
CHINA'S CHALLENGE OF THE AMERICAN PACIFIC SUPREMACY. DOOMED TO FAIL?

Arnaldo M. A. Gonçalves, PhD

Institute of Political Studies, Catholic University of Portugal

ABSTRACT

The last decades of the 20th Century have witnessed the appearance of Asian and Indic emergent powers that have put a huge challenge to the hegemonic leadership of the United States. Rapidly turned to be economic power-houses, these new emerging nations have, since then, experiencing great difficulties to being accepted as equal rivals of the great 'hegemon'. The reasons for this are contradictory. In the case of India this deficit can be attributed to the incomplete process of modernization of India's economy, the lack of a reliable net of transport infrastructures and the status of India's army. In the case of China the lack of primacy may be credited to the confronting relationship with the United States and its allies in the region and a certain darkness in China's intentions. The current arms race deflagrated by the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the acrimony about the sovereignty of the East and South China Sea Islands make clear two possibly outcomes: China is not perceived as a force of peace, regionally; and the Asian nations require the United States to follow a policy of active alliance, providing a defense shield for them, in case of attack from Beijing. China is appraised as a reliable ally and succeeds in grabbing the Asian nations to its sphere of influence.

Keywords: China, United States, Asia-Pacific, International Security, Extraterritorial Disputes, Chinese Foreign Policy, American Foreign Policy.

1. Soft Power as A Rhetorical Device

The relevance of 'soft power' was undoubtedly pursued to support the argument that being an unforeseeable convincing competitor, the United States has the power to lead in global affairs in this twenty-first century. Contradictorily it is because the projection of soft power is not enough to balance the congenital voracity of medium-sized countries to win the place as world powers that 'hard' power - conceived as a combination of military, economic and technological muscle - returns as the core trait in the current competition for leadership in global affairs.

For the realists, two patterns exist to explain the international order: bipolarization and multi-polarization, i.e. a system with two or more powers. Multipolarity has been perceived as the dominant tendency in world affairs and with potential for conflict, considering its complexity. In this system, states may be convinced that one of them is the major threat and may be tempted to surpass the others if they believe they may gain some advantage from it. So they may tolerate some space for those amongst them to expand and allow them to defeat some of their opponents (Posen).

For the multilateralists, China and the EU are examples of world powers that assert special importance to a multilateral world system. Multilateralists believe that the growth of the Chinese economy and the intensification of Beijing bilateral relations (at global and regional levels) may foster the necessary changes in the international system and may help to promote multi-polarism. Both sides share common interests in preserving the stability of the international economic system and promote sustain development. The necessity of their mutual cooperation surpasses the need to block the dominance of the United States (Andreosso and Nicolas).

Of course there are those in the realist field that don't accept the inevitability of a multilateral world, with the necessary readjustment of the US role in it. Samuel Berber, National Security Adviser of former U.S. President Bill Clinton argued in a speech at the *Council on Foreign Relations* on October 21, 1999, that the US leadership has never been more needed, or more in demand and it is perplexing that America finds itself being accused of hegemony and isolationism at the same time. America - Berger added - is the only nation on earth capable to project power in every region, whilst "others look to us to deliver decisive influence where it is needed" (Berger 1999). Condoleezza Rice stated sometime before, in a much quoted article published in the *Foreign Affairs* revue, that it is not isolationist to suggest that the United States has a special role in the world and should not adhere to every international convention and agreement that someone thinks to propose (Rice 2000). Consequently, the American president should "press other nations leadership for change". Debating the eventuality of the decline of the American Power, Dan Drezner, professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, noted that scholars like Gideon Rachman or Robert Kagan agree on the necessity of American power to ensure global order and prosperity and if American power declines, the current world order will decline with it. In that case, it will be replaced by some other kind of order who's guidelines are not yet perceived (Drezner, Rachman & Kagan, 2012).

Robert Kagan in a recent article about Barack Obama's foreign policy argued that is not surprising the lack of the enthusiasm of the public for a President that rules and leads the foreign policy of his country according to the wishes of the American people (Kagan 2014). A people that opposes any special U.S. role in Syria, that are eager of a lessen U.S. involvement in the Middle East and appreciate a 'nation-bulding at home' instead of a 'tide of war'. Although approving Obama's minimalist foreign policy - Kagan says - Americans are not proud of it and 'not grateful to him for giving them what they want' as they think of their

nation as special, a leader of the world, the 'indispensable nation' (U.S. Department of State, 1998)¹. Obama seems to show little nostalgia for the days of U.S. leadership and conceive his job to deal with the 'reality' of American decline, Kagan notes.

Before abdicating her position in the Obama Administration, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a farewell address at the Council on Foreign Relations. During her talking, Clinton reflected on her time in office, and urged the U.S. to look toward the future for the good of the country saying: "We are the indispensable nation. We are the force for progress, prosperity, and peace. And because we have to get it right for ourselves" (Clinton 2013).²

It will be hasty to declare the decline of the American power and its substitution for other grand and middle-seized powers as several international experts like to grant. Albeit the U.S. are in a withdrawal process from the battle fields of the Middle East there are no clear signs of a collapse of American military capabilities in relative terms, although Republicans in the Congress are alerting that the defense budget cuts made by the Obama Administration may lead to this ending (Wong 2014)³. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has proposed for 2015 cuts in military spending that comprise reductions in troop and force structure in each military department as part of an effort to prioritize U.S. strategic interests in the face of reduced resources after more than a decade of war. Hagel called the reductions -- including shrinking the Army to its smallest size since before World War II and removing an entire fleet of Air Force fighter planes - "difficult choices" that will change defense institutions for years to come. These changes are designed to leave the military capable of fulfilling U.S. defense strategy and defending the homeland against strategic threats, he mentioned (U.S. Department of Defense 2014). The Pentagon budget will shrink by more than \$75 billion over the next two years and reduce the size of the Army to as low as 440,000 active duty soldiers from the current size of 520,000, while ensuring the force remains well trained and equipped.

Even if we take this substitution for granted, no other regional power has the capability to defy the United States in its regional zone of influence, internationally or even in the America backyard. Russia is not such a competitor and China has a long way to go before being acknowledged as a US effective contender. According to military analysis, the United States and Russia rank #1 and #2 in military power today, respectively⁴. When comparing military power several factors need to be taken into account. One factor of special importance is the population of both countries. The US has a population of 316 million with 120 million in shape for military service and over 4 million reaching military age each year. Russia has a population of 145 million with 46 million ready for military service and 1.3 million reaching military age each year. From a population angle, the US is a much better position. Russia and the United States have

¹ Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of State of President Bill Clinton declared in an interview to NBC-TV in 19th February, 1998, in the context of America intervention in Iraq the following: 'It is the threat of the use of force and our line-up there that is going to put force behind the diplomacy. But if we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us. I know that the American men and women in uniform are always prepared to sacrifice for freedom, democracy and the American way of life'. See http://fas.org/news/iraq/1998/02/19/98021907_tpo.html

² Hillary Rodham Clinton stepped down as Secretary of State and took her leave from the political scene.

³ Republicans say this move is foolish, given the effects of previous post-war drawdown and recalling the downfall of American offensive capabilities when the War of Korea started and the abandon of a two-war strategy that allow the U.S. to fight two wars at the same time. The Hill, 'Republicans Blast Obama Defense Cuts', <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/199617-republicans-blast-obama-defense-cuts>

⁴ See GFP Strength in numbers, 'The Russians have proven that their commitment to growth and expansion in 2013 is for real heading into 2014', in http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=russia. Also Nation Master blog in <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/compare/Russia/United-States/Military>

pursued different paths to military might. The US dominates the air with far more bases, fighter jets and bombers than Russia but Russia is superior on the ground with more tanks, artillery and land vehicles. At sea, the countries are more evenly matched, but here the US is superior with more destroyers, submarines and aircraft carriers. The US military spending also overpass that of Russia, 612 billion to just 77 billion. This means that in a conflict the US would be in a much better position to accelerate production for new or replacement weaponry. Russia despite all the rhetoric about its returning role as a competitor of the United States on terms equivalent to those of the Cold War is in no position to dispute the primacy of the U.S., China is also distant from being a strategic competitor of the U.S., as we shall see later.

Power is the capacity to influence other nation's actions or omissions. It is a vase where the material capabilities of a country fit including the size of the population, the territory and location, the resource endowment, the economic capability and the military strength (Nau 2009). The state is the only international actor charged to gather military, personal, and other forms of power to protect security. Even if we think of alliances (such as NATO or OSCE) they are made of nation-states and are organizations where the decisions depend on the harmonisation of the national interests of the member states. No International Organization exists with the power to gather these resources by itself; the United Nations are dependent on the readiness of its members for the purpose of building-up Peacekeeping Operations (United Nations 2003).

Joseph Nye has exposed the notion of *soft power* in various places defining it as 'the ability to attract others by the legitimacy of U.S. policies and the values that underlie them'. According to Nye, nations influence others not by force or conciliation but by being who they are and attracting others countries to copy them, and accept their policies (Nye 2004 a)). In a famous article published in the *Foreign Affairs* revue, Nye argued that American soft power is in decline because of two factors (Nye 2004 b)). Firstly this is happening because of the rise of anti-Americanism in several countries in result of the American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nye reiterated that the U.S. needs the help of other countries to confront the threat of terrorism and the extent of that cooperation usually depends on the attractiveness of the U.S. Soft power is not – in Nye opinion - just a matter of ephemeral popularity, 'it is a means of obtaining outcomes the United States wants' and when Washington discounts the importance of its attractiveness abroad,' it pays a steep price'.

The second factor is the demur of U.S. attractiveness because of the United States sheer size and its association with modernity. In line with this argument the U.S. arouse opposition in counties that possess a distinctive traditional culture and faith. It may difficult to agree with this argument considering the sequence of events of the Velvet Revolution in Egypt - and other revolutionary uprisings in other parts of the Arab World. The placards of the demonstrators in those popular movements were decorated with American traditional political symbols like the Statute of Liberty. Ordinary people interviewed by international media stress systematically the ideals of 'people power' and the defense of public liberties. In the recent 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square bloodshed, crowds in Hong Kong - and other international cities - were eager to raise the same ideals that adorn American distinctiveness and leadership as the creed of liberty. All this lead us to the conclusion that the argument of 'modernity' as prejudice of singularity, tradition and lived faith is false and misleading.

Xi Jinping, the current Chinese President and secretary-general of the Communist Chinese Party, has been unambiguous to proclaim on several occasions that Beijing 'will not copy Washington's type of liberal democracy and follow its own Chinese way' (Cheng 2005)⁵. In a recent visit to Europe during a lecture at

⁵ See Brown and Loh (2010), Minxin Pei (2012- a) and Minxin Pei (2012-b).

the College of Europe, Xi has clearly stated that China is committed to socialism and that ‘multi-party democracy had failed in China in the past’, being this the reason why China ‘needed to follow its own path of political development to avoid disaster’ (The Irish Times, 2014). In the unequivocal words of the PRC’s leader, China cannot copy the political system or development model of other countries “because it would not fit us and it might even lead to catastrophic consequences. “Constitutional monarchy, imperial restoration, parliamentarism, a multi-party system and a presidential system, we considered them, tried them, but none worked,” Xi said in that speech, quoted by the official state news agency, Xinhua.

So soft power has been used as a tool, a rhetorical argument verbalized through beautiful words of candour but along with it countries prepared themselves for the worst days to come. The U.S. have this in mind when they verbalise the necessity of the American power to ensure global order and prosperity. As Gideon Rachman state in a debate in the pages of the *Foreign Policy Review*, ‘political power and economic weight are different things’ (Drezner, Rachman and Kagan, 2012). That is why the United States are intended to continue to be the world's dominant political power for a while. America's network of alliances, military strength, technological prowess, "soft power," political stability, and geographic position are all assets that China lacks. Robert Kagan replicates the same idea when he says that is optimistic to believe that China will pose only an economic challenge as others countries were forced to adjust themselves to a landscape of circumstances where one power has been much powerful than all the others. The Chinese have worked to avoid a scenario where a U.S.-led coalition is to be formed of the kind that defeated Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union. Deng Xiao Ping has alerted about that possible fate when he advice ‘keep a low profile and never take the lead’ but as relative power shifts that recommendation has become harder and harder to follow, as the actions of Chinese leadership has proven, he added (ibid).

Recent evidence of Chinese assertiveness in the South and East China Seas anticipate the kind of challenges that may occur in the future and as China is developing an obvious strategy to secure positions in the ground, i.e. in the China Sea maritime areas, in order to confine and derogate other nations’ reactions and movements (Bloomberg 2014; Huffington Post 2014; WantChinaTimes 2014; Roubini 2014; Japan Realtime 2014; Beijing Review 2014; Nye Jr. 2012). These plans were acknowledged and several traditional allies of the U.S. in the region have moved, already, to reinforce their defense capabilities either through the purchase of sophisticated military weapons either by reviewing the terms of bilateral agreements they signed with the U.S. following the Second World War⁶. President Obama’s fifth trip to Asia during his time in office underscored a focus on the Asia-Pacific region and commitment to Obama’s vision of ‘rebalancing to the world’s largest emerging region’. Obama’s visit to Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines was focused on the U.S. major priorities for the region, according to the White House: modernizing American-Asian alliances; supporting democratic development; advancing the Trans-Pacific Partnership and commercial ties; investing in regional institutions; and deepening cultural and people-to-people ties (The White House 2014). In Tokyo, Obama reaffirmed his support for Japan in its row over islands with China, and warned against escalation in the dispute, adding that he wanted to see the row

⁶ In February 2011, Maj. General Masahi Yamada, commander of the Southwestern Composite Air Division based at Naha alluded to plans of the Japanese government to buy a dozen of F15s fighters to strengthen its forces in southwestern Okinawan islands. This reinforcement of air power was directed to contain intrusions of Chinese aircraft like the Russians Su-27 into Japanese-controlled airspace. See *The New York Times*, ‘With its Eye on China, Japan Builds up Military’, 28. 02. 2011.

resolved peacefully (BBC 2014). But Obama confirmed that the islands fell under a security treaty that commits the US to act if Japan is attacked and that framework hasn't changed⁷.

However these ideas of 'rebalancing' or a 'pivotal' role of the U.S. have been considered more marketing slogans than setting a more effective path to the U.S. foreign policy, in the years to come. Asian nations have already heard the declaration that American will not be idly if some action of an emergent power disturbs the current status quo and they are not looking for some sort of anti-China alliance or containment of Beijing. They expect someone to take the lead in defending the order created in the aftermath of the Second World War, crafting Trade Blocks that could tie the region together and pushing for mechanisms that can lessen tensions in disputed areas like as some sort of agreement between the U.S. and China about sea Islands quarrels (Kazanis 2014). This role can be only performed by the United States, both by historical and geostrategic reasons.

2. A Possible Explanation of The Present World Order

In the last twenty-five years the world evolved into a logic of a complex system of balances of power between big conglomerates such as the US, the European Union, China and India and between middle-sized countries like Japan, the two Koreas, Pakistan, Syria or Iran. Although the global order is characterized by a single world power, he doesn't rule as he likes but is required to share some part of his global power with other competing nations. This fosters the possible conclusion that the world order is not unipolar or multilateral but is becoming gradually *centrifugal* in its equilibriums, a tendency praised for those who see in this the 'rise of the rest' or the 'Asian century'. But against the cheerful wishes of the advocates of multilateralism, the post-Cold War era is not realizing the dream of a global peaceful era and a resurgent nationalism emerged, under the discourse of emancipation of former colonial humiliations.

Realists argue that the best way to cope with nationalist sentiments exposed by emerging powers is by 'balancing power', i.e. by ensuring a rough equilibrium among states. So to appease the problems in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan needs to be armed by the United States to be able to deter China. The way to deter North Korea in its nuclear ambitions is to encourage an alliance that includes the United States, Japan, South Korea and eventually China. The longing conflict between India and Pakistan can only be dissuaded by a balance of power between these two Indic powers supported by the United States and Russia. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians may be only contained by a balance of power between Israel and the supporters of the Palestinians, i.e. the Arab states. But this balancing logic has a shabby point: conflicts occur when power is moving towards balance. So for this model of international appeasement to do well, a dominant power is needed to protect the status quo and allow gradual changes. Internationalists argue that nations in dispute only create insecurity and that negotiation is preferable. If negotiation fails (they claim) international intervention is necessary to punish aggressors and prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms. Therefore liberal internationalists advocate an aggressive diplomacy to mediate the Taiwan Strait dispute, the Korean peninsula crisis, the East-South-China Sea maritime quarrels, India-Pakistan rivalry or the Israel-Palestinian discord. They support multilateral institutions and assert the United Nations pro-activity in critical scenarios of operation. This logic has a weak point: the fragility of the United Nations, the diminishing respect that the *Blue Berets* receive in strangled areas of conflict and civil war, namely in Africa.

⁷ Obama said clearly that 'Article five [of the US-Japan security treaty] covers all territories under Japan's administration including [the] Senkaku islands'. He added 'We do not believe that they should be subject to change unilaterally.' 'This is not a new position. This is a consistent one,' he said. Still BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27137272>

So defensive realists may be right when they claim that the international system remains stable when a single nation-state is the dominant world power or the “hegemon”. Hegemony has the ability to dictate, or at least, to enforce the agreed rules and arrangements by which the international relations, political and economic are conducted (Acharya 2014; Nasr 2014; Ferguson 2012; Kupchan 2011; Zakaria 2009). When a “hegemon” exercises leadership, through diplomacy, coercion, or persuasion, the international system stabilizes as it cultivates cooperation. If a newcomer challenges the hegemon, the system becomes unstable until the former substitutes the prevailing power (Nau 2009)⁸. As the hegemon exercises its responsibilities it confers what is known as “public goods”, being the sharing of benefits that no one can be excluded from selectively. International security and monetary stability are examples of these public goods and those who enjoy these benefits without any individual contribution are called *free riders*. But this exercise is not free from difficulties as it requires the dominant powers to adapt themselves to the changing circumstances in order that they stay as dominants and control the volatility of the free-riders. It can happen that the free-riders of today will be the leading nations of tomorrow, by bandwagon, due to the conditions provided by the hegemon to create the relevant capacities of hard-power, namely military power.

We can expect small powers’ persistent pressing for recognition and as their violence potential increases through the diffusion of destructive weapons and surprise tactics, they may be able to threaten the Great Powers. North Korea, Al-Qaeda and Iran are good examples of these unexpected challengers (Wendt 2003). Small and Middle Powers will also have incentives to copy the examples of the leading nations by turning into Great Powers and balancing the dominant powers through a course of arms race. In this scenario, the capacity of the Great Powers to exempt themselves from confrontation may collapse and with it the capacity to sustain the global system and provide public goods. So the alternatives are: between a system of growing threats with Great Powers avoiding the recognition of others and the possibility of some sharing of power between the prevailing power and the newcomers.

Throughout human history the world has never witnessed a peaceful transition of power between Great Powers. All the transitions were made through painful, expensive and deadly wars. So why can we expect the events to occur now, differently? How is this related to the emergence of the East and the decline of the West?

3. China: A Peacemaker or A Challenger?

Although an emerging power, China seems to lack the important capabilities of “hard power” that would make it an unavoidable challenger of the U.S. According to the views of a China’s supporter, the PRC is on the course to become a superpower but not in the sense many expect (Wendt, 2003). Beijing military power is weaker compared to the US, having just one aircraft carrier, a former Soviet vessel – the Varyag – renamed Liaoning, whilst the US has eleven aircraft carriers⁹ although Recent news point out the other way round¹⁰. So the label of “superpower” can only be legitimately applied to China’s economic might, representing over half of the US economy and projected to surpass it in and around 2018, if China is capable to maintain the path of growth rate of the last decade (Jacques 2012). Under this line of argument, China is

⁸ This is called the *hegemonic stability theory*. See Nau, Henry R, *Perspectives on International Relation*, pp. 280-2, G.10.

⁹ The US maintains the largest carrier force in the world as Italy and Spain coming second as the only nations to have more than one aircraft carrier. Available in http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=United-States-of-America

¹⁰ It was reported that China has begun construction of a second aircraft carrier that is previewed to be launched in 2018. According to James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence of the U.S., the Chinese navy has plans over the next 15 years to advance its fleet of surface ships and submarines as well maritime weapons and sensors. China is reputedly building a hypersonic missile capable of penetrating the U.S. defense system, in consonance with the same source. Thayer, Carl, ‘Tensions set to rise in the South China Sea’, *The Diplomat*, 19.02.2014.

not expected to behave like the US because its history is different and “China has never colonized any overseas territory” as the Europeans did. China’s relationship with its neighbours was in the same context not colonial but under a tributary system that in return for access to the Chinese market and global protection, required those states to pay a tribute to China’s emperor, acknowledging China’s superiority. This system was stable and lasted for 2000 years until 1900. On the opposite side, the western form of power was and is military with the US accumulating half of the worlds’ defense expenditure. The essential form of Chinese power is on Martin Jacques words “economic and cultural”, and this tendency will continue in the future.

In terms of *Global Fire Power*¹¹ this verdict of Chinese military weakness is artificial. China stands third, after Russia and before India, in the GFP ranking. China has a population of 1.349 billion individuals compared with 316.6 million Americans. The US counts around 1.430 million individuals as “active frontline personnel” compared with 2.285 million from China. The US reservists count is 850.800 individuals compared with 2.300 million from the PRC. In the category of Land Systems the US is equivalent to China in terms of equipment, armory, and vehicles. In the category of Air Power the U.S. is much superior in terms of aircrafts, fighters, fixed-wing attack aircrafts, helicopters and personnel. The PRC has some advantage over the US in some categories of naval power, (coastal defense craft, mine warfare and frigates) but the US is superior in the number aircraft carriers (10 to 1), destroyers, submarines. In terms of logistics, i.e. the capacity to move man and machine from points all over, the U.S. is superior in terms of roadway, railway coverage, ports and terminals, and serviceable airports. The defense budget of the US for 2014 was around 612 billion US dollars compared with the equivalent of 126 billion for China, which is the second in relative terms¹². The PRC has an asset of financial reserves assessed at 3.3 trillion US dollars (in 2014) compared with 150 billion of the United States, twenty times more, then. So in terms of comparative positions it can be said that the U.S. is first in the rank as world single military superpower but China stands as third best pursuing a strategy that could lead to primacy by the middle of the twenty-first century. This evolution depends, naturally, on the evolution of Russia. Russia’s conventional military is a regional power, but although it can project force into nearby states, has limited capability for global power projection (U.S. Department of Defense 2014 b)).

In March 2014, addressing a committee of party leaders that discussed military reform, President Xi Jinping alluded to the purchase of a sophisticated weapons system but stated that that was not enough as ‘there cannot be modernization of national defense and the military without the modernization of military’s forms of organization’ (CNBC International 2014). Xi is clearly wagered to strengthen China’s naval and air forces, traditionally under the command of the People’s Liberation Army’s land forces, and reorganize the system of military regional commands, originally set up to defend the country against invasion from the URSS. That reorganization is focused to confront Japan, whose navy is usually considered to have an edge over China’s navy. It looks also to strength the PRC’s territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. Besides the senior leadership group that Xi Jinping convened in March 2014, five task forces have been set to discuss issues such training, force reduction, political indoctrination, corruption and infrastructure management. In a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party that took place in 2013, Xi Jinping was utterly clear by saying that ‘China will safeguard its maritime rights and interests’ and although adhering to the path of peaceful development ‘no way will the country abandon its legitimate rights

¹¹ The Global Firepower allows a broad spectrum concerning the comparison of the military strengths of the sixty-eight countries considered. The GFP is based on a formula using forty different factors compiled and measured against each nation. See www.globalfirepower.com

¹² China spends about 2.5 percent of its gross domestic product on its military and the U.S. about 4.5 percent.

and interests nor will give up its core national interests' (Xinhua 2013). Xi stated that oceans and seas have an important role to play in a country's economic development and China should strength efforts to 'become a maritime power', exploiting marine resources and safeguarding China's rights and that he wanted to build 'a strong maritime state'. On July 31, 2013, Xi Jinping - in his quality of chairman if the Central Military Commission (CMC) - promoted six senior military officers to the rank of general, including a deputy chief of the PLA, the commissar of armament department, the commissar of the Academy of Military Sciences, the commissar of the Beijing, Nanjing and Guangzhou Military Areas (Xinhua 2013).

How these developments are seen by the United States? According to the Department of Defense Report on China 2014, China is pursuing a long-term, comprehensive military modernization program designed to improve the capacity of its armed forces to fight and win short-duration, high-intensive regional contingencies (U.S. Department of Defense 2014 c)). China's program has been focus in 'preparing for potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait, which includes deterring and defeating third-party intervention' but is also looking for other contingencies other that Taiwan including potential conflicts in the South and East China Seas. The report makes reference to the MANEUVER-5 exercise in the Philippine Sea that included all three People's Liberation Army navy fleets (the North Sea Fleet, the East Sea Fleet and the South Sea Fleet) exercise that was the largest Navy open-sea exercise in the history of the country. At the same time, China conducted Mission Action series of joint military exercises over a period of a six week period during September and October 2013 (see map 1).

Continuing the assessment the report points out that as China's interests, capabilities, and international influence have grown, the military modernization program 'has become increasingly focused on military investments for a range of missions beyond China's coast, including sea lane security, counterpiracy, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief'. The Department of State gave emphasis to the fact that China's leaders look to the modernization of the PLA as essential to what they describe as a 'period of strategic opportunity' to advance China's development in the two first decades of the twenty-first century. This period is perceived as an opportunity to focus on using the external environment to provide the PRC the strategic space to achieve a 'national rejuvenation' by 2049. At the same time this is accompanied for declarations of peace and stability along the country's periphery and expansion of diplomatic influence to facilitate the access to markets, capital and resources and avoid a direct confrontation with the U.S. and other countries.

The uncertainties articulated by the U.S. Department of Defense's report have been corroborated by recent events and political declarations of Chinese political and military leaders that demonstrate that China is preparing itself for an alternative scenario to the current status quo in the region.

From May 19th, 2014, China and Russia started a weeklong naval exercise in the politically sensitive East China Sea. Chinese and Russian units taking part in the Joint Sea-2014 drill were combined rather than operating separately during the exercise, the first time the Chinese navy has worked so closely with a foreign maritime force, commented the Hong Kong press (South China Post 2014). China and Russia have sent ships including the Chinese navy's latest-generation Zhengzhou and Ningbo missile destroyers as well as Moscow's Varyag missile cruiser. The Type-052C destroyer Zhengzhou is the first PLA warship to be equipped with long-range missiles and detection equipment to combat enemy aircraft and military vessels. Forces included 14 ships, two submarines, nine fixed-wing aircraft and six shipboard helicopters, according to a report on the PLA Navy's website. China and Russia's naval units practiced defensive and attacking manoeuvres, carrying out escorts, search and rescue operations, and storming hijacked ships, the Xinhua agency reported.

One year before, in August 2013, visiting the Shenyang military theater of operations and the first aircraft carrier produced in China, President Xi Jinping briefed soldiers and incentive them to ‘train harder’ as China is becoming involved in regional disputes with the Philippines and Japan (Forbes 2013) (Forbes 2013; South China Morning Post 2013). In October 2013, the Chinese leader made a state visit tour to Southeast Asia nations which included Indonesia, Malaysia and a participation in the APEC meeting in Bali. Xi signed a series of economic agreements with Indonesia and use the address to the Indonesian Parliament to conciliatorily emphasize that ‘as for the disagreements and disputes between China and certain Southeast Asian nations on territorial sovereignty and maritime rights, both sides must always uphold the use of peaceful methods to maintain the broad picture of bilateral relations and regional stability’ (The Trait Times 2013). Xi argued that ‘China’s development is a force for peace and friendship in the world, bringing development opportunities for Asia and the world and no threats’. During his state visit to Malaysia, Presidents Xi and Mohd Najib Tun Razak signed a trade pact that is projected to triple the two-way trade to 160 million U.S. dollars by 2017 and agreed to elevate the bilateral ties into a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’, the buzz word China uses, in its multilateral diplomacy, to indicate closer relationships (USA Today 2013).

In the occasion of China’s participation in the APEC Forum in Bali, Indonesia - that Obama preferred not to attend - Xi underscore, in the same tone, China’s commitment to a peaceful region good for business, ‘a family of harmony prospers’ where ‘China is happy to live in amity with others’(The Guardian 2013). Talking about the domestic situation, Xi acknowledged a slowdown in China’s economic growth but stated to be confident that the Chinese economy will sustain its growth (South China Morning Post 2013)¹³. Xi made no direct reference to the bitter territorial disputes but China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed that ‘the U.S., Australia and Japan should not use their alliance as an excuse to intervene in territorial disputes’. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and his Australian and Japanese counterparts had issued a statement opposing ‘coercive or unilateral actions’ aimed to change the status quo. During November 2013, Xi Jinping promptly created a new National Security Commission that porposes to coordinate police, intelligence, military and other security organs –something that has failed in the past under Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao – and ‘allow government to speak with a single voice when dealing with crisis and abroad’ , in the words of Xinhua agency (Reuters 2013; The Washington Post 2013).

These statements may be considered as an exercise of propaganda but they may give clues on how China intends to confront two different challenges: the Obama policy of rebalancing of East Asia and the contentious territorial disputes China has with bordering countries (Paal 2012; Miller 2014). China’s desire to apply its force to get more assertive in defending its territorial claims brings it into opposition with its neighbors. China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have territorial claims across the waterway that provides around ten per cent of global fisheries and counts for half of the worlds’ shipping tonnage traverse across its’ sea lanes (see map 2). The majority of China’s oil imports pass through the Straits of Malacca, which is one of the world’s decisive shipping lanes, flanked by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. This may be the reason why is becoming clear a separated line within China’s foreign policy towards Asia, delimiting a zone of influence that is aimed to include these countries that throw in common a strong Chinese immigration and the Diaspora.

¹³ There is uneasiness among experts that China’s growth is under stress and the heavy reliance on capital accumulation and the rapid rise in credit led to a mispricing of risk accompanied by increasing debts, especially at the local government level, that have used infrastructure and property building as a tool to keep the economy moving and used financial instruments, out of their budgets to pay for the building-up. See *South China Morning Post*, ‘Xi at the Crossroads’, 19.11.2013.

As China continues to rise and its interest comes to clash more frequently with China's neighbors and the U.S., the idea of achieving national rejuvenation becomes mandatory in the political discourse. According to Chinese Communist Party documents acceded by international observers this means that China has to ease international concerns about its rise and at the same time strengthening its grip over disputed areas on land and at sea. This may explain, as Jacqueline Newmyer Deal argues, the apparent contradiction between China's claim to be pursuing 'peaceful development' and an assertive foreign-policy behavior in the East and South China Seas and what 'national rejuvenation' means (Deal, 2013). Up to now, Chinese nationalism has been referred to explain China's conduct in territorial and resources disputes as well in international forums. In line with some extreme interpretations, this nationalism recalls Germany quest for *lebensraum*, and is driven by a view of the superiority of the Chinese race.

Shinto Abe, the Prime-Minister of Japan, raised that line of argument in a conference in Washington in October 2010: 'this dangerous idea (of strategic frontier) posits that borders and exclusive economic zones are determined by national power, and that as long as China's economy continues to grow, its sphere of influence continues to expand'¹⁴. The idea of a legitimately vital space has been seconded by popular demonstrations in front of Japanese consulates in China, that give leverage to a radical and xenophobic public opinion allow it to affect the foreign-policy decision making within the CCP. In time, this will become a mechanism for ordinary people to critique their regime and acquire a voice, according to this line of argument. As reported by others, this nationalism dates from early twentieth-century Chinese nationalism, people such as Sun Yat Sen, that through the Society for Invigorating China (later named Kuomintang) incorporated a sort of social Darwinism with authoritarian impulses that he got during his travels to Japan and the reading of European theorists. The Chinese word for nationality, *minzu*, comes from the Japanese *minzoku*, which combines the idea of bloodlines and racial purity. When Sun Yat Sen developed his 'Three Principles of the People (nationalism, democracy and welfare) in Tokyo, in 1905, this idea was always present and it was in this time that the modern discourse of *guochi* or national humiliation was elaborated.

Xi Jinping discourse of the 'Chinese Dream' and through it of 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' is always linked to the evoke of impressive recent achievements and future planned developments, referred as 'rejuvenation' (*fixing*) (Zheng Wang 2013)¹⁵. Rejuvenation is deeply rooted in Chinese history and the national experience, especially the 'century of national humiliation' that started with the First Opium War (1839-1842) and lasted through the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945. After suffering a humiliating decline in national strength and status – the official discourse says – the Chinese people is solid in their commitment to return China to its natural state of glory, achieving through this the 'Chinese Dream'. So *fixing* became a common slogan in Chiang Kay-Shek, Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao discourses to mobilize the Chinese people to support the revolution and the reform and have helped to transform China into the modern and powerful nation that is today¹⁶. Xi Jinping has elected the motto of 'China Dream' as a quarry for the uninterrupted growth of the nation in contrast to the 'status of weakness prevailed for 170 years since the Opium War, subjecting China to bullying (Global Times 2012). Xi said, in declarations to the *Global Times*, that he firmly believes the country will realize its goal of achieving a 'moderately prosperous society' by the

¹⁴ Jacqueline Deal, 'China's', *ibidem*.

¹⁵ Zheng Wang argues that China and Japan have different historical memories and this is the reason why Chinese and Japanese have opposed views on the Diaku/Sensakus Island issue. Zhen alleges "historical evidence of sovereignty" over islands in the South China Sea to rebuke the (general) appeal to the application of international law. Most of the cases decide by the International Court of Justice deal about contradictory "historical evidence", exactly. See International Court of Justice site in <http://www.icj-cij.org/jurisdiction/index.php?p1=5>

¹⁶ Zhen Wang, 'Not Rising', *ibidem*.

CPC's 100th anniversary (2020), at a time when China has become a richer and stronger country with greater democracy and harmony.

How is the domestic discourse compatible with China's announcements of a peaceful projection of its power as a rediscovered great nation? It is difficult to establish points of reference as the real Chinese intentions are not anticipated by strategists and Western governments. It may be prudent to let out that China is throwing its dices, carefully allowing its neighbors to trust that is cooperating with them and cause an honest craving to reconcile differences. At the same time China will concentrate in enhancing its native capabilities, in terms of hard power, especially as navy power strength. By some means, China's strategists guess that any regional military confrontation will take place in the sea, as it happen during the Second World War. If like Japan during that time, China reaches a high level of offensive power strike it will be in a stand to constraining the other Asian nations capacity of maneuvering, with the firm believe that the U.S. will not come in defense of its allies, because of domestic constraints, the downsizing of the U.S. Pentagon budget and the overtiredness of active frontline personnel, involved in two regional wars. The missing period on this assessment is that the U.S. and certain Asia allies have anticipated this event and are stoutly working on a Plan B.

4. The Territorial International Dispute

This last June the United States and Philippines launched military joint exercises in the South China Sea and the U.S. announced plans to reinforce its military presence in the region as part of its "pivotal" role in Asia (Voice of America 2014). Starting in the fall of 2011, the Obama administration has issued a series of announcements and taken a series of steps to expand and intensify the significant role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. Explicitly identifying the Asia-Pacific region as a geostrategic priority for the U.S., the Obama administration is paying a higher level of attention to the region across a wide range of issue areas.

For China, the East China Sea—where it claims the Japanese-held Senkaku Islands—is as strategically important as the South China Sea, where it has territorial disputes over the Parcel and Spratly Islands with Vietnam, the Philippines, and other states¹⁷. China argues that these islands - known as Huangyan Island, in Chinese - are part of China's sovereignty (Embassy of PRC in the Philippines 2012). In 2012, China ordered its' patrol vessels to stop the Philippines Navy from arresting Chinese fisherman working in the disputed area. The Philippines replied that these Islands fall within its two hundred nautical miles Executive Economic Zone, and have the right to explore these natural resources and uphold the zone from any foreign interference. The record of China's disputes with its neighbors concerning the international status of these small islands dates back to 2010 (Huffington Post 2014). The first major clash happened in September 2010, when a Japanese coast guard arrested the captain of a Chinese fishing trawler in the waters of the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands for the Chinese). In 2012, the Japanese government nationalized the islands to defuse a public protest that may rise the conflict to a higher level. In September 2012, China sent six surveillance ships to the Senkakus to assert its territorial claims. Since then China has flown reconnaissance flights over the island and declared unilaterally an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADZ) requiring all flights over that area to submit prior notice to Chinese air traffic control (Nippon. Com 2014). At the same time, China built a fleet of five law enforcement agencies in the water, from Coast Guards to Customs,

¹⁷ The current situation of the islands is the following: the Pratas Islands are administered by Taiwan; the Parcel Islands are occupied by China, but claimed by Vietnam; the Spratly Islands are claimed entirely by China, Taiwan and Vietnam and part by Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines; the Scarborough Shoal is claimed by the Philippines, China and Taiwan.

operating a force over a thousand vessels which include armed cutters, frigates, hovercraft, patrol boats, aircrafts and helicopters. Beijing is also using this militarized force to enforce China's claims from Scarborough Shoal near the Philippines to James Shoal near Malaysia¹⁸ (see map II).

The year 2013 was differentiated by several events that indicated that tensions in the South China Sea are becoming out of the control (Thayer 2014). In January, the chief of staff of the Armed Force of the Philippines stated in a television interview - referring to the new fishing regulations issued by the Hainan province (China) - that Filipino fisherman should not give to threats or intimidation, following a declaration by the Secretary of Defense that the navy would provide escorts to fisherman in the West Philippines Sea, if necessary. On January 18, the local media published photographs showing the presence of two PLA Navy warships close to the Ayungin Shoal (Second Thomas Reef). On January 20, the PLA flotilla left the naval base on Hainan and initiate naval exercises in the South China Sea, which included landings on every reef guarded by the Chinese navy. The flotilla sail south and reach James Shoal, eight kilometers off Sarawak, where the navy performed ceremonies vowing national sovereignty over the shoal. A local newspaper reported at January 31, that officers at the Air Force Command College drafted an Air Defense Identification Zone including the Parcel Islands and some of the South China Sea and submitted to the government in May 2013¹⁹.

In its 2013 meeting in Bagan, Myanmar, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers expressed concerns on developments in the South China Sea and reaffirmed ASEAN's Six-Point Principles on that region and 'the importance of maintaining peace and stability, maritime security, freedom of navigation in an overflight above the South China Sea'. The ministers repeated the line of ASEAN that all disputes should be resolved by peaceful means in accordance with international law and that 'all parties should show self-restraint in the conduct of activities' but no clarification was presented of what activities were considered. The ASEAN ministers refused to take sides on recent Sino-Philippines conflict.

In May 2014, the introduction by China of a drilling rig into waters near the Paracel Islands led to multiple collisions between Vietnamese and China ships. The rig's deployment generated anti-China demonstrations across Vietnam that led to attacks on hundreds of factories that employ Chinese workers, five of whom were killed and hundreds more injured. China has announced that is moving a second oil rig closer to Vietnam's coast, announcing its determination to continue searching for resources in disputed waters despite a tense confrontation with Vietnam (CBS News 2014). The shifting of the rig came as officials from both sides said they made no progress in talks over the deployment of the first Chinese rig on May 1 which sparked the current standoff (see map III).

What are the main arguments behind these clashes between China and some of the ASEAN nations?

Beijing points out that they have historical territorial claims (Ikeda 2013; Kai 2013) and exhibits a map from the Nationalist period (1947), used in high-school classes, that sketches a "nine-dash line" which encompasses a larger part of the South China Sea. The exact course of this "line" is not specified but Beijing includes it in the confined area being a significant part of the Executive Economic Zones which to Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. At the exterior there is nothing illegal about the establishment of an ADIZ as international law does not forbid sovereign nations to define such zones - as both the United

¹⁸ In July 2012 China formally created Sansha city, an administrative body with its headquarters in the Paracels which it says oversees Chinese territory in the South China Sea - including the Paracels and the Spratlys. Both Vietnam and the Philippines protested against this move.

¹⁹ In January 2013, Manila said it was taking China to a UN tribunal under the auspices of the *UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea*, to challenge its claims in the South China Sea.

States and Japan both have those zones. The problem is that this China's ADIZ covers the air space over islands claimed both by Japan and China and the Chinese PLA is demanding planes flying through the zone to communicate their flight plans and identify themselves (Minxin 2013 c)). As Japan nationalized the Spratly Islands in late 2011, China is escalating its countermeasures and has sent official vessels to patrol territorial waters; in one encounter a Chinese ship locked its fire control radar on a Japanese coast guard ship (see map III).

Japan argues that the Senkaku Islands were incorporated into Japanese territory through a government decision in 1895, and since then is consistently taken the position that the islands are part of Japan. The only break in this legal possession was from 1945 to 1972, when the islands, following the Japan defeat in the war, were placed under the administration of the U.S. as part of the Okinawa prefecture. With the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972, the Senkaku Islands returned to Japan as part of Japanese territory, and the U.S. repeatedly state that the islands are within the range of application of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. China argues that Japan 'stole' the islands during the Sino-Japanese War, but Japan counter argues that the islands were never under the control of China's Qing Dynasty and Japan, in accordance with international law, incorporated the islands into its sovereign territory. Under the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which was signed in April 1895, the Chinese Emperor ceded Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands to Japan, but no mention was made of the Senkaku Islands. China invokes the 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Postdam Declaration as legal base for its claims of sovereignty over the so-said islands but the Cairo Declaration only enforces Japan 'to restore to the Republic of China all the territories Japan has stolen from the Qing Dynasty such as Manchuria, Formosa and the Pescadores (Ikeda 2013). The Postdam Declaration simply says that 'the Cairo Declaration shall be implemented' but no evidence exists that the Allied Powers and the Taiwan government considered the Senkaku as part of Formosa Islands. The San Francisco Treaty that defined the territory of Japan expressly stipulate that 'Japan renounced territorial sovereignty over Formosa and Pescadores' which the treaty said that were territories ceded by China to Japan during the Sino-Japanese War. If the Senkaku Islands were part of Taiwan the U.S. would have not placed the islands under its administration as part of Okinawa prefecture, remark the Japanese. Beijing says that the islands are described in old documents from the Ming Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty as tributary territories, which in the logic of the Chinese empire comprise other nations such as Mongolia, Korea, Tibet, Japan and Eastern Turkestan. China's claim of sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands erupted after a report of the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the East Pacific identifies potential oil and gas reserves in the disputed area.

Traditionally, the position of the U.S. is of independence concerning the Sino-Japanese dispute. On March 24, 2004, Adam Ereli, Spokesman of U.S. Department of State said that 'the U.S. does not take a position on the question of the ultimate sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands' and added 'we expect the claimants will resolve this issue through peaceful means and we urge all claimants to exercise restraint'²⁰. More recently, in its visit to Japan in April 2014 Barack Obama was unambiguous about saying that 'the US is duty-bound to come to Japan's aid in the event of a conflict with China over a group of disputed islands in the East China Sea' (The Guardian 2014). Obama reassured the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, that Japan's dispute with China over the Senkakus were covered by the allies' post-war security treaty, but he reiterated Washington's refusal to take sides in the sovereignty dispute and called on China and Japan to resolve their differences through dialogue.

²⁰ Quoted by Kai Jin, 'Structural Distrust' *ibid*.

Following Obama's statement in Japan, the Department of State elaborated on the U.S. objection to China's 'nine-dash line'. Danny Russel, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, remarked in a U.S. Congress hearing that Beijing's neighbors are alarmed by China's increasingly coercive efforts to assert and enforce its claims in the South China and East China Seas and that 'a pattern of unilateral Chinese actions in sensitive and disputed areas is raising tensions and damaging China's international standing' (U.S. Department of State 2014). Russel accentuated that 'the United States does not take sides on the sovereignty questions underlying the territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas', but have an interest in 'the behavior of states in their management or resolution of these disputes'. He further encouraged China, to manage or settle claims 'through peaceful, diplomatic means', reminding the examples of the Philippines and Indonesia that have done that in connection with their EEZ boundary throughout a third-party dispute settlement. Russel reiterate the U.S. opposition (and the international community's) to the use or the threat of force to try to advance a claim, and view such actions as having no effect in strengthening the legitimacy of China's claims. He restated that 'these issues should be decided on the basis of the merits of China's and other claimants' legal claims and adherence to international law and norms, not the strength of their militaries and law enforcement ships or the size of their economies'.

So a risk of confrontation exists, involving these countries, over the disputed waterfront and the trade maritime routes that connect the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. China has built ports along strategic points along the Asian coast and in the dispersed islands to protect the passageway of its flotilla and container ships towards the Middle East and Africa. Directly challenging the legality of China's 'nine-dash-line' carries some risks and puts the U.S. and other countries - like the Philippines that defy China's unilateral imposition - in a tough spot if China decides to ignore the warnings. Obama administration looks to take the appropriate measures by strengthening the U.S. military presence in the region through the building of a robust regional missile defense system that includes the deployment of two additional ballistic missile defense ships to Japan, the construction of a second missile defense radar site in Japan, and the expansion of America's ground-based interceptors in the continental United States, as Defense Secretary Hager announced in May, in Singapore (U.S. Department of Defense 2014 d)). Hager remembered that in recent months, China has undertaken destabilizing, unilateral actions asserting its claims in the South China Sea, restricted access to Scarborough Reef, put pressure on the long-standing Philippine presence at the Second Thomas Shoal, begun land reclamation activities at multiple locations, and moved an oil rig into disputed waters near the Paracel Islands. He reiterated that 'the U.S. oppose any effort - by any nation - to restrict overflight or freedom of navigation - whether from military or civilian vessels, from countries big or small'. He declared that 'the United States will not look the other way when fundamental principles of the international order are being challenged'. He announced that the U.S. will support efforts by any nation to lower tensions and peacefully resolve disputes in accordance with international law.

5. Conclusions

China is determined to raise its profile in the international stage by acquiring elements of hard power through two routes, one economic and the other security-biased. The first looks to develop China's economy in a more sustainable way turning the country into a 'prosperous society' by 2020, the year of the second centennial of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. Although the pace of growth of China's GDP has come down to a single digit, the country may attain the objective of becoming the largest world economy by the middle of the 21st century. Secondly, China's elite is too devoted to the modernization and restructuring China's armed forces, namely the navy and air force branches, in order to turn China into a

maritime power. The continuous growth of China's defense budget, the purchase of sophisticated weaponry and the production of aircraft carriers demonstrates that Beijing is preparing itself for a bigger role in the Asia-Pacific Region that was somehow loosen during the nineteen century when China needed to make several territorial concessions to Western Powers and Japan. The rise of nationalism has prepared the way for the current Chinese leadership to put aside the defensive approach that Deng Xiao Ping has recommend for China to have with its neighbors. A more proactive defense strategic interlinked with Beijing national interests as made its way, even with the cost of China being perceived by its neighbors, the U.S. and the international community as an assertive or expansionist Great Power. Some commentators even advance that China is looking to build its own 'lebensraum' projecting its strength and intimidating other Asian powers that are not willing to accommodate to a sphere of influence paradigm. China has increase its military capabilities whilst the major power of the region – the United States – was busy moving back from the battlefields of the Middle East. This retreat led some commentators to say that the U.S. is declining and that China would substitute the U.S. has the world next hegemonic power. This conclusion may be too bold as in terms of manpower, land systems, air and naval power, experience in combat, technology, weaponry, China has not reach the level of global power that may damage or threaten the U.S. position. Saying that, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea materialized in a succession of incidents with America traditional allies in the region are sending signs of alert to other nations about eventual plans, from China, to restrict the access and transit of ships through the international sea lines that tie the Pacific and the Indian oceans. The recent consciousness of the United States about the Southeast Asia's role is part of a comprehensive approach to East Asia that looks not to contain China but restore the confidence in the region. A objective that can be achieved by a robust military presence of the United States in that part of the world.

China is looking to build what the President of China called 'a new model of great power relations' that aims to wield much more power and influence in the Asia-Pacific Region than China has for the past few centuries. This is a zero-sum game and President Xi believes that for China to have more power, America should have less. Chinese leaders recognize that America's position in the region is built on a network of alliances with many of Beijing neighbors. So China trust that weakening these relationships may be the way to weaken U.S. power and influence in the region. The best way for it would be to undermine the confidence of America's allies that Washington is able and strong-minded to protect them from China's projection of power. By using direct military pressure in its territorial clashes with its regional counterparts, China makes them more eager for U.S. Military support and put the U.S. in the difficult dilemma of deserting its friends or fighting China. This is the reason why President Obama is targeting a third goal between these two very costly and risky choices: to encourage America's allies to update their hard-power potentials by supplying them with high-tech weapons systems and impel them to dialogue among themselves and join forces to face China's boosting threat.

References

1. Acharya, Amitav, *The End of American World Order*, Polity, 2014.
2. Andreosso-O'Callaghan and Nicolas, Françoise. 'Complementarity and Rivalry in EU-China Economic Relations in the Twentieth-First Century. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 12, 13-38, available at www.ifri.org.
3. BBC (2014). 'Obama Asia tour: US-Japan treaty 'covers disputed islands', April 24.
4. Berger, Samuel (1999). 'American Power: Hegemony, Isolationism or Engagement', *Council on Foreign Affairs*, October 21, available at www.cfr.org.
5. Beijing Review (2014), 'Building a Reasonable Power', April 14.
6. Bloomberg (2014). 'Australia Calls China's Actions in South China Sea 'Unhelpful'', June 1.
7. Brown, Kerry, Loh Su-hsing (2010). "China's next elite: 2012 and beyond", *Open Democracy*, in www.opendemocracy.net
8. CBS News (2014). 'China moving 2nd oil rig closer to Vietnam', June 19.
9. Cheng Li (2005). 'One Party, Two Factions:"Chinese Bipartisanship in the Making?', Conference on "Chinese Leadership, Politics, and Policy, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 2, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Li.pdf>
10. Clinton, Hillary (2013). 'Farewell Address at the Council of Foreign Affairs', *Council of Foreign Affairs*, available at <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/remarks-american-leadership/p35382>
11. CNBC International (2014). 'China's leader, seeking to build its muscle, pushes overhaul of the military', May 25 in www.cnbc.com.
12. Deal, Jacqueline Newmeyer (2013). 'China's National Heritage'. *The National Interest*, January-February.
13. Drezner, Daniel W., Rachman, Gideon, Kagan, Robert (2012), 'The Rise or Fall of the American Empire', *Foreign Policy*, February 14, in <http://foreignpolicy.com/>.
14. Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines (2012). 'China has sovereignty over Huangyan Island', June 8, available in <http://ph.china-embassy.org/eng/xwfb/t939694.htm>
15. Ferguson, Nial (2012). *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. London: Penguin Books.
16. Forbes (2013). 'China President Urges Military to Expand, Strength', September 1.
17. Global Times, Xi Jinping pledges 'great renewal of Chinese nation', via Xinhua, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/747443.shtml>
18. Huffington Post (2014), 'Xi Jinping's Excellent Adventure: a Calibrated Takeover of the South China Sea', May 20.
19. Ikeda, Tadaski (2013). 'Getting Senkaku History Right'. *The Diplomat*, November 26.
20. Jacques, Martin (2012). 'A Point Of View: Making sense of China'. BBC, October 12.
21. Japan Realtime (2014), 'China Says Abe's Military Plans will Increase Tensions', April 22, in <http://blogs.wsj.com>
22. Kagan, Robert (2014). 'President's Obama's foreign policy paradox'. *Washington Post*, March 26.
23. Kai Jin (2013). 'Structural Distrust: undermining a Senkakou.Daioyu Solution. *The Diplomat*, October 6.
24. Kazanis, Harry (2014). 'America and China's Perception Problems', *The Diplomat*, February 17.
25. Kegley Jr, Charles W., Wittkopf, Eugene R. (1997, 6th Edition.). *World Politics. Trend and Transformation*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 211-3.
26. Kupchan, Charles .A. (2011). *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest and the Coming Global Turn*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
27. Miller, J. Berkshire (2012). 'China's Other Territorial Dispute: Baekdu Mountain'. *The Diplomat*, December 23.

28. Minxin Pei (2012)
 - a) 'Is China's Communist Party Doomed?'. *The Diplomat*, October 1, in <http://thediplomat.com>;
 - b) 'Now the Hard Part Begins: The China Challenge', *The Diplomat*, November 20, in <http://thediplomat.com>.
 - c) 'China's game of chicken in the East China Sea', *Fortune*, December 4, available at <http://fortune.com/2013/12/04/chinas-game-of-chicken-in-the-east-china-sea/>
29. Nasr, Vali (2014). *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat*, Achor: Harpswell.
30. Nau, Henry R (2009 2nd Edition). *Perspectives on International Relations*. Washington: CQ Press, 28- 29.
31. Nipon.com. (2014) 'Will Rising Tensions in the South China Sea Spill Over into the East China Sea?', June 6, <http://www.nippon.com/en/> .
32. Nye Jr., Joseph S.:
 - a) (2012). 'Asian Nationalism at Sea', *Project Syndicate*, September 3, in www.project-syndicate.org.
 - b) (2004). 'The Decline of America's Soft Power'. *Foreign Affairs*, 81, 3, May-June, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2004-05-01/decline-americas-soft-power>.
 - c) (2004). *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
33. Paal, Douglas H. (2012). 'Why the South China Sea is not a "Sudetenland Moment"'. *The Diplomat*, August 18.
34. Posen, Barry R. (2004). 'The Unipolar Moment and the ESDP', *Discussion paper*, from "ESDP and the Structure of World Power," *The International Spectator*, XXXIX, 1, 5-17. <http://www.yale.edu/irspeakers/Posen%20-%20EuropeTheoryessay.doc>
35. Reuters (2013). 'China can speak with one voice on security via new council, Xi says', in www.reuters.com, November 1.;
36. Rice, Condoleezza (2000). 'Life after the Cold War', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February, 79, 1, in <http://www.foreignpolicy2000/org>.
37. Roubini, Nouriel (2014). 'Keeping China's Rise Peaceful is our Biggest Political Challenge'. *The Guardian*, April 30;
38. South China Morning Post:
 - a) (2014). 'China, Russia start joint naval exercise', May 20.
 - b) (2013). 'Xi Jinping sidesteps Southeast Asian pressure over China Sea disputes', October 3.
 - c) (2013), ' Xi at the Crossroads', November 19.
39. Thayer, Carl (2014). 'Tensions set to rise in the South China Sea'. *The Diplomat*, February 19.
40. The Guardian (2014). 'Obama says US will defend Japan in island dispute with China', April 24.
41. The Guardian (2013). 'China capitalises on Obama's absence to press business case at Asia summit', October 25.
42. The Irish Times (2014). 'Democracy not for China, says Xi Jinping', April 2. Also Reuters, in <http://in.reuters.com>.
43. The New York Times (2011). 'With its Eye on China, Japan Builds up Military', February 28.
44. The Trait Times (2013). 'China, Indonesia sign economic agreements during Xi Jinping's visit', October 2.
45. The Washington Post (2013). 'China's new security committee highlights President Xi's consolidation of authority', November 13.
46. The White House (2014). 'The President's Trip to Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines', in <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/asia-trip-spring-2014>
47. United Nations (December 2003). *Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations*. New York: Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, available at <http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org>
48. Wang Jisi and Joseph Nye Jr. (2013), 'We're all Declinist Pundits these days: Recession Proof', *Foreign Policy* on-line revue, January 2.

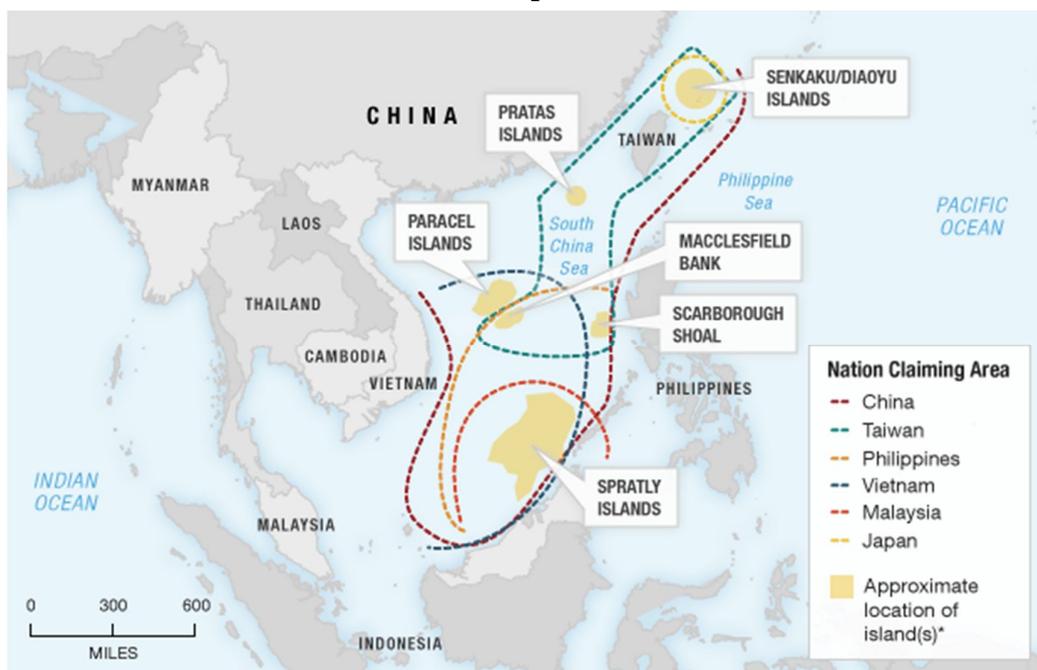
49. WantChinaTimes.com, 'Obama Forced to Concede New 'International Order': Dowei', May 2, via www.wantchinatimes.com.
50. Wendt, Alexandre (2003) 'Why a World State is Inevitable. Teleology and the Logic of Anarchy'. *European Journal of International Relations*, 9, 4, December 2003, 491-542.
51. Wong, Kristina (2014). 'Republicans Blast Obama Defense Cuts', The Hill, <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/199617-republicans-blast-obama-defense-cuts>
52. U.S. Department of Defense (2014):
 - a) 'Hagel Outlines Budget Reducing Troop Strength, Force Structure', February 24, available at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121703>
 - b) 'Joint Staff Official Discusses Russian Military Evolution', April 8, available at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122013>
 - c) 'Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments involving the People's Republic of China in 2014', available at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf
 - d) 'Hagel Remarks in Singapore on U.S. Asia-Pacific Policy', May 31, available at <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>
53. U.S. Department of State (2014). 'The Future of U.S.-China Relations', Daniel Russel. June 25, available at <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2014/06/228415.htm>
54. U.S. Department of State (1998). 'Transcript: Albright Interview on NBC-TV', February 19, http://fas.org/news/iraq/1998/02/19/98021907_tpo.html
55. USA Today (2013). 'China's Xi courts Malaysia; Obama stays at home', 4th October, in www.usatoday.com, October 14.
56. Voice of America (2014). 'US-Philippines War Games Open in Disputed Waters', June 27, available at <http://www.voanews.com>
57. Xinhua (2013). 'Xi advocates efforts to boost China's maritime power', July 31, in <http://news.xinhuanet.com>
58. Xinhua (2013), 'China promotes 6 officers to General', July 31, in <http://english.cri.cn>
59. Zakaria, Fareed (2009). *Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest*, London: Penguin Books.
60. Zheng Wang (2013). 'Not Rising, But Rejuvenation: The Chinese Dream'. *The Diplomat*, February 5.

MAP I
People's Liberation Army Navy



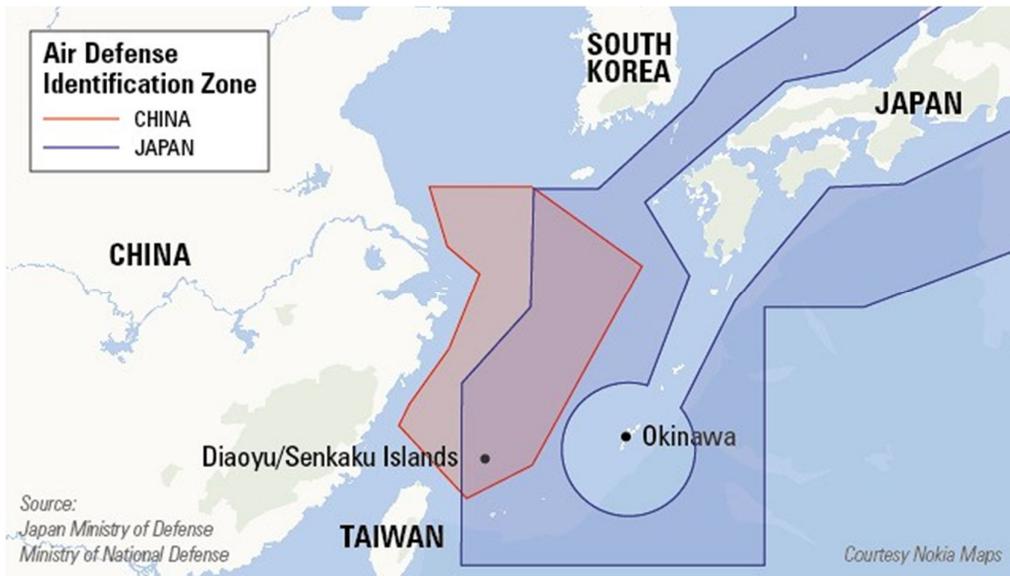
Source: www.globalsecurity.org

Map II
China Sea disputed islands



Source: NPR Broadcasting and Media Production, www.npr.org

Map III
China and Japan Air Defense Identification Zones



Source: Japan Ministry of Defense. Ministry of National Defence.