

## **Reimagining China and Asia**

### Reimagining the International Environment: Part II

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*This is the second of three lectures on the changing international political, economic, and military environment after the Pax Americana. The first considered changes in the pattern of relations between great and middle-ranking powers. The third will address the changes underway in the Middle East.*

Seventeen years ago, the turn of the 21st century marked a phase change in global geopolitics and economics. The age of Euro-American global dominance that began with Vasco da Gama and Columbus five centuries before is well on the way to ending, if it is not already over. China's national resurgence is the most recent phase in a half-millennium-long contention between great powers for politico-military control of areas under historic Chinese and Indian influence as well as China and India themselves.

Meanwhile, the two-century-old global infatuation with American aspirations for a more moral political order has faded. The Trump administration has replaced previously complacent American assumptions of global supremacy with a whining narrative of victimization by exploitative foreigners. U.S. dominance of the international state system is expiring-- a process accelerated by the new administration's determination to unilaterally disarm U.S. diplomacy. This raises the question of what, if anything, will replace U.S. and Western leadership of global governance.



There is no reason -- other than linear thinking and a lack of imagination -- to assume that another civilization or country must inevitably succeed the North Atlantic or the United States in achieving global military primacy or imposing its political and economic norms and systems on the rest of the world. But, if one does, the most likely candidates are India and China. Neither is well suited to the role. Both lack the messianic zeal to impose their values on others that is the hallmark of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. Historically, their international influence has rested on their ability to awe others, beguile them with displays of wealth, fascinate them culturally, and inspire them to seek to emulate Indian or Chinese civilization. Neither has habitually relied for its prestige on the use of military power beyond its frontiers. On its face, the common American assumption that either China or India must now do so is an instance of "mirror-imaging," projecting one's own presuppositions and behavioral patterns onto others.

India's population is about to surpass China's, but its economy is less than one-fifth as large. It is the paramount power in its region but, despite historical cultural influence in a wider arena, has little reach beyond it. It has great potential to take a larger role in global governance but, unlike China, it has yet to articulate a strategic concept for the transformation of either its sub-region or the broader Eurasian landmass.

For the time being, therefore it makes sense to focus on China, rather than India, as the key agent of change in Asia. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping [邓小平] led China in abandoning dogmatism and adopting an eclectic, pragmatic approach to rebuilding Chinese wealth and power. The result was three decades of Chinese emulation of many aspects of the U.S. economic model. This gratified Americans and greatly benefitted Chinese. But in 2008, Wall Street's vultures came home to roost in a financial crisis and worldwide recession. This discredited the vaunted "Washington consensus" on how countries should organize their socioeconomic systems. China's three-decade-long veneration of the U.S. model came to an effective end. It began a search for symmetry in its relations with America to reflect its *de facto* economic parity and growing diplomatic clout both in Asia and on the world stage.



In February 2012, President Xi Jinping [习近平] formally enshrined China's search for coequal status with the United States in a call for a "[\*new type of great power relations\*](#)." Beijing saw this as a way to get Washington to work with it to define rules for a Sino-American relationship based on recognition of interdependence, mutual deference to each other's interests, and the setting aside of disagreements to facilitate a search for common ground on global and regional issues. The American policy establishment viewed the concept as an alarming Chinese attempt to undermine – if not overthrow – U.S. primacy in the Asia-Pacific.

China sought "face." The United States judged it would be demeaning to provide it and declined to explore doing so. In the ensuing dialogue of the deaf, whatever opportunity the Chinese proposal might have offered to define principles for long-term cooperation between the United States and China was lost. Diplomatic paralysis set in. The two sides made no effort to find a formula for peaceful coexistence. Instead, they stepped up their strategic rivalry, which found expression in escalating military confrontation in and over China's near seas.

The absence of any Sino-American understanding about how best to manage the shifting balances of economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific has not halted the erosion of U.S. politico-economic primacy in the region. It has simply left these balances to take their own course. Their steady shift in favor of China coincides with its growing wealth and power. It also reflects America distraction by wars and alliance management challenges in multiple regions far from the United States. China is not so distracted, and it is on its home ground.

China and the United States have now entered a bilateral arms race. The naval warfare arm of the People's Liberation Army (the PLA Navy or "PLAN") has come to boast nearly 500 ships of various classes, dwarfing – in numbers if not in combat power – the roughly 170 vessels the U.S. Navy can call upon in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleets. The PLAN is both increasing its numerical advantage and narrowing the gap between its war-fighting capabilities in the Western Pacific and those of the United States. So are the Chinese air and rocket forces. The result is a progressive reduction in the longstanding American military supremacy in areas near China. No one



currently forecasts a reversal of this shift toward greater capacity by China to fend off U.S. military pressure or attack.

China's growing weight as well as doubts about the staying power of the United States, exacerbated by White House rhetoric, have caused China's neighbors, including longstanding U.S. allies, to begin to reposition themselves. They are all looking for ways to adjust to evolving strategic realities. They want to retain as much autonomy as possible, avoid antagonizing their powerful Chinese neighbor, and offset the likely continuing retreat of U.S. influence in the region both by building up their own defense capabilities and seeking new security partnerships.

A few examples tell the tale. Last year, under President Duterte, the Philippines turned its back on America, reached out to China, and sought to establish a connection to Japan independent of Tokyo's alliance with Washington. Japan is developing military capabilities that can either support the United States or allow it to act autonomously, as Tokyo chooses. To counter China on a more independent basis, Japan is working toward rapprochement with Russia and security and intelligence partnerships with India and Vietnam.

The region's most astute judges of pecking orders and power balances and its least remorseful bandwagoners, the Thai, have left their American perch and are tightrope-walking somewhere between China and America. Malaysia has begun a campaign to strengthen its ties to China. Some others, like Cambodia and Laos, have moved firmly into the Chinese orbit. Australia is considering how best to cope with the probable future deference of still more Asian countries to China. Other wobbles are clearly in prospect.

All this movement is taking place in a region of 4.4 billion people in which most supply chains converge in China, and which is growing much faster than the world average. America's abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) left China in the chair as pan-Asian negotiations seek to thrash out new rules for trade and investment through a proposed "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership." RCEP is a multilateral agreement whose terms none of



its members can dictate. The rules governing trade and investment in the Indo-Pacific will not be written by China, but by committees in which Australia, India, Japan, and south Korea as well as ASEAN all have a say. But, inasmuch as TPP's stated purpose was to keep America first by enabling it rather than China to write such rules for Asia, it is ironic that China will now lead the rule-drafting process. The United States has excluded itself from any direct role in whatever China and other Asians now come up with.

And RCEP is far from the only such game underway in the Indo-Pacific without input from the United States. China is an active participant in almost every gathering in Asia, while America is often unrepresented or excluded. The Trump administration's massive budget cuts to the non-military foreign-affairs functions of the U.S. government promise to deepen the decline in American influence in the region as well as globally.

As China's economic centrality to the Asia-Pacific economies has grown, a distinctive Chinese style of coercive diplomacy has emerged to complement the manner in which China uses force. Those seeking to cope with rising Chinese power need to study and understand this.

Take economic issues first. Unlike most other countries, Beijing habitually applies economic sanctions without announcing, confirming, or denying them. It sets no specific conditions for ending them. This allows China's leaders to adjust or end its coercive measures without being held to account for their results or the lack thereof. The imprecision of Chinese demands leaves the target of these measures to guess what it must do end them. This puts the onus for a solution on the victim of Chinese pressure and sometimes leads to factions within it negotiating among themselves rather than with China about what might satisfy Beijing.

On occasion, China has gone beyond economic measures and applied trumped up charges to take foreign corporate representatives hostage, while denying any connection between their detention and the existence of tensions over trade. (The only effective constraint on such abuses has been China's willingness to subject itself to World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute resolution

procedures. Will it continue to do so if the United States exempts itself from these procedures as senior officials of the Trump administration suggest it may?)

Chinese sanctions are usually designed to affect the other side on a hugely disproportionate basis, presumably on the theory that overkill will speed victory. They seldom involve restrictions on Chinese exports.<sup>1</sup> Typically, they curtail Chinese imports, sometimes by abusing inspection for standards and phytosanitary purposes, sometimes by informal guidance to importers, and sometimes by encouraging consumer boycotts organized through social media.

For example, in 2000, after south Korea curbed garlic imports from China, it banned the import of Korean cell phones and polyethylene goods. In 2001, China applied import quotas to Japanese automobiles and air conditioners in response to Japanese restrictions on Chinese mushrooms and straw for tatami mats. (Both disputes were resolved on terms favorable to China.)

China has also used economic coercion in politico-military disputes. In 2012, the maiden attempt by the Philippine Navy to enforce exclusive Philippines jurisdiction in the atoll at Scarborough Shoal [黄岩岛] led to China closing it to Filipino fishermen. China then impounded bananas, pineapples, and other fruit from the Philippines and suspended travel by Chinese tourists to the Philippines. In late 2016, the Philippines reached a broad accommodation with China that temporarily set aside the two countries' territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

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<sup>1</sup>An exception was a 2010 Chinese ban on exports of rare earths. China then accounted for 97 percent of the production of these 17 elements, giving it an effective global monopoly. Exports were mostly managed by Japanese trading companies. Rare earths are essential to the worldwide electronics industry, much of which is centered in Japan. The Chinese ban was partially motivated by a desire to curb illegal mining and smuggling activities but had the added advantage of penalizing Japan at a time when the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands was becoming acute. By 2012, the ban had become a set of reduced export quotas. In 2014, in a case brought by the United States, the WTO ruled against China, which then dropped the quotas.

China is currently putting heavy pressure on some businesses in south Korea to drive home its objections to the deployment to Korea of a U.S. ballistic missile defense system. The system has a radar that China believes will degrade its nuclear deterrent capabilities, enabling the United States to intimidate it in future. China's exploitation of its close ties to the Korean economy for political purposes may be a dry run for a future campaign to compel Taiwan to negotiate a resolution of its unsettled relationship with the rest of China.<sup>2</sup>

China also displays a unique style in its uses of force. The PRC first applied its military power abroad in Korea. It has since done so against the rival Chinese regime in Taiwan and against India, the Soviet Union, south Vietnam, and Soviet-backed Vietnamese empire-building in Indochina. Lately, while fortifying the rocks and reefs it occupies, it has used paramilitary forces – in the form of its Coast Guard – to oppose Southeast Asian and Japanese claims to desert islands and fishing grounds in the South and East China Seas.

Sometimes China uses force or shows of force simply to underscore the fact that an issue is in dispute. Examples include the once-every-other-day bombardment of Quemoy [金門] offshore Fujian Province from 1958 through 1978, the firing of missiles into targets near the Taiwanese cities of Keelung [基隆] and Kaohsiung [高雄] in 1995 and '96, and the current naval jockeying with Japan to refute Tokyo's claim that its administrative control of the Senkaku [钓鱼] Islands is undisputed.

When China has launched what it has euphemistically labeled “defensive counterattacks,” it has often achieved surprise despite having offered strategic warning that its adversaries' objectionable behavior was about to evoke a strong response. Examples include China's mauling of the US X Corps at Chosin Reservoir [长津湖] as it drove toward the Yalu in north Korea in November 1950, the PLA's rout of the Indian Army in October-November 1962, and various incidents in the seven-month undeclared war along the Sino-Soviet frontier in 1969. In

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<sup>2</sup> <http://chasfreeman.net/taiwan-into-the-endgame/>

1979, Vietnam took China seriously and was ready when it attacked. By contrast, despite the well-established pattern of China making good on its threats, Washington was surprised when China's response to the provocative visit of President Lee Teng-hui [李登輝] to the United States in 1995 was not just verbal, but kinetic.<sup>3</sup>

Chinese warnings should clearly be taken seriously. But Chinese aggressiveness, whether economic or military, should not be overestimated. China tends to act with prudence, upon warning, not rashly. It adheres to limited objectives, limited means, and limited time scales. On the other hand, it is characteristically determined, once the die is cast, to invest whatever level of effort is required to achieve its objectives. China has been notably careful to avoid “mission creep” in the wake of success. It has never moved the political goalposts upon military victory. There is no evidence that its ambitions are open-ended or unbridled. Quite the contrary.

In the economic sphere, China has settled its trade disputes with others either bilaterally or through litigation at the WTO. It has remained focused on specific issues and not sought to extract extraneous concessions from its trading partners. It sticks to its original objectives. It does not move the goalposts. It is willing to talk.

In the military domain, China has evidenced a similar pattern of strategic discipline. It showed great patience in its long wait for a negotiated rather than forcible return of Hong Kong and Macau to its sovereignty. It has been willing to make generous concessions to resolve border disputes peacefully with its neighbors. It has done so with all except India (which will not itself compromise) and maritime claimants who have declined to lend legitimacy to China's claims by agreeing to negotiate with it). Even when China goes to war, it keeps channels of communication open. As numerous examples attest, it is careful not to overreach.

Thus, China's objective in Korea in 1950 was to prevent the deployment of hostile forces on its border. When it achieved this goal, it dug in, more or less along the original dividing line

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1998-07-01/preventing-war-taiwan-strait-restraining-taiwan-and-beijing>





between north and south Korea of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Beijing's objective in its 1962 border war with India was to compel New Delhi to address its offer of an exchange of Indian recognition of Chinese claims in Ladakh for Chinese recognition of Indian claims in NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh). Once the PLA enforced China's claims in Ladakh, Beijing renewed its offer to trade claims with India. China had imposed by force precisely the deal it had offered to reach peacefully. The PLA retreated behind the original line of control in NEFA. (India preferred to continue the dispute rather than settle it under duress.) In 1979, China's war with Vietnam was directed at teaching the Vietnamese that they would be unable to live with the consequences of attempting to build an empire to China's southwest in alliance with China's Soviet enemy. Once this lesson had been imparted, China stood down.

China's wars in Korea, India, and Vietnam illustrate its habit of setting clear political objectives for its uses of force, even if it does not announce their specifics. Once the Chinese have begun to pursue these objectives, they persevere until they achieve them, however great the sacrifices required. This was the case with China's enormously costly intervention in Korea. It was also the case in its 1979 war with Vietnam. The PLA's bloody encounter with Vietnamese infantry – then the world's best – was far more costly than Beijing had expected. But the PLA carried on until it had made the politico-military point the Politburo had assigned it to make. Vietnam dutifully knocked off its empire building.

Given these patterns of Chinese behavior, China's size, its regional preeminence prior to the arrival of Western imperialism, and its newly demonstrated willingness to defend its interests as it sees them, China's neighbors view it with apprehension. They see it as difficult and sometimes overbearing without necessarily meaning to be. But China does not threaten either their independence or their identity. Unlike Western powers, it is famously indifferent to the way its diplomatic or business partners organize or conduct their internal affairs. Chinese have no apparent ideology to export and do not seem to regret this. They do not insist that others conform to Chinese norms before accepting them as legitimate members of their international relationship networks [关系网]. On the other hand, as is the case with cross-cultural

communication everywhere, understanding and respecting Chinese norms eases intercourse with them.

China's growing power allows it to bully others if it wishes to do so. Sometimes it does. But its inclination to do this is restrained by its having internalized the Westphalian fiction of the sovereign equality of states and having harmonized this fiction with the concept of “face,” the key norm of Chinese society. “Face” is self-regard born of the apparent esteem of one’s peers. It is sustained by elaborate courtesy and mutual expressions of respect, often transparently feigned rather than sincere. “Face” and deference to the sovereign equality of states have melded in the Chinese mind. China makes a fetish of avoiding interference in the internal affairs of other states, even its ingeniously obnoxious neighbor, north Korea.

In its foreign relations, China confers face by ostentatiously lavishing the same formal hospitality and official attention on ministates as on great powers. It gains face and is conciliated by the willingness of foreigners – especially powerful foreigners – to defer to it. When their deference, like that of President Nixon in 1972, manifestly belies their superior power, China’s gain in “face” can enable it to compromise in ways it otherwise could not without feeling demeaned.

The United Nations, which enshrines the legal principle of sovereign equality in its General Assembly but pragmatically acknowledges the reality of a hierarchy of power in its Security Council, suits Chinese psychology well. This helps to explain why China has become a prime defender of the UN Charter. Beijing’s proposed “new type of great power relations” can be read as an attempt to gain agreement to a “face-based” global order consistent with the UN Charter.

The 2012 Chinese offer to work with America toward a new order in world affairs came in the context of a palpable shift in the balances of power between China, the United States, and Chinese neighbors like India, Japan, and Korea -- all of which now have formidable economies and military capabilities. These shifts in power balances are driven mainly by economic factors. They will continue to take place, regardless of American lack of accommodation or resistance to



them. The only question is whether the concomitant adjustments in relations between state actors in the region will be gradual or abrupt, accomplished by mutual accommodation or engineered by armed conflict over Taiwan or some other territorial issue.

The notion that the United States can forever dominate China's periphery and its near seas is still an article of faith in Washington. It has steadily diminishing credibility in Asia. America's power is visibly declining not just in relation to China but also to the increasingly self-reliant allies and friends of the United States in the region. These trends give every sign of accelerating. Increased U.S. defense spending will not alter or reverse them.

Sino-American rivalry -- political, economic, and military -- seems destined to intensify. China can and will easily match defense budget plus-ups by the United States. Despite much shadowboxing by the U.S. armed forces, American military primacy in the Western Pacific will gradually waste away. Both the costs of U.S. trans-Pacific engagement and the risks of armed conflict will rise. The states of the region will hedge. They will either draw closer to Beijing, cleave to Washington, or -- more likely -- try to get out of the middle between Chinese and Americans. For the most part, they will not repudiate their alliances with America. Why give up something for nothing? But they will rely less on the United States and act more independently of it.

China's role in both regional and global governance will grow, even if the United States recovers from its current diplomatic anorexia and wallflowerism. Some sort of regional economic order centered on China is clearly emerging. While America plays solitaire, China is becoming a leader in the evolution of trans-Pacific institutions. Beijing's "belt and road" initiative is in the process of connecting Europe, the Middle East, Russia, Central, South, and Southeast Asia to China in a pan-Eurasian community of sorts. This is a grouping that has the potential to completely overshadow the United States globally later this century.

The world before us is manifestly one in which America can no longer get by on its muscle. It



must live by its wits. It may well be that the Department of State and related agencies, as well as the United States Foreign Service, are poorly adapted to meeting the challenges of the emerging world and Asian regional orders. It does not follow that the answer is to dismiss the diplomats, ignore the spies, shut the door, stock up on weaponry, and look for military solutions to non-military problems. That is the opposite of statecraft. It is a waste of taxpayer dollars as well as international opportunities for America. And it is dangerous.

Fortunately, despite the present schizoaffective disorder in Washington, there is every reason to be optimistic about the emerging order in the Asia-Pacific. As China's paramount leader Xi Jinping once remarked, the Pacific Ocean is "wide enough" to accommodate peaceful interaction between China and the United States as well as other great regional powers like India, Indonesia, and Japan. As power diffuses more widely and balances of power in the Indo-Pacific become more complex, middle-ranking powers like Australia, Korea, Pakistan, and Vietnam will have room to maneuver in relation to their larger and more powerful neighbors.

The regional order will no longer be managed primarily by the United States. But this is no reason to expect that any other great power, including China, will dominate it. Unless the United States and China act in such a way as to contrive a different result, Asia's politics are more likely to continue to be driven by economic rather than military dynamics.

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China has also used economic coercion in politico-military disputes. In 2012, the maiden attempt by the Philippine Navy to enforce exclusive Philippines jurisdiction in the atoll at Scarborough Shoal [黄岩岛] led to China closing it to Filipino fishermen. China then impounded bananas, pineapples, and other fruit from the Philippines and suspended travel by Chinese tourists to the Philippines. In late 2016, the Philippines reached a broad accommodation with China that temporarily set aside the two countries' territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Also in late 2016, China suspended loan negotiations and blocked truck traffic to punish Mongolia for allowing the Dalai Lama to visit. Mongolia agreed not to do so again.

China is currently putting heavy pressure on some businesses in south Korea to drive home its objections to the deployment to Korea of a U.S. ballistic missile defense system. The system has a radar that China believes will degrade its nuclear deterrent capabilities, enabling the United States to intimidate it in future. China's exploitation of its close ties to the Korean economy for political purposes may be a dry run for a future campaign to compel Taiwan to negotiate a resolution of its unsettled relationship with the rest of China.<sup>5</sup>

China also displays a unique style in its uses of force. The PRC first applied its military power abroad in Korea. It has since done so against the rival Chinese regime in Taiwan and against India, the Soviet Union, south Vietnam, and Soviet-backed Vietnamese empire-building in Indochina. Lately, while fortifying the rocks and reefs it occupies, it has used paramilitary forces – in the form of its Coast Guard – to oppose Southeast Asian and Japanese claims to desert islands and fishing grounds in the South and East China Seas.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://chasfreeman.net/taiwan-into-the-endgame/>

Sometimes China uses force or shows of force simply to underscore the fact that an issue is in dispute. Examples include the once-every-other-day bombardment of Quemoy [金門] offshore Fujian Province from 1958 through 1978, the firing of missiles into targets near the Taiwanese cities of Keelung [基隆] and Kaohsiung [高雄] in 1995 and '96, and the current naval jockeying with Japan to refute Tokyo's claim that its administrative control of the Senkaku [钓鱼] Islands is undisputed.

When China has launched what it has euphemistically labeled “defensive counterattacks,” it has often achieved surprise despite having offered strategic warning that its adversaries' objectionable behavior was about to evoke a strong response. Examples include China's mauling of the US X Corps at Chosin Reservoir [长津湖] as it drove toward the Yalu in north Korea in November 1950, the PLA's rout of the Indian Army in October-November 1962, and various incidents in the seven-month undeclared war along the Sino-Soviet frontier in 1969. In 1979, Vietnam took China seriously and was ready when it attacked. By contrast, despite the well-established pattern of China making good on its threats, Washington was surprised when China's response to the provocative visit of President Lee Teng-hui [李登輝] to the United States in 1995 was not just verbal, but kinetic.<sup>6</sup>

Chinese warnings should clearly be taken seriously. But Chinese aggressiveness, whether economic or military, should not be overestimated. China tends to act with prudence, upon warning, not rashly. It adheres to limited objectives, limited means, and limited time scales. On the other hand, it is characteristically determined, once the die is cast, to invest whatever level of effort is required to achieve its objectives. China has been notably careful to avoid “mission creep” in the wake of success. It has never moved the political goalposts upon military victory. There is no evidence that its ambitions are open-ended or unbridled. Quite the contrary.

In the economic sphere, China has settled its trade disputes with others either bilaterally or through litigation at the WTO. It has remained focused on specific issues and not sought to

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1998-07-01/preventing-war-taiwan-strait-restraining-taiwan-and-beijing>

extract extraneous concessions from its trading partners. It sticks to its original objectives. It does not move the goalposts. It is willing to talk.

In the military domain, China has evidenced a similar pattern of strategic discipline. It showed great patience in its long wait for a negotiated rather than forcible return of Hong Kong and Macau to its sovereignty. It has been willing to make generous concessions to resolve border disputes peacefully with its neighbors. It has done so with all except India (which will not itself compromise) and maritime claimants who have declined to lend legitimacy to China's claims by agreeing to negotiate with it). Even when China goes to war, it keeps channels of communication open. As numerous examples attest, it is careful not to overreach.

Thus, China's objective in Korea in 1950 was to prevent the deployment of hostile forces on its border. When it achieved this goal, it dug in, more or less along the original dividing line between north and south Korea of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Beijing's objective in its 1962 border war with India was to compel New Delhi to address its offer of an exchange of Indian recognition of Chinese claims in Ladakh for Chinese recognition of Indian claims in NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh). Once the PLA enforced China's claims in Ladakh, Beijing renewed its offer to trade claims with India. China had imposed by force precisely the deal it had offered to reach peacefully. The PLA retreated behind the original line of control in NEFA. (India preferred to continue the dispute rather than settle it under duress.) In 1979, China's war with Vietnam was directed at teaching the Vietnamese that they would be unable to live with the consequences of attempting to build an empire to China's southwest in alliance with China's Soviet enemy. Once this lesson had been imparted, China stood down.

China's wars in Korea, India, and Vietnam illustrate its habit of setting clear political objectives for its uses of force, even if it does not announce their specifics. Once the Chinese have begun to pursue these objectives, they persevere until they achieve them, however great the sacrifices required. This was the case with China's enormously costly intervention in Korea. It was also the case in its 1979 war with Vietnam. The PLA's bloody encounter with Vietnamese infantry –



then the world's best – was far more costly than Beijing had expected. But the PLA carried on until it had made the politico-military point the Politburo had assigned it to make. Vietnam dutifully knocked off its empire building.

Given these patterns of Chinese behavior, China's size, its regional preeminence prior to the arrival of Western imperialism, and its newly demonstrated willingness to defend its interests as it sees them, China's neighbors view it with apprehension. They see it as difficult and sometimes overbearing without necessarily meaning to be. But China does not threaten either their independence or their identity. Unlike Western powers, it is famously indifferent to the way its diplomatic or business partners organize or conduct their internal affairs. Chinese have no apparent ideology to export and do not seem to regret this. They do not insist that others conform to Chinese norms before accepting them as legitimate members of their international relationship networks [关系网]. On the other hand, as is the case with cross-cultural communication everywhere, understanding and respecting Chinese norms eases intercourse with them.

China's growing power allows it to bully others if it wishes to do so. Sometimes it does. But its inclination to do this is restrained by its having internalized the Westphalian fiction of the sovereign equality of states and having harmonized this fiction with the concept of “face,” the key norm of Chinese society. “Face” is self-regard born of the apparent esteem of one's peers. It is sustained by elaborate courtesy and mutual expressions of respect, often transparently feigned rather than sincere. “Face” and deference to the sovereign equality of states have melded in the Chinese mind. China makes a fetish of avoiding interference in the internal affairs of other states, even its ingeniously obnoxious neighbor, north Korea.

In its foreign relations, China confers face by ostentatiously lavishing the same formal hospitality and official attention on ministates as on great powers. It gains face and is conciliated by the willingness of foreigners – especially powerful foreigners – to defer to it. When their deference, like that of President Nixon in 1972, manifestly belies their superior power, China's gain in

“face” can enable it to compromise in ways it otherwise could not without feeling demeaned.

The United Nations, which enshrines the legal principle of sovereign equality in its General Assembly but pragmatically acknowledges the reality of a hierarchy of power in its Security Council, suits Chinese psychology well. This helps to explain why China has become a prime defender of the UN Charter. Beijing’s proposed “new type of great power relations” can be read as an attempt to gain agreement to a “face-based” global order consistent with the UN Charter.

The 2012 Chinese offer to work with America toward a new order in world affairs came in the context of a palpable shift in the balances of power between China, the United States, and Chinese neighbors like India, Japan, and Korea -- all of which now have formidable economies and military capabilities. These shifts in power balances are driven mainly by economic factors. They will continue to take place, regardless of American lack of accommodation or resistance to them. The only question is whether the concomitant adjustments in relations between state actors in the region will be gradual or abrupt, accomplished by mutual accommodation or engineered by armed conflict over Taiwan or some other territorial issue.

The notion that the United States can forever dominate China’s periphery and its near seas is still an article of faith in Washington. It has steadily diminishing credibility in Asia. America’s power is visibly declining not just in relation to China but also to the increasingly self-reliant allies and friends of the United States in the region. These trends give every sign of accelerating. Increased U.S. defense spending will not alter or reverse them.

Sino-American rivalry -- political, economic, and military -- seems destined to intensify. China can and will easily match defense budget plus-ups by the United States. Despite much shadowboxing by the U.S. armed forces, American military primacy in the Western Pacific will gradually waste away. Both the costs of U.S. trans-Pacific engagement and the risks of armed conflict will rise. The states of the region will hedge. They will either draw closer to Beijing, cleave to Washington, or – more likely – try to get out of the middle between Chinese and



Americans. For the most part, they will not repudiate their alliances with America. Why give up something for nothing? But they will rely less on the United States and act more independently of it.

China's role in both regional and global governance will grow, even if the United States recovers from its current diplomatic anorexia and wallflowerism. Some sort of regional economic order centered on China is clearly emerging. While America plays solitaire, China is becoming a leader in the evolution of trans-Pacific institutions. Beijing's "belt and road" initiative is in the process of connecting Europe, the Middle East, Russia, Central, South, and Southeast Asia to China in a pan-Eurasian community of sorts. This is a grouping that has the potential to completely overshadow the United States globally later this century.

The world before us is manifestly one in which America can no longer get by on its muscle. It must live by its wits. It may well be that the Department of State and related agencies, as well as the United States Foreign Service, are poorly adapted to meeting the challenges of the emerging world and Asian regional orders. It does not follow that the answer is to dismiss the diplomats, ignore the spies, shut the door, stock up on weaponry, and look for military solutions to non-military problems. That is the opposite of statecraft. It is a waste of taxpayer dollars as well as international opportunities for America. And it is dangerous.

Fortunately, despite the present schizoaffective disorder in Washington, there is every reason to be optimistic about the emerging order in the Asia-Pacific. As China's paramount leader Xi Jinping once remarked, the Pacific Ocean is "wide enough" to accommodate peaceful interaction between China and the United States as well as other great regional powers like India, Indonesia, and Japan. As power diffuses more widely and balances of power in the Indo-Pacific become more complex, middle-ranking powers like Australia, Korea, Pakistan, and Vietnam will have room to maneuver in relation to their larger and more powerful neighbors.

The regional order will no longer be managed primarily by the United States. But this is no



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reason to expect that any other great power, including China, will dominate it. Unless the United States and China act in such a way as to contrive a different result, Asia's politics are more likely to continue to be driven by economic rather than military dynamics.