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Is China Destined to Play High-politics in East Asia?

MOHD AMINUL KARIM
China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, and the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur
mdaminulkarim1967@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to project China's emerging path towards high politics in East Asia, which is ostensibly spawned by regional geopolitical dynamics. Hegemonic transition, replacing hegemonic stability, is seemingly activating the dynamics. There is almost an inexorable move towards predominance, by the two major powers, that tends to get stimulated by the presence of issues that may trigger conflict, possibly war. These issues range from flashpoints to populist nationalism, economic interdependence, nuclear issues, and alliance relations in the Western Pacific. The paper concludes, by highlighting, likely resultant action–reaction cycles, polarizations, and alignments through the varying array of forces, possibility of war, mutual deterrence, and above all projecting overall power relations.

Introduction

The economic and geopolitical centre of gravity in the world is visibly tilting towards Asia-Pacific as if following in the steps of early nineteenth century China when it was the largest economy in the world. China is rising again as a prominent world power, with significant implications for the rest of the world. China is eager to play a major role on the global stage, but is steadfast in acting alone in dealing with its neighbors (Clinton, 2014: 40). According to current forecasts, China, mainly because of its large population size, 'will surpass the United States in the total economic size sometime in the twenty-first century; the Carnegie Endowment puts the date around 2030' (Brzezinski, 2012: 56). Apart from GDP, China has other resources, such as its territory, which is equal to that of the United States, its population, which is four times greater than that of the United States, and, in terms of numbers, it has the largest army with about 200 hundred nuclear weapons, and modern capabilities in space and cyberspace (Nye, 2011: 178).

The challenge this robust and emerging economy faces today is scarcity of energy which is imported from different corners of the world – the thesis goes like this,

development is proportional to the consumption of energy. Scarcity of energy may become more critical as time goes by, and Asia's consumption is likely to have doubled by 2030, with China accounting for half of it. China is already the world's second largest oil importer, after the United States, importing around 5.5 million barrels per day (BPD) (Ashraf, 2013). China is frantically looking for energy sources in Africa, in Latin America, and in the Middle East. Energy consumption – along with other issues – seemingly is correlated with the hegemonic or leadership race in the region. But the irony is that the race is compounded by the transformation that is presumably underway. The transformation phase, understandably, is generally fraught with risks.

Under such a transformation, China, being an ambitious and a rising power, seemingly strives to maximize its power relative to others. Rivalry is considered an intrinsic part of great power competition, and carries the potential for conflict, which may flare up at the slightest provocation. Even nationalistic fervor – rife in many countries of the region, and often called populist nationalism – may be a good enough reason to trigger conflict.

The South China Sea is a significant source of conflict, as China is reclaiming lands on different reefs and islets, and the United States is conducting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) within 12 nautical miles around the contested features and launching air reconnaissance missions close to China's borders. China responds to these actions with a naval fleet closely following the US vessels and Chinese fighter-jets trying to intercept the air reconnaissance missions.

The United States is presumably overstretched, or, to some extent, exhausted after the Iraq and Afghan wars, as it was after the Vietnam War? The United States fell into a trap with the invasion of Iraq and it failed to follow up its early success in Afghanistan. The war with Iraq destroyed the United States' credibility and weakened its relations with allies in the Muslim world (Nye, 2011: 35). Deng (2014: 123) is succinct, 'The Iraq War started to drag down US power and image. Meanwhile, China and other emerging economies continued robust growth and began to hold increasing weight in global affairs.' Over and above this, the United States is wary of Russia and China converging on geopolitical issues, especially in Central Asia. Furthermore, the reality of the global economic recession in 2008 raised questions as to whether the United States could still maintain its primacy in all its components of national power. It is, however, gradually getting over its economic crisis as reflected in the rise in the employment rate – the unemployment rate went down from 10% to 5% – and the steady growth in GDP.

Despite the apparent overstretch and economic downturn in the United States, geopolitics between China and the United States is spiraling. Some of the drivers could be: Google decided to withdraw from the Chinese market, the United States sells arms to Taiwan, Obama meets the Dalai Lama in Washington, America decides to dispatch its aircraft carriers to participate in a joint military exercise with South Korea in the Yellow Sea (Jia, 2014: 12), the US Pacific navy undertakes FONOPS in the Chinese-claimed reefs

and islets in the South China Sea and resolves to continue to do so, the United States and India agree to form a deeper strategic partnership that includes nuclear deals, and the United States and Japan supporting a tighter alliance. Japan is seemingly getting rid of its pacifist cloak.

The United States means business in East Asia/Asia-Pacific, and as such it announced a rebalancing strategy – presumably to countervail China. US determination is seemingly palpable as it wants to maintain its leadership role in what may be called a Sino-centric world order. Such an order refers to better economic integration, maritime cooperation, management of territorial disputes, and joint resource development. Chinese mega-projects – such as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) – are purportedly launched to implement such objectives in Asia, Europe, and Africa. Chinese scholars observe that the US rebalancing strategy encapsulates areas such as forward deployment diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, and value diplomacy; consolidating old friends, and seeking new partners for military collaboration; and leading the construction of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) for economic collaboration. Subjects of value diplomacy are the promotion of democracy, human rights, freedom, and other universal values (Fang and Qiang, 2014: 94–5, 99). Value diplomacy could be destabilizing for China.

As a reaction, China is presumably trying to reestablish a dominant role both in economic and strategic fields. China, before its 'Century of Humiliation', was a great strategic and economic power, and it is natural for China to want its rightful place on the world stage, as observed by Henry Kissinger in his book *The White House Years*. In his book *On China* Kissinger (2000: 22) corroborates that the Chinese have been shrewd practitioners of *realpolitik* with a strategic doctrine distinctly different from the West.

Presently, China, as part of its grand-strategy, has been pursuing the policy of *taoguang yang hui* meaning 'not to show off one's capabilities but to keep a low profile'. This strategy may have been formulated to protect its economy and not to expose its military power. However, China has ostensibly come out of its isolationist posture – even in the military field – as was apparent by the turn of the century. There is now probably a paradigmatic shift: 'No more hiding one's capacities as Deng cautioned and no more reluctance or shying away from opportunities to lead' (Baviera, 2015).

In reality, China's strategic ambitions are loud and clear. They are manifested in six strategic goals, as observed by Brzezinski, three of which are relevant here. First, China wants to reduce geographical encirclement due to the United States' strategic links with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, and its vulnerability of passage in reaching the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca. Second, to establish itself in a favored position – in the form of free trade zone with Japan and South Korea – in an emerging East Asian community, and with ASEAN, while containing the major role played by the United States. Third, it wants to resolve the remaining unsettled legacy of Taiwan with 'one China, two systems' or even more than two (Brzezinski, 2012: 172–3).

There is, therefore, a puzzle where both the United States and China tend to fall into the trap of ambiguity. The United States presumably fails to prioritize whether to engage or to counterbalance China. China, on the other hand, also suffers from a similar ambiguity: whether to go hawkish outright or to buy time to revamp itself for a meaningful showdown. Notwithstanding any such dilemmas, there are visible balancing acts that are directed against each other. Balance-of-Power, a basic tool in the international relations discourse, is upbeat in the region.

It can be theorized that when the world's foremost power and a rising power are engaged in balancing, it is difficult to diffuse tensed relations unless there are paradigmatic – geopolitical – shifts from both the powers or one of the powers. It is inconceivable to think of a way out as events are now spiraling. Notwithstanding this, restraint is generally working and there is presumably an urge from all stakeholders to at least maintain the status quo. Therefore, some kind of fragile stability is at work.

Given such a fragile stability and volatile geopolitical milieu, China is seemingly destined to play high politics in East Asia in the foreseeable future. High-politics, here, implies power politics, including for example power, national interests, competition, the action–reaction cycle, leadership race, realism, balancing, power maximization, containment. It can also encapsulate components such as the military, economy, natural resources, technology, manpower, and diplomacy. There are also signs that China is nourishing soft power to add value to the hard power.

Such research questions can then be raised: are political, military, and leadership compulsions so overriding that China has to take recourse to power politics? Is the United States, as it is leading its team in East Asia, confronting such politics upfront as an obvious option? Are the issues – such as flashpoints – so implacable or intractable that they draw many powers, big and small, in East Asia to join the bandwagon?

This study shows the causal linkages between two high-profile strategies – economic and military – coming from two opposing preponderant powers. Resultant alignments and polarizations of other powers in East Asia and their manifestations, especially in the contested zones, are also visualized. Developments, related to the United States and China, their goals, projection, and array of hard power, and their probable impacts are explored in the paper. The author's participation, discussions, and presentations in various strategic conferences in different parts of the world over the last year add value and credibility to the paper.

The uniqueness of the paper is it that examines the factors from a military perspective. It also conducts a review of strategically important militarily features and relates these to the relevant actors' objectives. There is a probability that such objectives, emanating from opposite directions, may carry the potential for a head-on collision. In the first part of the paper, basic data on the issues and relations between the nations are described in a straightforward yet in an inter-connected manner. In the second part, the author draws deductions and inferences, and attempts to make

certain projections. In places, the data are a little stretched to make certain futuristic, probabilistic projections.

Issues and relations

Japan and the East China Sea

Barry Deskar dubs the East China Sea as the greatest threat in the region. He posits, 'The greatest threat is posed by competing territorial claims in the East China Sea, especially between China and Japan. This is because they are wrapped in a larger dispute over Japan's lack of contrition for its role in the Second World War. There is also the risk of a wider conflict here because of US support for its alliance partner' (Deskar, 2014). This is understandable, and therefore the United States is still cautious in granting full foreign policy autonomy to Japan, although it wants Japan to play a more assertive role.

A bleak picture emerges in China–Japan relations – in fact, it nosedived – when a Japanese Coast Guard arrested a Chinese Captain and other crew members of a fishing boat near the Senakau/Diaoyu Island in September 2010; an action–reaction cycle involving both parties following the incident provides an ominous signal. China's repeated demands for the release of all the crew members were ignored by the Japanese. As a rebuttal, China suspended minister-level meetings, cancelled bilateral negotiations on the increase in air routes, and ordered a freeze on the number of Chinese tourists to Japan. Japan then restricted exports of rare earth minerals critical for the manufacture of Chinese electrical products. Such acrimonies appear to be on a par with the claims in the South China Sea (Son, 2014).

In fact, these island issues have dwarfed the vexed Taiwan issue, at least for the time being. To complicate the matters further, in January 2013 Chinese warships were reported to have 'locked on' to a Japanese helicopter and destroyer in separate incidents. Japan is reportedly known to have deployed US-made Hawk UAVs for surveillance in East China Sea. These are likely to reinforce the land-based monitoring capabilities. Presently, the militaries of both Japan and China are generally resolute to control the Islands, given their critical strategic value to all concerned parties. As the islands bear significant military value – being situated between the First-Island-Chain, Taiwan, and mainland – they seemingly provide enough impetus for China to get blue-water access, and hence more capabilities.

What may be more disconcerting for Japan and the United States is the desire of China to dominate the so-called First-Island-Chain. The stretch of maritime territory from the Yellow Sea through the East China and the South China Seas towards the Strait of Malacca is the First-Island-Chain – mainland Japan – Okinawa – the Philippines may be seen as its eastern imaginary line. This chain seemingly forms the front-line of China's naval defense.

Beyond these Seas, China extends its security perimeter along the Maritime Sea Lines of Communication (M-SLOC) that link India with the Pacific Ocean. In sum,

China's move is a rebuttal to the United States' Cold War strategy of using the island chains to contain China's naval and maritime development. China sees the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute as a facet of the US island chain strategy that also includes the Japan–US alliance. The United States has even expressed its intent to shift some of its military assets from the first island chain to the second, including Guam, Oceania, and the Pacific islands. In May 2006, the United States and Japan reached an agreement to move 8,000 US Marines and their 9,000 affiliates from Okinawa to Guam (Yun, 2014). China has presumably also stretched out to the second island chain already.

Japan made an offer to South Korea to take another set of disputed islands – another issue of contention in the region – to the International Court of Justice. Interestingly, Japan has not made such an offer to China, knowing fully well China would not agree to such a proposal. China, in fact, does not accept there is any questionable sovereignty issue on the islands. Historically these have been always Chinese territories (Yi, 2014). On the other hand, the United States may have to provide military assistance to Japan in case there is a showdown over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. It was clearly pronounced by President Obama, in the form of a formal commitment in April 2014, that the US–Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security 'covers all territories under Japan's administration, including Senkaku Islands' (Resnick, 2014).

China is likely to go to any length to deal with Japan's alleged nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. China is also concerned about the revised 1978 Defense Guidelines that give mandate to Japan to provide assistance to the US military and extend the jurisdiction from the Far East to the Asia-Pacific. As part of its extension, Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea may, therefore, come within Japan's span of maneuver.

Japan's new Security law adds fuel to the fire in the sense that SDF can now come to the aid of the United States and other powers when subjected to armed attack, even if Japan is not under attack. Japan will now take up greater security responsibilities under the US–Japan alliance (Borah, 2015). Japan can now clearly come to the aid of the United States and its allies in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea

In order to keep its energy route secure and open – also a goal for the United States and Japan – China, seemingly, has remarkably modernized its navy and other components of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA is gradually emerging to meet the challenges that may emanate from the United States and Japan, apart from other claimant states to the South China Sea, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and the other smaller states of Southeast Asia. Meanwhile the United States military is repositioned and revitalized to ensure uninterrupted freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea that falls along its vital M-SLOC. The United States is seemingly challenged by a rising China – 'the South China Sea will be the strategic bellwether for determining the future of US leadership in the Asia-Pacific region' (Cronin and Kaplan, 2012: 7).

The South China Sea is a transit and an operating area, and a strategic maritime high- way for both China and the United States Pacific Command (PACOM). As mentioned, the Sea and the Malacca Strait link the Pacific Ocean with the Indian Ocean. Robert Kaplan dubs the Sea as the centre of maritime Eurasia – punctuated by the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar – and calls it the throat of global routes that join Southeast Asia with the Western Pacific. More than half of the world's annual merchant fleet tonnage passes through these choke points, and a third of all maritime traffic. Eighty percent of China's crude-oil imports, roughly two-thirds of South Korea's and nearly 60% of Japan's energy supplies pass through the Sea (Kaplan, 2011). China is seemingly compelled to control its own vital M-SLOCs that are subject to major disruption in the constricted Malacca Strait, and in other South China Sea choke points like Lombok, Makassar, and Sunda Straits. In fact, if the Malacca Strait is blocked just for a day, disruption in energy supplies might cause social unrest in China (Cronin and Kaplan, 2012: 12).

Strategically, from both the military and economic points of view, China has no choice but to turn to its submarines to retaliate for any nuclear attack. China needs to patrol the Pacific Ocean by nuclear-powered and nuclear-equipped submarines (SSBN) since its *JL-2* submarine ballistic missiles cannot reach the US mainland from the South China Sea. Chinese SSBNs need to enter the Pacific Ocean secretly or else US SSNs will keep on chasing them. China will also try to elbow out US naval operations from the South China Sea (Ohara, 2014). China is introducing its *Jin*-class submarines, outfitted with *JL-2*, in the South China Sea, which also provides China with second-strike nuclear capabilities.

Trailing this trend are the smaller powers, specially the Philippines and Vietnam, who are rearming, presumably beyond their own financial means, to meet the challenges that may emanate from China. In fact, such experiments are occasionally manifested in the form of limited skirmishes.

The South China Sea is rich in hydrocarbons, including oil and gas fields off China's Pearl River Delta and Hainan. There is a huge concentration of hydrocarbon resources in its southern parts that bring great economic advantage to Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and the Philippines. A US geological survey undertaken in 2010 estimates that there is potentially one billion barrels of oil and 145 trillion cubic feet of gas (Graham, 2014). This may raise the possibility of Chinese exploration and production (E&P) activity moving further south, thus raising the stakes of military maneuvers and stand-offs in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the smaller Southeast Asian countries. Their claims and China's claim within the nine dashed lines – an imaginary line, drawn by the KMT's pre-1949 mainland government, overlap.

China's claims are more based on historical facts – such claims are challenged by other claimant countries – rather than the United Nations legal recourses, although China is a signatory to UNCLOS. China's historical claims are seemingly substantiated by their records of maps or discoveries – of *Nanasha* (Spratly) and *Xisha* (Paracels)

Islands – during Han, Tang, Qing, and Ming Dynasties: the *Nansha* Islands were discovered during the Han dynasty (23–220 AD); the Tang dynasty Emperor (785–805 AD) included *Nansha* Islands in their maps; and during the Qing dynasty – in the early eighteenth Century – the Chinese government marked the *Nansha* Islands on the official maps.

The Cairo Declaration, Clause 8 of the Potsdam Declaration, gave explicit decision that all territories occupied by Japan should be restored back to China and this implied the *Nansha* Islands in the South China Sea. Japan occupied the South China Sea in 1939 (Wang, 2015). During the Ming dynasty, China was the sole maritime power when Admiral Zheng He set sail passing through '*Wan –sheng shih tang*' ((Paracels) and '*Shih-shing Shi-tang*' ((Spratlys) en-route to Vietnam, Malacca, India, and East Africa. Two American scholars Hungdah Chiu and Choon-ho Parkwrote in 1975 in the *Journal of Ocean Development and Law* mentions: 'There is no doubt that China discovered and used the Paracels for several hundred years before Vietnam began asserting its claims in 1802' (Li and Tat, 2014).

Despite such historical claims, China seemingly suffers from hesitation and indecision as to whether to use UNCLOS or non-UNCLOS logic to promote its maritime interests. The Sea is part of the 'Chinese Dream' that may be realized through peripheral diplomacy, and developing a Maritime Silk Road (MSR) through Southeast Asia to the Indian Ocean (Christoffersen, 2014).

However, there may be a kind of policy adjustment as articulated by Chinese General Zhang (2014) stating, 'China is primarily interested in the sovereignty over the islands and its adjoining waters in the South China Sea, not the entire space within the nine-dashed line.' His statement reflects maturity and diplomacy when he also states that China will never magnify and complicate the issues. It is, otherwise, deduced – and is also acceptable to the western diplomats – that China has room for flexibility and accommodation when China sees a win-win outcome in any negotiation as may be discernible in case of Taiwan issue.

Taiwan

Similar is the fait accompli for Taiwan. China is binding time in respect of Taiwan, by applying both carrot and stick policies. For the time being, it is trying economic integration with Taiwan. China is unlikely to give up its claim both *de jure* and *de facto.* China is steadfast to take recourse to military means if necessary. China may be willing to go for a loose confederation where Taiwan may even be allowed to maintain a kind of armed forces. Integrating Taiwan with the mainland China – similar to that of Hong Kong and Macau – and both of the Seas is the vital national interest of China (Karim, 2010: 382–5). That said, as Shambaugh concludes, China is still five to ten years away from mounting an all-out conventional assault, enforcing a naval blockade, and preventing US intervention. (Shambaugh, 2013: 280).

Interestingly, the United States, as a party to the 1943 Cairo Declaration, agreed to return the sovereignty of Taiwan to China but it backed out once it witnessed the

triumph of communism in different parts of Asia and in the Soviet Union, especially in mainland China.

The Americans thought Taiwan could be a vital link in the chain of containment in the periphery of Sino-Soviet bloc. Taiwan turned out to be a militarily important staging/strategic area. Taiwan provided a stronghold, which could be easily defended by the US forces, and from where effective intelligence and reconnaissance operations could be undertaken. Therefore, the military objectives overshadowed a seemingly genuine sovereignty issue. This military politics gained impetus, recently, as the strengthened Japan–US alliance has led to Japan's involvement in the Taiwan issue, which is ominous.

In 2005, the US–Japanese alliance identified Taiwan as its strategic objective, to which China reacted sharply by passing the Anti-secession Law and warned Japan of dire consequences. This alliance is likely to – should deterrence fail – work as a joint platform to respond to any contingency in the Taiwan Strait. Japan's uncalled-for interference in the Taiwan issue was also a trigger for widespread anti-Japanese protests in China in 2005. In 1996 and 1997, the United States and Japan revised their defense cooperation guidelines that also emphasized the Taiwan issue (Wu, 2005–6: 25). Targeting similar objectives, the United States is creating alignments/alliances/ententes with countries in the region such as India, Australia, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

India, Australia, Vietnam, and the Philippines

India continues to team with the United States, Japan, Australia, and even Indonesia and Vietnam. That said, Mahbubani (2014) suggests: India should behave like a 'great power', and not like a 'regional power' in the South Asian context. Robert Kaplan has openly invited India to counter-balance a rising China. Raja Mohan offers three clear-cut suggestions to India. First, to strengthen its national power; second, to deepen economic and security cooperation with the United States without becoming its formal ally; and, third, to reassure China that it would not be a party to any US plans to contain China (Mohan, 2014: 19).Things may not turn out to be as simple as suggested. China may not be reassured as the 'Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region', signed between India and the United States in 2014, brings India into a strong partnership with the United States in terms of maritime security, 'navigation and over-flights throughout the region specially in the South China Sea' (Ashraf, 2015). This may add fuel to the fire.

China is visualizing a strategic environment – with India also in focus – that includes not only trade and commerce, but also preponderance and power balancing. China – a strategic ally of Pakistan – declares *Jammu and Kashmir* as disputed territories. Official Chinese maps show *Jammu and Kashmir* outside India, and *Arunachal Pradesh* – China calls it Southern Tibet – as part of China, much to the consternation of India. In 2009, China demanded that the Dalai Lama be restrained from visiting the *Tawang* Buddhist monastery in *Arunachal Pradesh*, but the Dalai Lama insisted on going. China

has been sensitive to Dalai Lama's meetings with Indian leaders and the protests lodged by the exiled Tibetans against China's policies in Tibet (Dutta, 2011: 132–4).

Even Australia is out there to be an overt strategic partner of the United States as it has allowed permanent (rotational) stationing of the US marines and air force. Defense technology agreements between Australia and Japan may open up Australia's options. Australia may be tempted to get what Japan has to offer such as Japan's *Soryu*-class submarines. Japan is hopeful of striking a hefty deal – to the tune of US$16 billion – for the manufacture of submarines for Australia. Japan and Australia may now be called members of a quasi-alliance.

Australia, on its own, is in the process of manufacturing a number of submarines over the next few decades. There are even alignments – regular military drills are conducted with Japan, India, Australia, and Singapore and others – which allow them to remain militarily prepared to confront any eventuality. As already mentioned, the US rebalancing strategy aims to marshal resources in the Pacific Ocean in coordination and collaboration with its allies. Added to these, both Vietnam and the Philippines have entered into military collaboration with the United States to confront China over the South China Sea. China has asserted sovereignty over the recently created *Sansha* Prefecture covering the Spartlys, the Paracels, and Macclesfield Bank. Vietnam claims these are disputed. China has also deployed HD-981 armaments in the waters of the Paracels, in accordance with, as it justifies, international law and UNCLOS. China argues it has historical rights that predate UNCLOS to determine sovereignty as mentioned (Kausikan, 2015). The Vietnam navy is on its way to procure submarines and other sophisticated naval gadgets. There are speculations that the US navy is asking for a space in Vietnam's coast. During President Obama's recent visit to Vietnam, the United States has lifted the arms embargo that it imposed on Vietnam a few decades ago.

The US–Philippines alliance is perceived to be a deterrent to China's creeping assertiveness. Two US nuclear-armed submarines made port calls in Subic, and thousands of US troops with warships conducted military drills with the Philippine military, as a sequel to the naval stand-off between China and the Philippines in 2012 (Trajano, 2012). The United States has eschewed the idea of the establishment, or reestablishment, of permanent military bases in allied countries. To cover it up, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement concluded with the Philippines involves the rotation of US forces in and out of the existing military facilities in the host country (Sa and Resnick, 2015). So the necessity for permanent fixed bases is becoming redundant.

The Philippine navy is contemplating procuring submarines as a deterrent, keeping China as a potential threat in the South China Sea. The Philippines is even proposing to extend assistance to other smaller countries claiming sovereignty or sovereign rights in the South China Sea, for capacity building. Recently, it has taken the issue to the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), much to the consternation of China. Vietnam also followed suit. China opted out of ITLOS when it ratified

UNCLOS, implying it will continue to oppose such moves. There are speculations that things may improve somewhat after the newly elected president of Indonesia takes charge. Even Japan has entered into a strategic partnership with the Philippines and Vietnam. It offered capacity building assistance, conducted joint-training exercises, mainly involving the coast guards or the civilian maritime enforcement agencies.

China's Maritime- and- Land Silk Roads

China has 14 maritime neighbors and eight land-based neighbors. Officially, it follows a policy of building a strong maritime force. It is steadfast in safeguarding its maritime rights and interests. The high-profile strategic project that it recently launched is the MSR, which reflects China's determination to become a maritime power through an incremental strategy. President Xi is more committed to a long-term maritime strategy than his predecessors. His thrust areas are first, creating high-profile organizations, such as a state security committee, to take care of maritime policy and strategies; second, to upgrade naval and civil maritime law enforcement facilities to counter the US rebalancing strategy; third, to reframe issues related to the East and South China Seas, away from international law, more towards China's claim of historical rights; and, fourth, create China's good image through participating in international forums and multi-lateral exercises in the region (Yoon, 2014).

China has, as part of the project, embarked on a movement for more China–ASEAN maritime cooperation. It envisages cooperation with all countries in the form of more trade and people-to-people contacts, both by sea and land. This may encapsulate maritime consultancy, enforcement of law in the maritime regime, maritime economy, and maritime diplomacy. Maritime cooperation may be one of the hallmarks of China–ASEAN maritime cooperation, which may lead to the realization of the China–ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Forum (Tan, 2014). In the south, China has called for land connectivity between Kunming in China and Kolkata in India involving China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and India (BCIM). However, at present, it is in limbo, perhaps due to geopolitical complications. It aims to open an effective land corridor for mutual trade and people-to-people contact.

Similarly, the 'Irrawaddy Corridor', linking Kunming to ports in Myanmar, can help China transport oil and gas to the Yunnan province. The Karakoram Highway – already underway from Gwadar seaport in the Arabian Sea to Xinjiang province – links China and Pakistan primarily for energy security. Pakistan obtained an offer of 48 billion US dollars for energy and infrastructure development.

China has built east–west train lines connecting its cities, such as Urumqi and Kasghar to Xi'an, and the major coastal cities. This line has been extended to Moscow, developing Central Asia as an economic corridor, and then on to Duisburg (Germany) – thus creating the China–Europe railway line (Rana and Chia, 2014). Essentially, these land access corridors help China set up maritime bridgeheads and overcome the tyranny of geography, particularly for the hinterland areas that are far from the east coast of China.

Economic and nuclear interdependence

Despite the flashpoints and issues, there is economic interdependence between the nations of the Asia-Pacific. Economic interdependence between China and the United States is glaring to the extent that one tends to call it Mutually Assured Economic Destruction, similar to Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) in the nuclear field. That said, over the years US investment in China has increased to around US$50 billion and its exports to China have doubled in the last five years. Meanwhile US imports from China have grown to about US$425 billion in 2012. It clearly heralds a scenario that once US and Chinese economies are on par – due to US investments, Chinese exports, and its debts to the US – the balance is likely to tilt towards cooperation, interdependence, and sustainable competition (Patel, 2014: 9). The United States and China have deeply invested in each other's economic success, so they share a common interest in maintaining stability in Asia and the world and in ensuring steady flow of energy and trade (Clinton, 2014: 40). Even India and China have huge economic interdependence. Somewhat similar is the fait accompli for the Japanese–Chinese economies.

There seems a paradigmatic change to such an outcome as the US giants are thinking of outsourcing their product lines in the neighboring countries, such as in India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Complementariness between US and Chinese economies are on decline (Trigkas, 2015). Return on investment is higher for investments made in manufacturing or infrastructural development in the neighboring countries than in purchasing US government bonds. Therefore, the OBOR may make a difference to this interdependence syndrome. There are indications that this interdependence trend may lose its potency somewhat.

Reflections

China, seemingly, attempts to elbow out others – mainly the United States and Japan in the Western Pacific, if necessary by military means. It is true the other way round as well. Its non-confrontational assertiveness posture is seemingly a challenge to the US declared policy of rebalancing, and of late Japan's overt military standing. This clearly reflects China's resolve not to back down in the face of the US strategy of rebalancing; it was evident during the Scarborough Shoal incident with the Philippines; oil rig issue with Vietnam in May 2014; enforcing new fishing regulations in January 2014 that oblige foreign vessels to apply for permission before entering the South China Sea, including the contested areas in Vietnam and Philippines; and the military movement in the Senkakus/Diayou, including declaring in November 2013 an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea. China is likely to become more assertive across wider maritime areas while at the same time avoiding serious reactions and likely confrontations with the United States until its position in the East and South China Seas is stable (Yoon, 2014). US Pacific navy's FONOPs did not go unchallenged. One cannot even rule out the possibility of China taking recourse to nuclear weapons, should it be so necessary.

The Soviet Union challenged the United States in every nook and corner of the world during the Cold War when its economy was never more than half the size of that of the United States. The US economy may even become half the size of that of China by 2030 (Mahbubani, 2014). China could, therefore, outspend the US many times over. China seems determined to play its dollar diplomacy to counterbalance US diplomacy. The OBOR projects may be viewed as strategic moves in that direction. China may be on its way to making Asia an 'integrated and prosperous' region of the world. China is focusing on both the economic and military fronts. At this point in time, it is growing strong on the economic front while steadily sharpening its military machine. China is seemingly transiting faster than presumed.

As an upshot, China's military modernization is ostensibly geared to meet, if necessary, the potential objectives along the frontiers of Japan, Taiwan, India, and South and East China Seas. One may not see anything irregular if Chinese surveillance aircraft are seen patrolling the US Pacific islands or even the coastal areas of its mainland as the Soviets used to do during the Cold War. Russia is still doing so on a limited scale in the Mediterranean, and they are likely to team up with China anytime to conduct joint military drills.

As a reaction, the United States may have to go all out to contain this inexorable move towards power transition. The thesis is supported by the fact that the United States tends to hugely rearm itself and its allies' militaries, which is also true in the case of economic cooperation. Friends and allies of China exist almost on all sides. Present US maritime strategy assures 'All Domain Access', which also implies it is in continuing ascent; working with allies and partners in global network to secure stability and maritime security (Till, 2015).

China is wary of this, and as such, China is going for strategic alliance with Russia as mentioned. It also strives to improve relations with India, at least on the economic front. The recent visit of President Obama – two such visits during his tenure – to India has forged greater alignment between India and the United States, especially in nuclear cooperation. This is likely to trigger more nuclear collaboration – part of the action–reaction cycle – between China and Pakistan. It is unlikely there would be any such alignment between China and India. Power relational cycle – that continues to disturb the strategic stability – between China, India, and Pakistan is almost perennial and the cycle may turn cataclysmic at the slightest provocation.

The scenario may be viewed in another perspective like China's neighbors may come closer to it economically but militarily they may be more tilted towards the United States. This is, as such, called Asia's dilemma. This dilemma will in, all probability, continue to haunt Asia in the near future. This may not also be to the liking of the United States, and, therefore, the United States, ostensibly to counterbalance such economic tilt, floats the idea of a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This again is construed by China as containment by the United States – famously known as the Kennan theory during the Cold War. However, the containment policy of the United States in respect of the Soviet Union during the Cold War is out of context here.

There are also indications that ASEAN may be divided between TPP participants and non-participants, and the least developed countries may be left behind (Nogami, 2015). Economically, China is much more vibrant as already mentioned, and, as such, will continue to have an edge over the others, and thus a kind of authority to call the shots, at least as far as its smaller neighbors are concerned.

What is the worry – China presumably has been successful in driving a wedge between the smaller countries of ASEAN, thus putting at risk ASEAN's ability to reach an amicable solution to the South China Sea disputes? Even China tends not to recognize ASEAN as an entity when it comes to the South China Sea, although China and ASEAN signed a Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC) in 2002. Dr Surin Pitsuwan, former Secretary-General of ASEAN, makes no bones about accepting the fact that the South China Sea issue is a challenge for ASEAN, in bringing China on board for a long-term solution (Pitsuwan, 2014). Notwithstanding, China may budge somewhat to keep the claimant countries in the South China Sea in good humor, especially after it has launched its OBOR projects.

In fact, DoC in November 2002 was originally envisaged to be legally binding, but Malaysia and China avoided a legalistic slant. China still feels DoC has a moral force, if not strictly legal. Therefore, unless DoC is first implemented in letter and spirit, China may not be serious in signing a legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) in near future (Yi, 2014). China looks at the CoC differently from that of ASEAN. For ASEAN, CoC may bring significant political benefits, such as the precedent that maritime disputes can be resolved through negotiation. On the other hand, China may not like to limit its power in the region by entering into any binding treaty at this point in time (Vu and Phuong, 2014). This is also substantiated by Ian Storey, who argues China's propensity to delay substantive engagement on the CoC presumably reflects its judgment that it would not like to restrict its freedom of action in the South China Sea (Storey, 2014: 32).

To see things from another perspective, if Beijing takes a tougher stance on the East China Sea, especially over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the more likely Japan is to upgrade its military machine and further strengthen relations with the United States and other countries ringing China, for example Japan's support of the recently inked Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States and the Philippines in 2014. Brinkmanship in the South China Sea helps nobody. Having said this, in the case of armed conflict war breaking out, the United States may be confronted with a Hobson's choice. It can either stay out of this imbroglio, thus losing its credibility in the region, or face a nuclear-armed adversary over an issue that has marginal value to US interests (Resnick, 2014). Even Russia could be drawn into the fray. China and Russia have already conducted anti-piracy military drills in the Indian Ocean – in the Gulf of Aden – named the 2009 Peace Mission Exercises.

Given such complexities in the relations, skepticism and defiance may now dominate diplomatic narratives. Every step, by either the United States or China, whether positively or negatively intended, is going to be viewed obliquely. One of

the features of the 'pivot' policy of the US is: pursuing partnerships with Singapore, New Zealand, India, Vietnam, and again concomitantly fostering cooperative dialogue and consultation with China (Patel, 2014: 11). Such juxtaposition may not go well as common wisdom suggests. This wisdom is deeply rooted in history, national interests, strategic alignments, leadership races, balancing, and containment etc.

Chinese military modernization suggests China is interested in power projection, and a kind of aggrandizement. This may induce many of the Asia-Pacific militaries to upgrade their military capabilities to counterbalance China's rise. Today India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan are upgrading their military machines and the trend is likely to take an upward swing in the future. To cite a few examples – during the period covering 2000–13 – Malaysian defense expenditure doubled in real terms from US$2.4 billion to US$4.8 billion, Thailand's grew by 75% to reach US$5.6 billion, and Singapore's grew by nearly a quarter to US$9.1 billion (Bitzinger, 2015).

Notwithstanding such phenomenal rises, Vietnam and the Philippines presumably suffer from a security dilemma. Their dilemma is obvious as they have to confront a giant neighbor, China, almost daily, especially over the South China Sea, and alongside look for security protection from the United States. Vietnam and the Philippines, therefore, have to keep China happy, and at the same time rely on the United States for security protection. As usual, they are tilting militarily more towards the United States and Japan. Both Vietnam and the Philippines have done well – in an asymmetrical power relationship – in the sense that they are creating a new set of relations, or reviving older ones in order to ease geopolitical pressure. Such relationships may get entrenched unless China tones down its stance and activities in the South China Sea. China may now need to revisit its policy on the South China Sea, as stakes are high since the launching of the OBOR projects.

Southeast Asian nations may welcome Japan's return to the region, as there is a perception that most of the powers in the region tend to welcome the US strategy of rebalancing. The resultant impact is China's further military expansion that was originally bolstered by such a strategy. Such a posture may not bode well for Japan to get permanent membership in the UN Security Council unless there is consensus to reform the UN Security Council. However, there is going to be no let-up in Japan's pursuit of security politics and state-of-the-art military modernization.

Even the Indonesia-Australia frontier is no quieter. There is every possibility that the Sundra and Lambok Straits, as well as the maritime realm along Indonesia and Australia, may continue to be cluttered with submarines and other naval assets, including coast guards. Things could escalate when forces from opposite sides meet. Fear of hidden agendas for intelligence could even arise.

Moving from the traditional to the nuclear, there exits Mutually Assured Economic Destruction similar to Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) in the nuclear field. Liberal scholars tend to support the thesis that economic interdependence between China and the United States is likely to deter both sides from engaging in conflict. Realist

scholars, in contrast, contend that such economic interdependence may seemingly help China gain more economic power – that results in increased military modernization – which may stoke more belligerence between the two countries. This author feels there are signs that the economic interdependence between the United States and China may gradually fade away, which gives an ominous signal to an already volatile scenario. This said, the sense of global responsibility puts a kind of restraint on both the players.

Given that four of the powers, China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea are nuclear powers, other powers in East Asia, such as Japan and South Korea may become nuclear; Japan already has the technology. Northeast Asia therefore carries the potential to turn into a nuclearized zone. Things get even more complicated when Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have sophisticated anti-ballistic missile systems in their armories as part of extended deterrence provided by the United States. Such deterrence greatly undermines the concept of MAD and this may be quite destabilizing in the sense that China will go for more sophistication and refinement of its armaments, both nuclear and conventional.

Even the developments in South Asia or in the Bay of Bengal region may trigger China, India, the United States, and Japan to play high politics with no less intensity. In 2013, the Indian navy-led Milan Exercise in the Bay of Bengal drew a large number of participants. Such military drills in the Bay of Bengal are now a routine. This may be accentuated after the US Defense Secretary and Indian Defense Minister signed a landmark 10-year defence framework agreement on June 3, 2015 in New Delhi, highlighting the augmentation of defence cooperation between the two countries. This strategically important 10-year defence framework agreement envisages joint development and manufacture of defence equipment and technology including jet engines, aircraft carrier design and construction. The agreement also includes plans to cooperate in developing mobile solar energy power source, and also developing a lightweight protective suit that could be effective in chemical and biological hazard environments (Garamone, 2015). US policy-makers may even consider equipping India's carriers with the electromagnetic aircraft launch system (EMALS), and the US navy's E-2 C/D Hawkeye for airborne early warning and battle management system that ensures a combat advantage to India's navy relative to its adversaries (Gady, 2015). It is, reportedly, known that the United States has assured India of providing assistance and technology for the production of anti-submarine armaments. Such sophistication is good enough stimuli to activate action-reaction cycle.

There is, however, an encouraging trend: the Strategic and Engagement Dialogue (S&ED), government-to-government summit between the United States and China, also raised the issue of cyber security and missile defense. The United States is serious to discuss the issue of climate change with China. This signals better institutionalization of the relationship when such issues are discussed in bilateral or multilateral forums. Such dialogue can at least provide space for diplomacy to achieve its full potential. This vindicates the thesis that the United States is now seriously considering engaging with China on an equal footing, when transition is at play. To this end, China and the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 12 November

2014, outlining the rules of behavior for the safety of air and maritime encounters. This is definitely a way forward but it may not be able to address the two countries fundamental differences, and is unlikely to prevent future incidents (Valencia, 2014). However, the recent dialogue on security and economic issues, at the summit level, in Beijing in June 2016, is an encouraging initiative.

Thus said, China may be handicapped as its much-vaunted nationalism – Chinese Dream – may work as a double-edged weapon. If it fails to confront the geopolitical compulsions, it may add to its domestic repercussions. As a case in point, if the energy supply along the Malacca Strait is blocked even for a day, it may cause social unrest inside China as already stated. Also, if the relations between China and Japan worsen further, centered on any flashpoint or historical issue, populist nationalistic fervor may become rejuvenated in both the countries. China opposes the western concept of human rights, democracy, and unregulated markets, while, in contrast, it may see substance in building a strong state, a harmonious society, and stable and sustained economic growth. China has to have strategies to respond to the value diplomacy of the United States. Value diplomacy is a potent weapon to destabilize China both internally and on its periphery.

China's potent card is its nationalism, presumably replacing communism. It is the concept of nationalism that keeps China glued together internally. Its nationalism is more homogenous – some say Han chauvinism – as opposed to US 'melt-pot' nationalism which is heterogeneous in nature. It is rather difficult to predict the outburst of these forms of nationalism at crunch time. Again unregulated capitalism has done substantial harm to the US economy and society. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has to ensure egalitarianism to its burgeoning population scattered far and wide. Otherwise, popular resentment may disturb this nation-state – especially its nation building. That said, democratic waves are making their impact felt at least in its local politics.

Great power status brings with it great responsibility. Is China prepared to take on that increased role? Can China play the role of a 'responsible stakeholder', the term coined by an astute US diplomat Robert Zoellick, to help shape and dictate international order and global governance? 'Striking feature of US global leadership is, apart from possessing overwhelming military might, its relative success in taking the initiative for inculcating global norms and establishing global institutions in a wide-range of policy areas, such as free trade, international finance, free navigation, intellectual property rights, economic cooperation, climate change, health, education, and food. The experience of the United States reinforces the analysis that the basis of extending US power and influence throughout the world is the junction between global leadership and the international regime' (Lien *et al.*, 2014). This is going to be decisive for China. That said, China seemingly is gradually coming out of its isolationism and becoming more engaged in both regional and global governance. As a matter of fact, in 2005, the United States recognized China as a 'responsible stakeholder' (Yun, 2014).

Taking a cue from the above, the author wishes to draw the readers' attention to Kaufman's three viewpoints on China's involvement in international affairs and global

governance. 1: 'International system is harmful for China' – 'a substantial number of Chinese elites are not comfortable to engage substantially with the present international system.' 2: 'China can work within the current system' – 'such elites argue China is now in a position to successfully interact and compete with other strong nations.' 3: 'China can change the system' – 'China can now lead a new international system superior to the current one' (Kaufman, 2010: 12–23).

These theses are both time and context bound. This author feels China has already tackled the reticence as outlined in viewpoint 1, and the present context is markedly different. China has already embarked on viewpoint 2 and is playing an active role in different multilateral institutions, global governance, and diplomacy. China's OBOR strategy is an ambitious project and its ramifications, if successfully implemented, could be far-reaching. That said, China might not be able to reach to the expectation level of viewpoint 3 in the foreseeable future. China may now play its soft power more actively in order to win over more friends and allies in Asia. Just to highlight the thesis, Chinese the navy has escorted around 6,000 ships in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia in its anti-piracy drive, half of which were foreign ships (Zhou, 2015). Having said so, China is presently pre-occupied with regaining its lost stature that it lost during the 'Century of Humiliation' and, as such, China is changing and emerging rather faster than most of the projections.

Conclusion

Overall context and scenario in East Asia stimulate high politics that encapsulate the leadership race, power maximization, both offensive and defensive realism, action–reaction cycle, balancing, polarizations, arms race, containment, and so on. Inter-hegemonic races – if both the powers can afford and has the national aspiration – are a universal and historical phenomenon. That is even more true for any rising, aspiring, sensitive, and, to some extent, conservative power such as China. The United States and Japan are already there to play this race with its potent wherewithal. This is an inexorable move, which is seemingly irreversible.

That said, China's sense of insecurity could continue to spiral as it is surrounded on almost all sides by a collection of US allies – along with their strategic commitments – when China has few in the region. It is, therefore, in the process of teaming up with Russia. But when China feels it has enough power, this could lead to more decisiveness in regional and global affairs, and for its political and economic interests abroad to expand, especially in its surroundings. This is then going to vindicate the proposition that there is a probability of a hegemonic war breaking out, as hegemonic transition is at work now. This is linked to China–Japan and Japan–United States relations. Other powers such as India, Australia, South Korea, and Russia are also gradually being sucked into the fray as stated above.

China's non-confrontational assertive posture – as is generally perceived – is likely to challenge the US declared geopolitical policy of rebalancing, and, of late, Japan's overt military standing. As said, the US economy may even become half the size of that

of China by 2030. China can, therefore, outspend the US many times over unlike the former Soviet Union. China seems resolute to play its dollar diplomacy to offset US diplomacy. US diplomacy captures value diplomacy as well. Value diplomacy, to the Chinese, is more frightening.

China is also going full-steam with its military modernization. China's military modernization follows its huge economic growth, which is seemingly focused on objectives that straddle Japan, Taiwan, India, South and East China Seas. China's military modernization creates the perception that China is interested in power projection. Its power projection is very much evident in the South China Sea as its only aircraft carrier is now patrolling the waters of the Sea, in addition to many other state-of-the-art military gadgets. As a reaction, the United States is prepared to go all out to contain this inexorable goal of China to become a preponderant power. US naval forces in the Pacific are highly potent.

To see things from another perspective, any move of Beijing in the East China Sea, especially over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, is likely to push Japan to further upgrade its military machine, and strengthen its alliance relation with the United States and other countries ringing China. Japan has already expanded its role and assertiveness with the passage of a new security bill. This is equally true when it is viewed vice versa. Both China and Japan are likely to continue their acts of brinkmanship over the islands.

All such developments may induce many of the Asia-Pacific militaries to upgrade their military capabilities, presumably, to counterbalance China's rise. Today India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan are upgrading their military machines, and the trend is likely to take an upward swing in the near future. That said, smaller powers are wary of getting closer to either of the powers. So a kind of security dilemma – called the Asian Dilemma – is working here.

To add fuel to fire, Northeast Asia carries the potential to turn into a nuclearized zone. Things tend to get all the more complicated when Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have sophisticated anti-ballistic missile systems in their armories as part of an extended deterrence. Even in South Asia or in the Bay of Bengal region there are developments that may seemingly trigger China, India, the United States, and Japan to play high politics with no less intensity. China seemingly is gradually creeping towards the Indian Ocean. Military drills are now regular events in that part of the world, where India, China, and the United States are the key players. Such drills are purportedly meant to contain China.

Again to counterbalance China on economic and diplomatic fields, the United States launched the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and rebalancing strategies as mentioned. As a response, China makes efforts to have an edge over others, both economically and militarily, and thus assumes a kind of authority to call the shots, at least to its smaller neighbors.

As an option, Southeast Asian nations may welcome Japan's return to the region. It may be triggered by the fact that Japan acts as a balancer in the region. That said, in case of a war breaking out in East Asia, the United States might be confronted with

Hobson's choice. It can either stay out of the imbroglio, thus losing its credibility in the region or face a nuclear-armed adversary over an issue that has marginal value to US interests. In case of showdowns over the islands both in the South and East China Seas, probability of use of nuclear weapons may not be ruled out. That said, China is unlikely to compromise with Japan unless Japan's sincerity is visible to China for the resolution of the issues.

On the ASEAN front, for ASEAN, CoC may bring significant political benefits, such as there is precedence that maritime disputes can be resolved through negotiations. On the other hand, China may not want to limit its power in the region by entering into any binding treaty at this point in time.

As a sequel to the lingering of geopolitical issues, regional institutions may be marginalized when major powers have higher stakes and interests in the contested issues. Such institutions may then not be able to operate independently either of China or the United States. Such institutions are also becoming polarized. Added to it the smaller powers, suffering from security dilemmas, are in the process of upgrading their military arsenal much beyond their means. Major Powers are there to come to their support in such up-grades.

China can work within the current milieu as China now favors multilateral institutions or multilateralism. China is in a position to successfully interact and compete with other strong nations. China may now play its soft power more actively in order to win over more friends and allies in Asia.

In conclusion, what is frightening is the rise of populist nationalism coupled with geopolitics – mainly hovering around the flashpoints – that propels China or even Japan to resort to any means, including military, when the crunch time comes? A kind of egoistic feeling – as part of geopolitics and populist nationalism – may continue to strain the relations. This, in turn, is giving rise to alliance/alignment building where the United States is playing a pre-eminent role.

The net outcome of all these strategic developments is: China seems destined to play high politics in real earnest. The United States, on the other hand, is also steadfast in amassing hard power as part of its rebalancing strategy. It is also applying soft politics such as exporting democratic values to Asia. In the final analysis, high politics is the obvious choice for both the powers. A sustainable equilibrium idea may be introduced if both the United States and China can convince each other that they do not threaten each other's core interests, and that they are willing to accommodate each other's and the region's interests as a whole. Of late, it appears that both the powers appreciate such a fait accompli.

About the author

Lt General (retired) Prof. Mohd Aminul Karim is a visiting professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, and also a visiting senior research fellow at the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. He is a senior fellow (non-resident) at the International Institute for Non-Proliferation

Studies, USA. He worked as Chief of both National Defense College and Defense Services Command and Staff College of Bangladesh. He was a Visiting Scholar at the Mershon Centre for International Security Studies, Ohio State University, USA; a Professor at BRAC University, Dhaka; and an Adjunct Professor at University of Malaya. He has published articles in many journals, including for Cambridge, Elsevier, Springer, SAGE, Wiley Blackwell, Taylor and Francis, Routledge. His areas of interest include international relations, geopolitics, regional integration, organizational behavior.

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