancing advocated by some realists. The former aims to establish and expand the sphere of influence, while the latter aims to maintain the balance of power and prevent the rise of hegemony. When constructing a coalition, a state seeking offshore leadership literally tries to assume the role of leader, while on the other hand, a state performing offshore balancing may try to minimize its burden by transferring the leadership to an ally. For offshore balancing, see Mearsheimer (2001) and Walt (2005).

³ Balancing is not the only function of an alliance. There are cases in which an alliance is formed to gain influence vis-à-vis allies or manage relations among allied countries (Schoeder 1994).

⁴ The United States defines its national interests broadly, including economic prosperity and diffusion of its values (White House 2010). Instead of enumerating diverse interests, this paper focuses on the factors that are most relevant to security strategy and military relations.

⁵ The figure is reflective of inflation (Department of Defense 2008, 31).

⁶ There is no guarantee that the rapid development shown in the past will be sustained in the future. There already exist diagnoses saying that the China boom is coming to an end and that growth will slow down (Batson 2010; Sharma 2010).

⁷ Goldman Sachs projects that the total size of China's economy will reach an equivalent level to that of the U.S. economy in 2027 (Nye 2010, 4).

⁸ As far as GDP is concerned, China has already caught up with Japan to reach the top rank in Asia (Barboza 2010).

⁹ It is estimated that Russian and Japanese expenditures will be \$125.2 billion and \$62.3 billion, respectively (Crane et al. 2005, 299).

¹⁰ China and India have failed to reach a firm agreement on their borderline. China and Russia have resolved their border dispute, but it cannot be said that the sources of their dispute have been completely eradicated (Fravel 2008).

¹¹ The Chinese People's Armed Police Force (CAPF) is currently responsible for this task, but armies may be needed in case of large-scale uprisings.

¹² Deng Xiaoping, while alive, used to warn Chinese leaders against claiming leadership (決不當頭).

¹³ David Shambaugh's lecture. (September 6, 2010, George Washington University).

¹⁴ The impact of a naval blockade is rarely critical (Mearsheimer 2001).



¹⁵ A U.S.-Indian alignment began with the signing of the Civil Nuclear Agreement under the George W. Bush administration, and has accelerated recently through highest-ranking diplomatic activities. For instance, President Obama has announced his support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, and Prime Minister Singh has expressed his support for America's position in international economic issues including the balance of trade and exchange rates (Stolberg 2010).

¹⁶ A study shows that it is difficult to employ a balancing strategy under highly interdependent economic conditions (Papayoanou 1999).

¹⁷ According to Przeworski and Limongi, there has been no case in which a democratic regime with a per capita income higher than \$6,055 (1985 PPP USD) returned to an authoritarian regime. When converted to 2000 PPP USD, this is equivalent to \$9,688 (Sahr 2009).

¹⁸ The United States has already undertaken its plan to construct a super base in Guam which could substitute for the military bases in Japan in an emergency (Swami 2010).

¹⁹ There is a contrary assertion that Chinese nationalism is defensively oriented (Goldstein 2005, 210).



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- The East Asia Institute, an Asia Security Initiative core institution, acknowledges the MacArthur Foundation for its generous grand and continued support.

