

Focus on Asia–Pacific Region: Analysis of US–China Strategic Rivalry

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I. Background

1. “Big-country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics” in China

“Big-country diplomacy” was initially put forward by President Xi Jinping at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs last November. Since the new leaders came into power in 2013, they have been endeavoring to promote “big-country diplomacy” in practice. From China’s perspective, more attention has been paid to the maintenance and promotion of China’s sovereignty, security and development. In the past 30 years, especially over the past decade, as China’s interests have been gradually globalized, the country has to defend and develop its domestic and overseas interests more firmly and resolutely under the “big-country diplomacy”. And the US-China wrestling these years is a situation quite relevant to the promotion of “big-country diplomacy”.

2. Obama’s “Asia Rebalance” from 2011

The rising powers in Asia-Pacific region are leading to a rapid change in the balance of powers, and challenging the US on its role as the dominant power in this region. As a consequence, the Obama administration has decided to shift the US resources and strategy to the Asia-Pacific so as to maintain the US dominance, which in turn to constraint, balance, or even contain China’s growing power and influence in this region.

II. Current Situation

1. Economic Strategies

On the one hand, US took the first step of the Asian rebalance policy, which is partial economy.

Obama took the lead in hammering out the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), promoting economic cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries excluding China in trade, investment and other fields.

Over the past 10 years, China has become the economic center of the Asia-Pacific region. The United States used to be the largest trading partner of Japan, South Korea and other Asia-Pacific countries. From the later period of past 10 years, however, China has gradually become the largest trading partner of these countries, replacing the United States as the dominant economy. Therefore, the United States hopes to suppress

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China by TPP in terms of trade and investment, resuming the position as the most important trade partner of Asia-Pacific countries.

On the other hand, China carried out the “belt and road” initiative.

In the economic perspective, the “belt and road” initiative, relying on China's geopolitical advantages, is conducive to the implementation and promotion of China's economic strategy in various European and Asian countries. To a large extent, it can offset China's loss in trade and investment caused by the emergence of TPP.

2. Diplomatic Strategies

For the US government, the focus of its “Asia rebalance” policy is on Southeast Asia and South Asia.

The United States used to have its focus on Northeast Asia. But now it shifts its priority towards Southeast Asia, including South Asia.

a. Vietnam. The United States is trying to win over Vietnam for the following reasons: the historical grievance between Vietnam and China resulted in Vietnam's vigilance against China. And the South China Sea disputes nowadays, as well as the pro-American and pro-Muslim factions within the Vietnamese leadership, also explain the possibility that the United States could build up strategic partnership with Vietnam. For the US, it is necessary to obtain such an ally as Vietnam has very great geopolitical significance as a continent country boasting a long coastline of the South China Sea.

b. Burma. There used to be a period which is over 20 years long, when the western countries sanction against Burma, and China was the only military diplomatic partner that Burma could rely on. But in recent years the United States has successfully penetrated into Burma. After the new leaders came to power, Burma government immediately steered the country away from China, and made great efforts to improve relationship with the West, resulting in a frosty relationship between China and Burma. The United States also sees Burma as an important piece on its strategic chessboard in Indian Ocean.

However, for China and its Indian Ocean strategy at present stage, the situation could be quite complicated. India, as the largest country of the Indian Ocean region, is the dominant power of South Asia. China's India Ocean strategy will encounter great difficulty if India and the United State cooperate to contain China.

Moreover, China has made its responses to the US “Asia Rebalance” policy.

a. China-ROK Relationship. The relationship between China and South

Korea develops rapidly. South Korea's president and President Xi Jinping have been well acquainted with each other for a long time, and the relationship between the two countries has improved rapidly after the two leaders came into power. Trades between China and South Korea have also been boosted. As a result, the United States is worried that the rise of China may lead to the disintegration of its alliance system. Nevertheless, China and South Korea has further entrenched mutual consensus on many issues, especially issues concerning Japan.

b. Dispute over the South China Sea. Four countries, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines, got involved in the dispute with China over the South China Sea. The Philippines has adopted an attitude of open hostility, while Vietnam has been offering support both overtly and covertly. In recent years, China has strengthened the relationship with Malaysia. The dispute between the two countries over the South China Sea has not cast a shadow on their relationship. Indonesia is the leading country in Southeast Asia and an important neighbor to China on South China Sea. Thus, a friendly relationship with Indonesia could help ensuring the stability of Southeast Asia. Thailand is an ally of the United States. However, during the domestic political unrest when the military launched a coup, China offered support for the stability of the country and therefore received understanding and appreciation from the Thai military. That led to a good neighborly and friendly relationship between China and Thailand, and put China in a very advantageous position in the US-Thailand-China trilateral relations.

c. Mongolia. The United States has been speeding up its pace in drawing Mongolia over to its side since the Bush administration. For example, the United States has set up electronic transformer substation in Mongolia, and conducted experiments on missiles and other weapons aiming at Northeast and Northern China, as well as satellite launch. The United States claimed to be Mongolia's "third neighbor", which is obviously part of its rebalance strategy to contain China and Russia. However, in the last two years, the situation changed. President Xi Jinping paid a special visit to Mongolia last year and then Mongolia decided to build railways with Chinese standards in order to facilitate economic exchanges between the two countries. The trilateral summit among the president of China, Russia and Mongolia has impelled Mongolia to reposition itself. This is also one of the pieces of US-China wrestling in Asia-Pacific region.

3. Security Strategies.

Firstly, the United States has increased military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region.

The United States plans to deploy 60% of its naval and air forces in the

Pacific region by 2020, which is the inverse of the situation during the Cold War when it deployed 60% in the Atlantic and 40% in the Pacific. The most advanced weapons will also be deployed in the Pacific region.

Secondly, the United States has formally established the new Air-Sea Battle strategy.

The U.S. military believes that in the first decade of the 21st Century, China has focused on developing its modern navy combat capability and offshore maritime defense strategy in order to solve the Taiwan Issue. China's navy-air forces cooperation could implement devastating attack to any targets within a distance from 300 to 500 miles offshore. That means US intervention will have to stay 500 miles away if there is any conflict in the Taiwan Strait, which pushes it into an operational area with limited freedom of action. Under the threat of China's military and anti-ship missiles, a new strategy-- the Air-Sea Battle was proposed by American Navy and Air force. This strategy refers to a military tactic that the air force assaults and destructs targets including linchpin, missile base and airport before navy attacks in a direct way.

After working out the new strategy, it is necessary for the US to deploy troops, and carry out training and military exercises. The US organized the first Air-Sea Battle drill last year, which marked that after several years of preparation, Air-Sea Strategy will be used in practice and will be exercised and improved to counter China.

Thirdly, the United States has made great efforts to consolidate alliance and partnership.

After World War II, the United States has formed an alliance with five countries including South Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia in the Asia Pacific region. Apart from these, strictly speaking, New Zealand is not a formal member of the US alliance system. So is Taiwan area after the United States and Mainland China established diplomatic relations. The US doesn't find it difficult to restraint China with the five allies it has in the area. Therefore, it managed to build up new partnership with countries like Singapore, which could provide the most reliable sea base with its strategic significance and geographical importance. The United States also hopes to re-rent Cam Ranh Bay, an important Vietnam naval base, to contain China. At the same time, India and the United States are getting close as India is always wary of China over marine issues. Although these countries are not publicly aligned with the United States out of political reasons or domestic opposition, the increasing on security coordination toward China.

Fourth, the United States provokes dispute over the East China Sea and

the South China Sea.

a. Diaoyu Island issue. For a long time, the United States has stated that it does not take an official position on the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Island, hoping that the problem could be resolved peacefully. However, since the beginning of the Bush administration, the United States has declared in 2004, 2010 and 2012, that the Diaoyu Island dispute falls under the US-Japan Security Treaty, it would protect the interests of Japan if any conflict breaks out. The Bush administration was aiming at an agreement with Japan on a new missile defense system in the Asia Pacific region. And the Obama administration offered support to Japan in exchange for an ally of its Asia rebalance.

b. South China Sea Dispute. In recent years, the United States has become increasingly concerned over the South China Sea issue. Within the first week of 2014, three officials of the Obama administration publicly criticized and challenged China's establishment of "Air Defense Identification Zone" in the South China Sea at the end of 2013. In 2015, the US renewed its attack more vigorously when the president, Defense Minister, Secretary of State and congressmen denounced Chinese behavior in the South China Sea Island issue in public. It was also in this year, that the United States and the Philippines carried out the largest joint military exercise over the last ten years. The location was very close to the disputed islands between China and Vietnam. The Littoral Combat Ship, deployed by US in Singapore, firstly appeared in international waters near the Nansha Islands (Spratly Islands). Recently, the P-8A reconnaissance aircraft is deployed to the Philippines for the first time, and it's allowed to fly at a low altitude over the reefs. The US surveillance drone flight was found spying over the South China Sea. One US defense official claimed a deployment of the first bombing plane in Australia, and threatened that military aircraft and Navy ships will go within 12 nautical miles of China's artificial islands in the next step.

III. Prospects of the US-China Contention in the Asia Pacific Region

1. The United States will continue to focus on the Asia Pacific region.

Despite the European crisis, the US still has to handle opponents like Russia, the Middle East countries and other Islamic countries. Many unstable internal situations remain to be tackled by the government. As the most available place of great strategic importance fattiest meat in the continent, the Asia Pacific region will continue to be the focus of the Obama administration, and even the next US president. In history, National interests drove the United States into two world wars in Europe and the Pacific Area. In this regard, we need to prepare ourselves for another potential war that the US might launch for its interests.

2. China's military strategy in Southeast Asia.

Firstly, the nuclear submarine base construction is of great importance.

With a great geographical significance, the Southeast Asia and its maritime trade routes are important strategic passages for the United States. The rapid development of Chinese Navy is another reason that the US focuses on the return to Asia. ***It is imperative for the Chinese Navy to be armed with nuclear submarines, and to obtain a reliable nuclear-strike capability.*** China's first nuclear submarine base is located in Shandong Province. But the base has two drawbacks. Firstly, the depth of water is too shallow for concealment. Secondly, nuclear submarines could be easily tracked as when they have to pass through the first island chain before entering the West Pacific. Along the way, there are countries and areas including South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Southeast Asia, which all have shown a pro-American tendency. Over the past 10 years, China has opened up a base with a water depth of 200 meters in Sanya. The key advantage of the base is that it is not surrounded by any other major powers. If our nuclear submarines can successfully get access to strategic seas from here, then they can ride the waves of the Pacific, and even the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

Secondly, military facilities, especially a military airport is in construction on Yongshu Reef. In addition to the nuclear submarine base, considering that there are military airports in Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Nansha, ***China's next key step must be a construction of a military airport after building up the Yongshu Reef.*** The combat radius of a military airport can cover surrounding areas and we don't exclude the possibility of deploying missiles, anti-ship missiles and anti-aircraft missiles in order to make sure China's navigation freedom. ***Accordingly, the United States is likely to put further pressure on China in Southeast Asia.*** For example, their military aircraft and warships may go within 10 nautical miles of the Yongshu Reefs, to show that they do not recognizing the sovereignty of China. Or they might carry out non-war confrontation and harassment.

Thirdly, China has planned to deploy missiles and establish air defense identification zone. After the construction of the airport, it is necessary for China to carry out missile defense. The strategies of missile deployment, especially the setting of the air defense identification zone, should be carefully considered. The design of the Air Defense Identification Zone in Yongshu Reef, should be in accordance with the nine-dash line, which officially set up a defined claim of the territory of the South China Sea. Currently, the situation in the area is quite turbulent. The Philippines drew a line on the sea, declaring that the eastern part of the line and Nansha Islands belong to the Philippines. Vietnam also insists that western areas

belong to them. These countries are worried that the South China Sea will become China's inland sea according to the nine-dash line. This problem has a great influence on all aspects, including the relationship between China and the South China Sea claimants, Southeast Asian countries, as well as China's maritime silk road construction and so on.

Translator/ Wang Hui

Introduction:

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As one of the first ten university think tanks in Shanghai, Center for Asia-Pacific Cooperation and Governance is led by Professor Wu Xinbo, Executive Vice Dean of the Institute of International Relations, Fudan University. Targeted on the research of international relations and regional cooperation in Asian-Pacific region, the Asian-Pacific Institute focuses on interactions between China and other major countries as well as regional organizations in Asian-pacific region (such as the United States, Japan, Russia, South Korea and ASEAN etc.), analyzes these interactions and thus proposes counterstrategies; researches the channels and models of cooperation in Asian-pacific region, discusses about the establishment of governance mechanism in Asia-pacific region and summarizes feasible models of cooperation which are suitable for Asian-Pacific region; advocates a regional model of international relations with Asian-Pacific characteristics based on the history, culture, social and political status in Asian-pacific region.

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