



CHINA'S ROLE IN AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY: PARTNER, REGIONAL POWER, OR GREAT POWER RIVAL?

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In the American foreign and defense policy communities the conventional wisdom now holds that China will emerge as a true great power in the twenty-first century's early decades. As one commentator has argued, 'When historians one hundred years hence write about our time, they may well conclude that the most significant development was the emergence of a vigorous market economy—and army—in the most populous country in the world'.¹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that since the early 1990s, American policymakers and analysts have focused increasingly on the strategic implications of China's rise to great-power status.

The conventional wisdom holds that American thinking about China falls into two competing viewpoints. One school of thought—widespread in the Bush II administration, especially the Pentagon—views China as an increasingly salient threat to US interests in East Asia, and America's most likely future great power (or 'peer competitor') rival. Viewing China as already a strategic competitor, adherents of this viewpoint hold that Washington therefore must 'contain' China. Containment is primarily a geostrategic policy that would use American military power to rein in China's ambitions and compel Beijing to adhere to Washington's rules of the game on such issues as arms control, weapons proliferation, trade, and human rights. For some, containment means using US influence to compel Beijing to accede to the liberalization of China's domestic political system.

The other school of thought—with which the Clinton administration was identified—holds that by 'engaging' Beijing (and by enmeshing it in the global economy and various multilateral institutional frameworks) China's rise to great-power status can be managed, and Beijing can be induced to behave

¹ Nicholas Kristof, 'The Rise of China,' *Foreign Affairs* 72 (November/December 1993), p.59. Not all analysts agree that China will emerge as a peer competitor. For a summary of the debate, see Thomas J. Christensen, 'Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for US Security Policy,' *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp.5-9.

‘responsibly’ in international politics. Engagement is predicated on the belief that, as China’s contacts with the outside world multiply, its exposure to ‘Western’ (that is, American) political and cultural values will result in evolutionary political change within China. Thus, containment is a strategy that gives more emphasis to the traditional ‘hard power’ tools of statecraft (especially military power), while engagement places somewhat more weight on the ‘soft power’ of ideas and trade.² Containment holds that China must transform its domestic system ‘or else.’ Engagement holds that, over time, China will change. Containment stresses the exercise of American power. Engagement stresses the benefits to China of cooperating with the international community.

This chapter discusses the role of China in American grand strategy. When all is said and done, it is apparent that there is a mainstream consensus view about the future of the Sino-American relationship, and that within this consensus the differences between containers and engagers are of degree, not of kind. US policymakers and foreign policy analysts broadly agree that China’s emergence as a great power would threaten America’s post-Cold War hegemony. The debate in policy circles is not about whether China’s great-power emergence is inimical to American interests, but rather, what Washington should do about it. This chapter will first discuss American grand strategy and its theoretical underpinnings. Second, it will address the issue of whether China, indeed, is likely to emerge as a great power. Third, building on insights from international relations (IR) theory, it will show why strategic rivalry between the US and China is highly likely to occur. The chapter concludes with a prescription for an optimal US grand strategic posture toward a rising China.

THE INFLUENCE OF THEORY ON GRAND STRATEGY

The debate about America’s China policy focuses primarily on several salient issues. Is China becoming a great power and, if so, will it threaten American interests? If China is becoming a great power, can its great power emergence be managed? Will China’s growing ties to the global economy make Beijing more pliable? Will China become more democratic (and how much should the United States do to promote democracy in China)? From the standpoint of American security, does it make a difference whether China is democratic? The present debate about China’s role in American grand strategy

² The distinction between hard and soft power is set forth in Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

addresses these questions. This debate, however, cannot be understood properly without venturing into the seemingly treacherous waters of international relations theory.

I say this hesitantly. Anyone who has taught the subject knows that the mere mention of the words 'international relations theory' is likely to cause the audience's eyes to glaze over.' But this is not an exercise in discussing theory for theory's sake. On the contrary, policy debates inescapably have a theoretical dimension.³ The nexus between theory and policy is especially important with respect to grand strategy. After all, the very concept of grand strategy posits a relationship between theory and policy. As Posen puts it, grand strategy is a state's theory about how it best can cause security for itself.⁴ In making grand strategy, policymakers build on their assumptions about how the world works; that is, their models (even if only implicit) of international politics. Grand strategy is a set of cause-and-effect hypotheses postulating which policies are most likely to produce the strategic outcomes that policymakers desire. The success of a state's grand strategy depends, therefore, 'on whether the hypotheses [that policymakers] embrace are correct.'⁵ Hence, to evaluate a grand strategy, it is necessary understand the theoretical model(s) that underlies it. The China policy debate illustrates concretely how theory influences policy.

Realist Foundations Of American Grand Strategy

What scholars call realism is what most people think of when they hear the term 'power politics.' Realism's fundamental insight is that international politics is different from domestic politics. This is because, unlike domestic politics, in international relations there is no central authority (that is, a government) that can make and enforce rules of conduct on the system's participants. When realists talk about international politics being anarchic, they are referring to this lack of a governing authority. When they talk about international politics as a 'self-help' system, they simply mean that in a

³ As Stephen Van Evera observes, important policy questions usually do: 'It is often said that policy-prescriptive work is not theoretical. The opposite is true. All policy proposals rest on forecasts about the effects of policies. These forecasts rest in turn on implicit or explicit theoretical assumptions about the laws of social and political motion. Hence all evaluation of public policy requires the framing, and evaluation of theory, hence it is fundamentally theoretical.' Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p.91.

⁴ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.13.

⁵ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p.2.

condition of anarchy, each state is responsible for ensuring its own survival and well-being.

Of course, when a state acts to protect itself, its actions may have the paradoxical consequence of causing other states to feel that their security is impaired by the first state's behavior. The result is often the kind of spiral that we associate with arms races. This vicious circle, where the quest for security leads to increased insecurity, is what international relations theorists call the 'security dilemma'.⁶ The security dilemma explains a lot about both Beijing's, and Washington's, perceptions of the Sino-American relationship.

Offensive realism lies at the core of American grand strategy.⁷ It incorporates the following key assumptions about the nature of international politics. First, security in the international political system is scarce.⁸ Second, although all realists believe international politics is competitive, offensive realists (unlike defensive realists) believe that international politics is ineluctably conflictive—a harsh, unrelenting competition—because there are no offsetting factors tempering the great powers' struggle for power and security. Third, pervasive insecurity means that international politics approximates a zero-sum game—that is, a gain in relative power for one state is a loss of relative power for all the others, which means there isn't a whole lot of room for great-power cooperation.⁹ Fourth, in this hothouse environment, states are impelled to pursue offensive strategies by maximizing their power and influence at their rivals' expense.

Given the fact that, for great powers, international politics is a harsh, unrelenting struggle for survival, what grand strategy is prescribed by offensive realism? Simply put, offensive realists say great powers should maximize their power in order to attain security. As University of Chicago political scientist John J. Mearsheimer says, 'states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system.'¹⁰

⁶ On the security dilemma, see John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p.24. Also, see Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,' *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp.167-214.

⁷ Key works on offensive realism include, John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Eric J. Labs, 'Offensive Realism and Why States Expand Their Security Aims,' *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Summer 1997); Christopher Layne, 'The 'Poster Child for Offensive Realism: America as Global Hegemon,' *Security Studies*. Vol12. No. 2 (Fall 2003).

⁸ Mearsheimer, pp.7-13; Zakaria, *op.cit.*, p.13; Labs, *op.cit.*, pp.1, 7-8.

⁹ Mearsheimer, pp.12-13; Zakaria, *op.cit.*, pp.29-30; Labs, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹⁰ Mearsheimer, p.33. Also, see Tellis, *Drive to Domination*, pp.376-379, 381-382.

Offensive realists believe that because of the international system's structure, states can never settle for having 'just enough' power, because it is impossible for a state to know how much power really is sufficient to ensure its security. For great powers, the way to break out of the 'security dilemma' is to eliminate the competition, and become a hegemon. As offensive realists view things, 'the pursuit of power stops only when hegemony is achieved,' because for great powers 'the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power'.¹¹

Liberal Influences On American Grand Strategy

Although US grand strategy is shaped fundamentally by offensive realism, it also has an important component that is drawn from the liberal approach to IR theory (also known as Wilsonianism, or liberal internationalism). This is because American grand strategy is, as former Secretary of State James A. Baker III has put it, 'a complex mixture of political idealism and realism'.¹² Or, as the Bush II administration's 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* puts it, US grand strategy is 'based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests'.¹³ America's hegemonic grand strategy, in fact, is a '*realpolitik* plus' grand strategy—a grand strategy that defines US national interests in terms both of power and the promotion of US ideals—which is why it has been labeled as 'liberal realism', or 'national interest liberalism'.¹⁴ In American grand strategy, liberalism is muscular, not 'idealistic', and it postulates cause-and-effect linkages about how the United States can enhance its security. In making the case to incorporate liberal objectives into US grand strategy, liberals talk the language of realism.

The liberal and realist impulses in American grand strategy cannot be disentangled neatly from each other because there is a circular logic that ties them together. A liberal world order is thought to be conducive to US interests, and to bolster America's power and security; therefore, because the United States is very powerful in international politics, it should use its power to create a liberal world order so that it can obtain more security for itself. In

¹¹ Mearsheimer, pp.34, 35.

¹² James A. Baker, III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1982* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p.654.

¹³ United States Government, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington D.C., September 2002), p.1.

¹⁴ The term '*realpolitik* plus' is Robert Art's. See Robert J. Art, 'Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement,' *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p.80. The terms 'liberal realism,' and 'national interest liberalism,' are used, respectively by David Stiegerwald, *Wilsonian Idealism in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Tony Smith, 'Making the World Safe for Democracy,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Spring 1999), p.183.

fact, offensive realism leads precisely to the expectation that a hegemonic great power will use its preponderance to increase both its hard and soft power, and will view the two as mutually reinforcing.

What is the liberal approach to IR theory, and what are its key contentions? There are three main strands to liberal thought about international politics: political liberalism (also known as democratic peace theory), commercial liberalism, and liberal institutionalism. Political liberalism's central claim—and liberals are all over the ballpark here—is that liberal (or democratic) states do not (or seldom) fight each other, and do not (or seldom) use military threats in their relations with one another. Political liberalism also tracks with balance of threat theory by suggesting that other liberal states will not balance against a powerful (even hegemonic) liberal state, because they know it will not use its capabilities to harm them.¹⁵ Commercial liberalism (which today essentially is synonymous with the concepts of international economic interdependence, and 'globalization') holds that international commerce and interdependence lead to peace, or at least make war much less likely.¹⁶ Commercial liberalism's key claims have been neatly summarized by Arthur Stein:

War is costly, and exchange is beneficial. The prospects of commerce increase the costs associated with war, and the development of commerce creates a constituency to press the case for peace. As governments become more representative, the greater the degree to which those costs come to be included in political calculations and decisions and to be reflected in the political system.¹⁷

Liberal institutionalism holds that international institutions or regimes facilitate mutually advantageous cooperation that only can be attained when states voluntarily forego unilateral action in favor of multilateral collaboration. Thus, it is said, institutions temper the effects of anarchy in both economic

¹⁵ As Michael Doyle says, 'balancing denigrates the pacific union [among liberal democracies] and thus should be eschewed by liberals in their relations with each other.' Doyle, 'Politics and Grand Strategy,' p.35.

¹⁶ For an overview, see Stein, 'Economic Interdependence and International Cooperation,' pp.244-254. Stein concludes (p.290) that although economic exchange and interdependence do not ensure peace, they do make war less likely. The seminal work on interdependence is Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2ed., 1989).

¹⁷ Stein, 'Economic Interdependence and International Cooperation,' p.255. For a recent argument that democracy, free trade, and international economic interdependence are interrelated see Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.327-329.

and security relations among states. As Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane argue, 'Even in a world of independent states that are jealously guarding their sovereignty, room exists for new and better arrangements to achieve mutually satisfactory outcomes, in both terms of economic welfare and military security'.¹⁸ Liberalism's bottom line is that it posits the existence of a virtuous circle among democracy, an open international economy, and international institutions.

America's Hegemonic Grand Strategy

By eliminating America's only great power rival, the Soviet Union's collapse vaulted the United States into a position of uncontested global hegemony. Since the Cold War's end, the declared objective of US grand strategy has been to consolidate and extend American hegemony in the international system. This first became clear in March 1992, when the initial draft of the Pentagon's *Defense Planning Guidance (DPG)* for Fiscal Years 1994-1999 was leaked to the *New York Times*.¹⁹ The *DPG* made clear that the objective of US grand strategy henceforth would be to maintain America's preponderance by preventing the emergence of new great-power rivals. As the *DPG* stated, 'we must maintain the mechanisms for *detering potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role*'.²⁰ This strategy aimed not only at thwarting the emergence of the 'usual suspects' (a rising China, or a resurgent Russia), but also the rise to great-power status of America's principal Cold War allies, Germany and Japan. As the *DPG* said, 'We must account sufficiently for the interests of the large industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political or economic order'.²¹

¹⁸ Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane, 'Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy', David A. Baldwin ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.113. This claim also is made in Robert O. Keohane and Lisa Martin, 'The Promise of Institutional Theory', Michael Brown et al eds., *Theories of War and Peace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), pp.390-391. According to Keohane, states do not worry, per se, about the asymmetric distribution of gains from cooperation. Concern about relative gains arises only where there is a probability (not merely a possibility) that another will use its relative gains in a way that adversely affect's the state's interests. Where cooperation is institutionalized, the probability of asymmetric gains being so used is low. See also Robert O. Keohane, 'Institutionalist Theory and the Realist Challenge,' in David Baldwin *op.cit.* pp.275-277, 281-283.

¹⁹ Patrick E. Tyler, 'US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop,' *New York Times*, 8 March 1992, p.A1.

²⁰ 'Excerpts From Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Re-emergence of a New Rival',' *New York Times*, 8 March 1992, p.A14 (emphasis added).

²¹ *Ibid.*

The Clinton administration reiterated that the perpetuation of US hegemony was America's key grand strategic objective. The May 1997 *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)*, prepared by the Clinton administration, clearly embraced the geopolitical objective of maintaining American hegemony. The 1997 *QDR*'s underlying premise was that 'The United States is the world's only superpower today, and is expected to remain so throughout the 1997-2015 period'.²² Although not as blunt as the *DPG*, in strikingly similar language the 1997 *QDR* makes clear that the post-2015 objective of US grand strategy, and the military posture underpinning it, would be to keep things just as they were geopolitically: 'it is imperative that the United States maintain its military superiority in the face of evolving, as well as discontinuous, threats and challenges. Without such superiority, our ability to exert global leadership and to create international conditions conducive to the achievement of our national goals would be in doubt.'²³ In the near-term, the 1997 *QDR* specified that the goal of US grand strategy was to prevent 'the emergence of a hostile regional coalition or hegemon'.²⁴

In its fall 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States*, the Bush II administration followed the Bush I and Clinton administrations in making the maintenance of American global hegemony the key objective of US grand strategy. Hegemons are like monopolistic firms in the marketplace. Neither like competition, and both act strategically to prevent the emergence of rivals. The Bush II administration's 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, and its 2002 *National Security Strategy*, evidence a clear determination to ensure that America's global hegemony cannot be challenged. The 2001 *QDR* states that the United States seeks to maintain 'favorable power balances' in key regions like East Asia, the Persian Gulf and Europe.²⁵ The US will accomplish this

²² William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington D.C., May 1997), s.2.

²³ *Ibid.*, s.3. Like many bureaucratic documents, the *QDR* casts its policy recommendation as the sensible middle ground between two unacceptably extreme options. In the *QDR*, the first option rejected would focus US strategy and force structure on near term threats, 'while largely deferring preparations for the possibility of more demanding security challenges in the future.' The second unacceptable option is the reverse: sacrificing current capabilities to prepare for future threats from regional great powers or 'global peer competitors.' The path embraced by the *QDR* 'focuses on meeting *both* near and longer term challenges, reflecting the view the our position in the world does not afford us the opportunity to choose between the two.' The *QDR* thus clearly embraces the long-term objective of preventing the emergence of great power competitors. That is, it reaffirms the grand strategic objective of maintaining the US as the only great power over both the near-term, *and* the post-2015 long term.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

²⁵ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington D.C.: September 2001), pp.2, 4, 11, 15.

aim by maintaining overwhelming military superiority so that it 'can dissuade other countries from initiating future military competitions' against the US, and, if necessary, 'impose the will of the United States... on *any* adversaries.'²⁶ The 2002 *National Security Strategy* states even more clearly that the objective of American strategy is to prevent any other state from building up military capabilities in the hope of 'surpassing, *or even equaling*, the power of the United States'. In a break with the Bush I and Clinton administrations, however, the Bush II administration has incorporated the logic of 'anticipatory violence' into US grand strategy.²⁷ The 2002 *National Security Strategy*, and policy statements by senior administration officials (including President George W. Bush himself) have reserved to Washington the right to act preemptively, or preventively to cut down potential rivals before they become actual ones.²⁸

China's emergence as a great power would challenge directly America's global hegemony. American grand strategy clearly aims to hold down China. While acknowledging that China is a *regional* power, Washington conspicuously does not concede that China either is, or legitimately can aspire to be, a great power.²⁹ Discreetly warning China against challenging the United States militarily, the 2002 *National Security Strategy* warns Beijing that, 'In pursuing advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region, China is following an outdated path that, in the end, will hamper its own pursuit of national greatness. In time, China will find that social and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13, 15.

²⁷ It is perhaps more accurate to say that the Bush II administration, unlike its predecessors, *openly* incorporated preemption and preventive war into US grand strategy. The Clinton administration did prepare to launch a preemptive strike against North Korea during the 1994 crisis caused by discovery of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. See Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, 'Back to the Brink,' *Washington Post*, October, 20, 2002, p.B1. To the extent the Bush I administration's policy, in fact, was driven by concerns about Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's push to acquire nuclear weapons, and other WMD capabilities, the 1991 Persian Gulf War could be regarded as a preventive war.

²⁸ George W. Bush, 'Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy,' West Point, N.Y., June 1, 2002, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/print/20020601-3.html. The Bush II administration's *National Security Strategy* (*op.cit.* p.15) declares that: 'The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater the is the risk of inaction - and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.'

²⁹ For example, Defense Secretary William Cohen described China as an *Asian* power. William Cohen, 'Annual Bernard Brodie Lecture,' University of California, Los Angeles, October 28, 1998 (DoD web site).

political freedom is the only source of that greatness'.³⁰ Notwithstanding Beijing's views to the contrary, the US grand strategy rejects the notion that China has any justifiable basis for regarding the American military presence in East Asia as threatening to its interests.³¹ Washington aims to encourage China to become a 'responsible member of the international community'.³² 'Responsibility', however, is defined as Beijing's willingness to accept Washington's vision of a stable international order.³³ It also means China's domestic political liberalization, and its development as a free-market economy firmly anchored to the international economy. As the Bush II administration's 2002 *National Security Strategy* declares, 'America will encourage the advancement of democracy and economic openness' in China, 'because these are the best foundations for domestic stability and international order'.³⁴

In essence, then, American grand strategy requires China to accept US hegemony. The strategy is silent, however, on what the US will do if Beijing refuses to accept America's pre-eminence. On this point—notwithstanding that its emphasis on the pre-emptive and preventive use of military power has been debated mostly within the context of the US response to terrorist groups like al-Qaida and rogue states like Saddam Hussein's Iraq—the Bush II administration's strategy has obvious implications for potential peer competitors such as China.

WILL CHINA RISE?

The Fates of Hegemons

American grand strategists believe, to paraphrase the Duchess of Windsor, that the US can never be too rich, too powerful, or too well armed. And, at first blush, the natural reaction is to ask, 'what's wrong with that?' After all, if international politics is about power—and it is—then should not the United States seek to amass as much power as possible? Yet, although it may seem counter-intuitive, there is plenty of evidence that suggests that it is self-

³⁰ *National Security Strategy*, op.cit., p.27

³¹ Department of Defense, *The United States Security Strategy for the East-Asia Pacific Region 1998* (Washington D.C., 1998) p.30 .

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Clinton, 'Remarks on US-China Relations;' Cohen, 'Annual Bernard Brodie Lecture;' *The United States Security Strategy for the East-Asia Pacific Region 1998*. As National Security Adviser Berger puts it: 'Our interest lies in protecting our security while encouraging China to make the right choices'—especially choosing to allocate its resources to internal development rather than building up its military power. Berger, 'American Power.'

³⁴ *National Security Strategy*, op.cit.

defeating for a great power to become *too* powerful. Since the beginnings of the modern international system, there have been successive bids for hegemony: by the Habsburg Empire under Charles V, Spain under Philip II, France under Louis XIV and Napoleon, and Germany under Hitler (and, some historians would argue—though the point is contested—under Wilhelm II). Each of these hegemonic aspirants in turn was defeated by a counter-balancing coalition of states that feared the consequences for their security if a hegemonic aspirant succeeded in establishing its predominance over the international system. ‘Hegemonic empires,’ Henry Kissinger has observed, ‘almost automatically elicit universal resistance, which is why all such claimants sooner or later exhausted themselves’.³⁵

It is a pretty safe bet that the United States will not be able to escape the fates of previous contenders for hegemony. Consistent with the historical record, we should expect to see American power balanced either by the emergence of new great powers, and/or the formation of counter-hegemonic alliances directed against the United States.³⁶ For balancing to occur, of course, there must be other actors in the international system able to match US military, economic, and technological capabilities. To date, however, no rival to the US has emerged. And some US grand strategists believe no challenger will emerge in the future, because America’s economic and technological lead over potential great-power rivals is insurmountable.³⁷ Indeed, given the immense imbalance of power in America’s favor, ‘catching up is difficult.’³⁸ Clearly, in the short-term (the next decade) no state will emerge as America’s geopolitical peer. But over the next several decades one or more peer competitors is bound to emerge. This is where China comes into the equation.

Why New Great Powers Rise: The Imperatives of China’s Emergence

Great-power emergence results from the interlocking effects of differential growth rates, anarchy, and balancing. The process of great-power emergence is much more straightforward than this terminology might seem to imply. The term ‘differential growth rates’ is the specialist’s way of stating an important fact: the economic (and technological and military) power of states grows at

³⁵ Henry A. Kissinger, ‘The Long Shadow of Vietnam,’ *Newsweek*, May 1, 2000, p.50.

³⁶ For a detailed explanation of the theoretical and empirical foundations of this argument, see Christopher Layne, ‘The Unipolar Illusion. Why New Great Powers Will Rise,’ *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp.5-51.

³⁷ William C. Wohlforth, ‘The Stability of a Unipolar World,’ *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp.4-41.

³⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘Globalization and American Power,’ *The National Interest*, No. 59 (Spring 2000), p.54.

differential, not parallel, rates. A comparison of the United States and China provides a concrete example. From the mid-1980s through the late 1990s, China's economy grew at a rate in excess of 10 percent a year, while for most of that period America's economy grew at a 3-4 percent annual rate. In *relative* terms, therefore, China has been getting stronger while the United States has been declining.

Chinese policymakers are indeed sensitive to relative power issues and to the relationship between a state's economic strength and its political strength.³⁹ China's relative economic power is increasing rapidly: its phenomenal economic growth rate since the early 1980s has, by some measures, catapulted it into a position as the world's second-largest economy. If it can continue to sustain its near-double digit growth rates into the early decades of this century, it is projected to surpass the United States as the world's leading economy.⁴⁰ It is China's explosive growth that is fueling its rise as a great power. The difference between China's growth rates and America's means that the distribution of relative power is shifting, and that China will emerge as a challenger to US global hegemony. As the historian Paul Kennedy has shown, time and again relative 'economic shifts heralded the rise of new Great Powers which one day would have a decisive impact on the military territorial order'.⁴¹

Growth rate differentials, however, are only part of the story. The nature of the international system (its 'systemic structure') plays a major role in the process of great-power emergence. In a realist world, states that have the potential to become great powers have strong, security-driven, 'structural' incentives for doing so. To be able to protect themselves from others, states need to acquire the same kinds of capabilities that their rivals possess. The competitive nature of international politics spurs states to emulate the successful characteristics of their rivals, especially in the realms of military doctrine and technology. If others do well in developing effective instruments of competition, a state must respond in kind or face the consequences of falling behind. From this standpoint, it is to be expected that in crucial respects, great powers will look and act very much alike. It is also to be expected that this 'sameness effect' will impel states that are potential great

³⁹ See David Shambaugh, 'Growing Strong: China's Challenge to Asian Security,' *Survival* 36 (Summer 1994), p.44. Shambaugh notes that Chinese strategists have been strongly influenced by Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*.

⁴⁰ See for example Harry Harding, 'A Chinese Colossus?' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 18, September 1995, p.106. Harding estimates that China will surpass the United States and Japan as the world's largest economy by the twenty-first century's second decade

⁴¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), p.xxii.

powers actually to become great powers, and to acquire all the capabilities attendant to that status. States that fail to conform to this imperative will pay the price. As the noted realist Kenneth Waltz observes, 'In a self-help system, the possession of most but not all of the capabilities of a great power leaves a state vulnerable to others who have the instruments that the lesser state lacks'.⁴²

Another factor driving the process of great-power emergence is the tendency of states to 'balance' against others that are too strong or too threatening. Balancing is the term theorists use to describe a commonsensical aspect of states' behavior. When a state feels threatened because another is too powerful, it will try to offset the other's strength (either by building up its own military capabilities and/or by acquiring allies). The reason states balance is to correct a skewed distribution of relative power in the international system. The pressure to balance is especially strong in a unipolar system such as that which came into existence with the Soviet Union's collapse. Historical experience leads to the expectation that America's present hegemony should generate the rise of countervailing power in the form of new great powers. By definition, the distribution of relative power in a unipolar system is extremely unbalanced. Consequently, in a unipolar system, the structural pressures on potential great powers (like China) to increase their relative capabilities and become great powers should be overwhelming. If they do not acquire great-power capabilities, they may be exploited by the hegemon.

Of course, a potential great power's quest for security may trigger a classic security dilemma. China's great-power emergence is illustrative. China's rise to great-power status in the long term is a virtual certainty, given its actual and latent power capabilities. But China's rise is likely to occur sooner rather than later, because in a unipolar world China has very strong incentives to balance against US power. In this sense, the immediate impetus for China's rise is a defensive reaction to America's hegemonic position. At the same time, however, China's rise has made others, including the United States, apprehensive about their own security.

Can China Compete Militarily?

China today lacks the two strategic prerequisites of great-power status: power-projection capabilities and a high-tech military. At present, China is unable to project air and naval power adequate to back up its claims to the South China Sea and, notwithstanding its robust policy toward Taipei, it could

⁴² Kenneth Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics,' *International Security* 19 (Fall 1994), p.21.

not today invade Taiwan successfully. Moreover, China lags far behind the United States (and Japan, as well) in its capacity to field high-tech military forces. One need not accept the extravagant claims of some military analysts that a ‘revolution’ in military affairs is occurring to realize that modern technology has an important role in warfare. The Persian Gulf War, Kosovo, and the campaign against Afghanistan offered glimpses into the battlefield of the future, where sensors, computers, real-time communications, stealthy weapons platforms, and precision-guided munitions will dominate. Before it can compete militarily against the United States (or a rearmed Japan), China first must build up a modern aerospace and avionics industry (which it presently lacks), and develop the other infrastructural components needed to support a 21st century military (electronics, microchips, fiber-optics, ceramics, and robotics - to name but a few).

Over the long term, China is bound to aim for military parity with the United States. For sure, there are many American strategists who believe China is too far behind the US to entertain hope of ever catching up, and who also claim, as Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross maintain, that even trying to close the gap is futile because such a policy ‘risks stimulating its neighbors to accelerate their own pace of advance, potentially widening rather than narrowing the gap between China’s security needs and its military capabilities’. Arguments of this sort reflect a peculiar logic and are myopic historically. If this argument is correct, no late-emerging great power would ever attempt to catch up to the dominant great power in the system. Yet, for all the reasons already discussed, latecomers do try (and sometimes succeed) in challenging the system’s dominant power.⁴³ One can hardly imagine, for example, German or American policymakers in the late nineteenth century saying, ‘Oh well, we can never hope to match Britain strategically, and we will be less secure if we try, so we will just have to accept that England’s supremacy is a permanent fact of geopolitical life.’ Neither should we imagine that China as a great power would be content to accept US political dominance and military superiority—and if it did, in what meaningful sense could we even speak of China as being a great power?

The question of whether China can equal, or surpass, the United States in military effectiveness and capability is related to, but analytically distinct from,

⁴³ Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China’s Search for Security* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997). There is an important literature demonstrating that latecomers enjoy ‘the advantages of backwardness.’ The seminal work is Alexander Gerschenkron, *The Advantages of Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 1962).

the issue of whether China will attain great-power standing. Great-power status is a threshold that, when crossed, would mean that China will possess (at least to a considerable degree) the tangible resource inputs (in terms of finances, a defense industrial base, technology, and skilled personnel) needed to field a military force capable of competing against the United States. However, whether China actually would be able to use those resources effectively is another issue. As military historians Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth Watman have observed, 'military effectiveness is the process by which armed forces convert resources into fighting power.'⁴⁴ Hence the key question is whether China can convert its resources into effective and capable military power.

Although much has been written about the linked issues of military innovation, effectiveness, and competence, we still understand imperfectly their underlying causal factors. Why are some militaries innovative and others not? Why are some militaries effective and competent and others not? Moreover, beyond understanding causation, there is the issue of identifying signposts. What factors should we look for to determine whether a particular military is likely to be innovative, effective, or competent?

Analysts have employed three analytical approaches to answer these questions: societal, organizational, and realist. The societal perspective (which focuses on how the cohesiveness, or divisiveness, of society affects military effectiveness) and the organizational theory perspective (which identifies a number of pathologies that make it difficult for organizations to innovate effectively) have ambiguous implications with respect to the question of whether China will be able to innovate successfully in the military sphere. The realist perspective, however, suggests strongly that China, over time, will be able to close the military gap currently separating it from the United States. States emulate their rivals, especially militarily. As political scientist Colin Elman has observed, 'Perhaps more than in any other area, military technologies, strategies, and institutions are adopted because of perceptions of what other states are doing'.⁴⁵ Security expert Barry Posen has identified the external factors that correlate with a state's success in innovating militarily: the perception of a highly threatening international environment, and revisionist

⁴⁴ Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth Watman, 'The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,' in *Military Effectiveness, Volume I: The First World War*, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston: Unwin and Hyman, 1987), p.2.

⁴⁵ Colin Elman, 'Do Unto Others as They Would Unto You? The Internal and External Determinants of Military Practices' (Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, unpublished paper, May 1996), p.3.

ambitions.⁴⁶ China fits Posen's profile. It is a state that believes it lives in a high-threat environment, and it has irredentist goals in Taiwan and the South China Sea. The safest assumption for American policymakers is that during this century's early decades China will emerge as a military competitor of the United States.

Between Now and Then

Although the odds are strongly in favor of China reaching peer competitor status, this is not something that will occur overnight. It will take China some time to close the gap between itself and the United States with respect to material capabilities. An interesting question, therefore, is how, during its transition from potential to actual peer competitor, will a rising great power like China counter American hegemony? Given America's apparent inclination to use preventive/pre-emptive strategies to counter *future* threats, rising great powers will have good reason to view the transitional interval as one during which they will be vulnerable strategically. Rising great powers like China likely will be attracted to asymmetric strategies as a means of offsetting superior US military capabilities.

The terms 'asymmetric warfare,' 'asymmetric threats,' and 'asymmetric strategies,' have become buzzwords much favored by policymakers and analysts. A little bit of perspective is in order. When discussing asymmetric state responses to hegemony (in today's world, to US hegemony) it is first necessary to specify the level of analysis being discussed. At the grand strategic level, research on the initiation of asymmetric conflicts tells us that weaker powers often rationally pick fights with stronger powers for a number of reasons.⁴⁷ For example, such states may calculate that although the overall material distribution of power is adverse to them, they can still hope to prevail by using clever strategies (for example, pursuing a 'limited aims' strategy), and because the 'balance of resolve' favors them. The balance of resolve reflects asymmetries in motivation: if the stakes are greater for the weaker power, it may be prepared to take greater risks, and pay higher costs than a defender who regards the stakes as less than vital to its own security interests.⁴⁸ Similarly,

⁴⁶ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: Britain, France, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁴⁷ The key work is T.V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Great Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ In his classic study, Andrew Mack demonstrates that weaker powers often count on favorable asymmetries in motivation to offset an unfavorable asymmetry in material capabilities. Specifically, weaker powers often calculate that if the stakes in the conflict are vital to itself but peripheral to a more powerful defender, domestic political factors ultimately

weaker powers will try to develop methods of war-fighting that neutralize the advantages (material and/or qualitative) enjoyed by a stronger adversary. At the operational and tactical levels, asymmetric responses by others to a hegemon may be manifested in the weaker power's choice of weapons systems, operational doctrine, and tactics. Of course, there is nothing novel about asymmetric responses, which are as old as war itself. If its strategists are smart, a weaker power in an asymmetric contest will not attempt to slug it out with a stronger foe. As Edward Luttwak has noted, the essence of strategy always has been the ability to identify, and exploit, the opponent's political, operational, and tactical vulnerabilities.⁴⁹

Short of using nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons, a state like China which possibly is striving for, but has not yet attained, great-power status can employ other asymmetric means to offset superior US capabilities.⁵⁰ For example, because American forces depend significantly on basing facilities provided by allies in key regions, a weaker adversary like China might use ballistic missiles, and/or special operations forces to deny the US access to these facilities in the event of conflict, or to at least disrupt US force deployments.⁵¹ Similarly, although unable to match the United States in key leading-edge military technologies (command, control, communications, real-time reconnaissance and surveillance), an emerging China that still is a non-peer competitor might acquire low-cost technologies and information-warfare capabilities that could disable the satellites and computers upon which the American military depends for its battlefield superiority. In sum, even if, in the short term, others lack the capability to 'balance' against American hegemony in the traditional sense, the very fact of US preponderance gives them strong incentives to develop strategies, weapons, and doctrines that will enable them to offset American capabilities. Indeed, this is exactly what Beijing seems to be doing. Unable as yet to go toe-to-toe with the US in a

will constrain the stronger power from incurring high costs to defeat the weaker power. See Andrew Mack, 'Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,' *World Politics*, Vol. 27 (January 1975), pp.175-200.

⁴⁹ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p.16.

⁵⁰ For an analysis of how a China that failed to achieve peer competitor status might nonetheless prevail (or perceive that it could prevail) in an asymmetric conflict with the United States fought over the fate of Taiwan, see Thomas Christensen, 'Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for US Security Policy', *International Security* (Spring 2001).

⁵¹ For a discussion of the possible asymmetric use of ballistic and cruise missiles to hinder US ability to project power into East Asia, see Paul J. Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

great-power war, China is concentrating its military buildup on the kinds of capabilities—air power, cruise and ballistic missiles, diesel submarines—it would need to prevail in a showdown with the United States over Taiwan.⁵² In the longer term, the very fact of US global preponderance is certain to spur China's emergence as a true peer competitor.

CONTENDING WITH AN EMERGING CHINA: AMERICAN STRATEGY

As realist theory suggests, security concerns are driving China's economic modernization. Chinese leaders understand the security dilemma (that is, so long as China is weak, it is vulnerable to the US) and hold an essentially realist conception of international politics. Beijing views an American-dominated unipolar world as inherently threatening. China is therefore committed to 'balancing' against preponderant American power (by building up its own capabilities) and favors a multipolar system (that is, a system where there is more than a single great power) in which US influence would be diminished.

Historical experience suggests that the emergence of new great powers usually has a destabilizing effect on international politics. Or, in plain English, conflict is more likely during eras when new great powers are emerging, because it is very difficult to reconcile the competing interests of the rising new great power and the established, status quo, great powers (or, in today's world, the one and only great power). Whether China's rise to great-power status will prove disruptive is, of course, one of the crucial questions analysts must answer as they attempt to peer into the future. American grand strategy harbors the hope that economic interdependence and domestic political liberalization will tame China so that its great-power emergence can be successfully and peacefully accommodated. But these hopes are bound to prove illusory.

Economic Interdependence

In US policy circles, a frequently heard argument is that as China becomes increasingly tied to the international economy, its 'interdependence' with others will constrain it from taking political actions that could disrupt its vital connection to foreign markets and capital, and to high-technology imports from the United States, Japan, and Western Europe. This claim was made time and again by the Clinton administration and its supporters in the debate about whether the US should extend permanent normal trade relations to

⁵² Craig S. Smith, 'China Reshaping Military to Toughen Its Muscle in the Region,' *New York Times*, October 16, 2002.

China, and support Beijing's accession to the World Trade Organization. 'Interdependence' is another way of saying that trade is a tie that binds states to follow peaceful, cooperative foreign policies. Why should this be the case (or, as political scientists say, what is the 'causal logic' underlying this proposition)? That is, what is it specifically about interdependence that purportedly causes peace?

Several causal logics underpin the 'interdependence leads to peace' argument. One is that as their prosperity comes to be ever more tightly bound to the global economy, states simply cannot afford the disruption of trade that would result from war. Another is the claim that in today's technology and information-oriented global economy, trade, not conquest, is the most efficient road to achieving national wealth. Many American policymakers subscribe strongly to the belief that China will be a cooperative actor in the international system because its economic modernization requires its integration into the global economy and, as it becomes more interdependent with the outside world, it will find that interdependence has created a web of common interests with states that otherwise might be geopolitical rivals.

The 'interdependence leads to peace' argument, however, is inherently suspect. After all, Europe never was more interdependent (economically, and intellectually and culturally, as well) than it was on the eve of the First World War. Obviously, the prospect of forgoing the economic gains of trade did not stop Europe's great powers from fighting a prolonged and devastating war. Implicit in the 'interdependence leads to peace' argument is the notion that statesmen think like accountants; but they do not. Calculations of possible economic gain or loss are seldom the determining factor when policymakers decide on war or peace. And even if they were, there is little reason to believe that economic interdependence would be a deterrent to war. This is because even for the losers, the negative economic consequences of modern great-power wars have been of short duration.

China's recent conduct suggests further reason to be skeptical of the 'interdependence leads to peace' argument: Beijing is not acting as the theory predicts. As political scientist Gerald Segal pointed out, China's behavior in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea in the 1990s indicates that it is not constrained by fears that its muscular foreign policy will adversely affect its overseas trade.⁵³ As China becomes more powerful, it increasingly appears willing to risk short-term costs to its interests in economic interdependence in

⁵³ Gerald Segal, 'The 'Constraint' of China,' *International Security*, Vol. 20 (Spring 1996), pp.107-35.

order to pursue its geostrategic interests. Indeed, as China becomes wealthier and stronger militarily, it is (as realist theory would predict) becoming more assertive in its external behavior.

Democratic Peace

The so-called democratic peace theory is also invoked to support the proposition that an impending Sino-American rivalry can be ameliorated. Among those US strategists who have taken a hard line on China, the view has taken hold that conflict with China is inevitable—unless China becomes a democracy. In part, this is because China's external ambitions are seen as being in conflict with America's interests. However, China's 'aggressiveness' is ascribed by US hard-liners, in large measure, to the nature of its domestic political system. Simply put, the containers view China as a 'bad' state.

This Wilsonian viewpoint is quintessentially American. The time-tested American remedy for a 'bad' state is to transform it into a 'good' state—that is, into a democracy. The Wilsonian outlook incorporates the so-called 'democratic peace theory,' which asserts that democracies never go to war with fellow democracies. Hence, expanding the 'democratic zone of peace' is deemed a vital American security interest. Yet the democratic peace theory is singularly devoid of intellectual merit.⁵⁴

There are two (not mutually exclusive) causal explanations of the democratic peace: first, in democracies, statesmen are restrained from going to war by the public, upon which the human and economic costs of war fall; and second, in their external relations with one another, democratic states are governed by the same norms of peaceful dispute resolution that apply to their domestic politics. Neither causal logic holds up under scrutiny. Democracies have often gone to war enthusiastically (Britain and France in 1914, the United States in 1898). And there is an ample historical record demonstrating that, where vital national interests have been at stake, democratic states routinely have practiced big-stick, realpolitik diplomacy against other democracies (including threats to use force). Moreover, contrary to the democratic peace theory's central tenet, democratic states *have* gone to war with each other.⁵⁵

It matters little, however, whether the democratic peace theory is true. What matters is that most of the American foreign policy community *believes* it is true. And this belief has consequences. After all, if a nondemocratic state (in

⁵⁴ For a critique of the democratic peace theory, see Christopher Layne, 'Kant or Cant: They Myth of the Democratic Peace,' *International Security* (Fall 1994).

⁵⁵ See Christopher Layne, 'Shell Games, Shallow Gains and the Democratic Peace,' *International History Review* (December 2001).

this case, China) is likely to be a trouble-maker and challenge the United States, the obvious solution to the problem is for the United States to cause that state to metamorphose into a democracy: 'The ultimate American objective on China is to induce China to behave more responsibly and to become more democratic.' The impulse to be a 'crusader state,' however, invariably has pushed the United States down the road of foreign policy misadventure, and will do so if Washington pushes its Wilsonian agenda on Beijing.

Averting Sino-American Conflict I: Avoid the Wilsonian Trap

From a realist perspective, one must conclude that a US-China great-power competition is highly likely in the future. Great-power rivalry is the norm in international politics for several reasons: anarchy among states generates legitimate security fears that require and justify self-help; reasons of state predominate over conventional interpersonal standards of behavior; and power relationships predominate over internal political characteristics in determining state behavior.

But if rivalry is certain, war is not. Indeed, peace may be the most causally over-determined phenomenon in international politics. In this respect, realism is a theory about both war and peace. Because of the anarchic, self-help nature of international politics, realists believe that wars can occur and sometimes do. At the same time, many realists would argue (as would I) that war, especially great-power war, is rare. This is because for the great powers, war itself is a deterrent, albeit an imperfect one. Because of the uncertainties it entails, the decision to go to war is always (as Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg put it in 1914) 'a leap into the dark.' For this reason, realists would expect most great-power crises to be resolved short of war. Indeed, because war is such a risky and uncertain business, realists would expect states to be extremely cautious in going to war. Whether the United States and China find themselves on the brink of war in the future will be determined as much by Washington's policies as by Beijing's.

There are two elements of its grand strategy toward China that Washington needs to reconsider, and they are linked: trade, and domestic liberalization. Trade is an issue where almost all parties in the current debate about America's China policy have gotten it wrong. Engagement (based on economic interdependence and free trade) will neither constrain China to behave 'responsibly' nor lead to an evolutionary transformation of China's domestic system (certainly not in any policy-relevant time span). Unfettered free trade, however, will simply accelerate the pace of China's great-power emergence: the more China becomes linked to the global economy, the more rapidly it is able to grow in both absolute and relative economic power. To be

sure, short of preventive war, there is nothing the United States can do to prevent China from eventually emerging as a great power. Thus, there would be no point to simply ceasing economic relations with China. But the United States must be careful about how—and why—it trades with Beijing.

American trade with China should be driven by strategic, not market, considerations. If Washington cannot prevent China's rise to great-power status, it nonetheless does have some control over the pace of China's great-power emergence. A US trade policy that helps accelerate this process is shortsighted and contrary to America's strategic interests. The United States should aim to reduce China's export surplus to deprive it of hard-currency reserves that Beijing will use to import high technology (which it will use to modernize its military). Washington should also tightly regulate the direct outflow of critical advanced technology from the United States to China in the form of licensing, offset, or joint-venture agreements. Individual corporations may have an interest in penetrating the Chinese market, but there is no American interest, for example, in permitting US firms to facilitate China's development of an advanced aerospace industry.

On the other hand, those US hard-liners who want to use Sino-American trade as a bludgeon to compel Beijing to accept America's dictates with respect to human rights and democratization also have got it wrong: while American leverage is too limited to have any significant positive effects, Washington's attempts to transform China domestically will inflame Sino-American relations. American attempts to 'export' democracy to China are especially shortsighted and dangerous. America's values are not universally accepted as a model to be emulated, least of all by China. Moreover, America's attempts to universalize its liberal values and institutions are more likely to be regarded by others as an exercise of hegemonic power rather than as an act of unselfish altruism. Indeed, it is commonplace to observe that the United States invokes its values as a means of legitimizing its predominant role in international politics. As the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington has observed, an American policy based on the universal applicability of liberal democratic ideology is the 'ideology of the West for confrontation with non-Western cultures'.⁵⁶

American efforts to force China to adhere to American norms and values, in fact, have sharpened Sino-American tensions. Chinese president Jiang

⁵⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p.66.

Zemin's October 1995 remarks to the UN Security Council are illustrative. In his speech, he observed that 'certain big powers, often under the cover of freedom, democracy and human rights, set out to encroach upon the sovereignty of other countries, interfere in their internal affairs and undermine their national unity and ethnic harmony.'⁵⁷ The attempt to export democracy will cause a geopolitical backlash by strengthening China's resolve to resist US hegemony. Kenneth Waltz perceptively observes why this is so:

The powerful state may, and the United States does, think of itself as acting for the sake of peace, justice, and well-being in the world. But these terms will be defined to the liking of the powerful, which may conflict with the preferences and the interests of others. In international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it. With benign intent, the United States has behaved, and until its power is brought into a semblance of balance, will continue to behave in ways that annoy and threaten others.⁵⁸

The truth is that China is not going to become a democracy—certainly not any time soon—and the United States lacks the power to compel China to transform its domestic political system.

American efforts to do so can only serve to heighten tensions between Washington and Beijing. Chinese leaders fear, and oppose, American hegemony, and they regard America's attempts to foist its political and cultural values on China as a specific manifestation of American 'hegemonism'.

Averting Sino-American Conflict II: Taiwan

Taiwan is a powder-keg issue. China remains committed to national reunification, yet Taiwan is moving perceptibly toward independence. Almost certainly, Beijing would regard a Taiwanese declaration of independence as a *casus belli*. It is unclear how the United States would respond to a China-Taiwan conflict, although President George W. Bush created a stir in 2001 when he declared the United States would intervene militarily in the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. For sure, however, it is safe to predict that there would be strong domestic political pressure in favor of American intervention. Beyond the arguments that Chinese military action against Taiwan would undermine US interests in a stable world order and constitute unacceptable 'aggression,' ideological antipathy toward China and support for a democratizing Taiwan would be powerful incentives for American intervention.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Alison Mitchell, 'Meager Progress as China Leader and Clinton Meet,' *New York Times*, October 25, 1995.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Waltz, 'America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective,' *PS* (December 1991), p.669.

American strategists advance three reasons why the United States should defend Taiwan: strategic; reputational; and ideological. Strategically, Taiwan must be defended to protect the trade routes in the South China Sea. What this argument overlooks, however, is that these shipping routes are of vital Japanese interest but are relatively unimportant for the United States. The reputational argument is that unless the United States defends Taiwan from China, other states will lose confidence in America's security guarantees and acquiesce in China's regional hegemony. This argument overlooks two points: first, once China becomes a great power, the credibility of US commitments in East Asia inevitably will diminish; and, second, regardless of what the United States does with respect to Taiwan, other East Asian states will balance against a threatening China in self-defense, rather than jump on its bandwagon. The ideological argument, already mentioned, is that the United States cannot afford to stand on the sidelines while a fellow democracy is conquered by an authoritarian great power.

During the 1996 tensions between Taiwan and China, leading members of the foreign-policy community argued that US interests required support for Taiwan because the real issue at stake was the need to defend a democratic state menaced by a totalitarian one. A leading Asian affairs expert argued, for example, that the issue between China and Taiwan had nothing to do with the latter's political status as a province of mainland China. Rather, it was claimed, the United States had a compelling interest in defending Taiwanese democracy and preserving it as a political model for Beijing to adopt (presumably because a democratic China, from an American perspective, would be a more tractable state):

The United States must recognize that it has a fundamental interest in promoting Chinese democracy, and in protecting its sole example in Taiwan. Thus, we must warn China in no uncertain terms that we will not sit idly by if Taiwanese democracy is threatened, encourage our allies to make similar declarations, and continue to back up our words with a show of American naval power.⁵⁹

Arguments that the United States must be prepared to defend Taiwan from Chinese invasion overlook three points. First, for nearly a quarter century, the United States has recognized that Taiwan is a Chinese province, not an independent state. Second, America's European and Asian allies have no interest in picking a quarrel with China over Taiwan's fate. If Washington goes to the mat with Beijing over Taiwan, it almost certainly will do so alone. (Given its unilateralist bent, however, the prospect of fighting China without

⁵⁹ Christopher J. Sigur, 'Why Taiwan Scares China,' *New York Times*, March 19, 1996.

allies might not be of much concern to the Bush II administration.) Third, by defending Taiwan, the United States runs the risk of armed confrontation with China.

In the short term, a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is unlikely, and the United States would have little to fear from a military clash with China. Both of these conditions, however, are likely to change in coming years. Looking down the road a decade or two, it would be a geopolitical act of folly for the United States to risk war with China for the purpose of defending democracy in Taiwan. The issue at stake simply would not justify the risks and costs of doing so. Indeed, regardless of the rationale invoked, the contention that the United States should risk conflict to prevent Beijing from using force to achieve reunification with Taiwan amounts to nothing more than a veiled argument for a declining America to fight a 'preventive' war against a rising China. Here, the embrace of pre-emptive and preventive military strategies by the Bush II administration raises obvious questions. If US hard-liners believe that preventive war is a viable option for coping with a rising China, instead of using the Taiwan issue as a fig-leaf, they should say so openly so that the merits of this strategy can be debated.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD AN OFFSHORE BALANCING STRATEGY IN EAST ASIA?

Any realist worth his salt would agree that the rise of a new great power is reason for concern. However, while concern is prudent, panic is not. China is in the process of emerging as a great power. But it has a considerable distance to travel before it gets there—and it is conceivable (even if not likely) that it will not get there. China's ability to attain great-power status hinges primarily on two considerations: economic growth, and the domestic political situation. On the first point, China only needs to grow at a seven to eight percent annual rate over the next ten to twenty years to surpass the United States as the world's largest economy. All things being equal, these growth rates appear feasible, even probable. However, all things are not equal, which leads to a second set of considerations that pertain to China's domestic cohesion. There has been much speculation that China's drive to great-power status may fail because of domestic internal developments. Civil unrest stemming from failed political liberalization, or the centrifugal effect of regional autonomy undermining central government control of the nation is the most frequently mentioned internal threats to China's great-power emergence. Although these possibilities cannot be discounted, it nevertheless would appear that China is unlikely to succumb either to domestic political upheaval or to the kind of

disintegration that could lead to a collapse of central governmental authority. Thus China's rise to great-power status probably will not be sidetracked by internal political developments.

So what should the United States do about China? If the US persists with its current hegemonic grand strategy, sooner or later, the odds of a Sino-American conflict are pretty high. Current American strategy thus commits the United States to maintaining the geopolitical status quo in East Asia, a status quo that reflects America's hegemonic power and interests. America's interest in preserving the status quo, however, is bound to clash with the ambitions of a rising China. As a great power, China no doubt would have its own ideas about how East Asia's political and security order should be organized. Unless US and Chinese interests can be accommodated, the potential for future tension—or worse—exists. Moreover, the very fact of American hegemony, as I have argued, is bound to produce a geopolitical backlash—with China in the vanguard—in the form of counter-hegemonic balancing. At the same time, the United States cannot be completely indifferent to China's rise, either.

The United States could accomplish the important goals of containing China, while yet avoiding direct conflict with Beijing, by abandoning its hegemonic grand strategy in favor of an offshore balancing grand strategy combined with a "spheres of influence" diplomacy. Throughout history great powers have been able to accommodate each other's conflicting interests despite ideological differences and the fact that they seldom regard each other as friends. Among modern international history's great powers, only the United States seems unable to accept the fact that great powers must live in a world with others who neither like them nor share their values. The belief that America must universalize its institutions and values in order to be secure has had dreadful consequences in the past. The issue of Taiwan illustrates that this mindset may lead to disaster again in the future.

The key component of a new geopolitical approach by the United States would be offshore balancing.⁶⁰ Instead of trying to stop the emergence of new great powers, an offshore balancing grand strategy would recognize the inevitability of their emergence, and turn this to America's advantage. Rather than fearing multipolarity, as does the present US strategy of hegemony, offshore balancing would embrace it. An offshore balancing strategy would

⁶⁰ On offshore balancing, see Christopher Layne, 'From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy,' *International Security*, Vol. 19 (Summer 1997). For a discussion of how offshore balancing could work in East Asia, see Christopher Layne, 'Less Is More,' *The National Interest*, No. 43 (Spring 1996).

allow for the other great powers to build up their military capabilities, and to provide for their own and regional security. The United States would rely on the dynamics of a multipolar balance of power to check any other power from becoming overly ambitious and threatening. In East Asia, China would be contained not by the US, but by Russia, Japan, India, and Korea. In this respect, offshore balancing is a grand strategy based on *burden-shifting*, not *burden-sharing* (or what realists call 'buck-passing'). In contrast to the effect of its hegemonic strategy, which attracts the strategic attention of other states to the United States, an offshore balancing strategy would deflect those concerns away to the US, and redirect them to the rivals others confront in their own neighborhoods.

To be sure, the United States would need to experience a conceptual revolution in grand strategy to adopt an offshore balancing posture with respect to East Asia. It would need to abandon the illusion that American hegemony can be maintained (and that multipolarity can be prevented). It would need to abandon many of the ideological pretensions that underlie America's view of its world role. And American policymakers would need to rethink their stance on important specific issues, notably including Japan's emergence as a great power, the role that economic interdependence plays in driving American security commitments, and the US commitment to Taiwan. If the United States is to shift its grand strategy away from hegemony—which it must do to minimize the odds of an eventual collision with China—it must take to heart the injunction of Walter Lippmann that it must forsake the temptations of hegemony in favor of more respectful and natural relations with other great powers:

A mature great power will make measured and limited use of its power. It will eschew the theory of a global and universal duty, which not only commits it to unending wars of interventions, but intoxicates its thinking with the illusion that it is a crusader for righteousness... I am in favor of learning to behave like a great power, of getting rid of globalism, which would not only entangle us everywhere, but is based on the totally vain notion that if we do not set the world in order, no matter what the price, we cannot live in the world safely... In the real world, we shall have to learn to live as a great power which defends itself and makes its way among the other great powers.