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China and US create less pacific ocean

By Geoff Dyer in Washington

The naval build-up by Beijing and a Pentagon shift in seaborne firepower towards Asia are creating an arena for rivalries, writes Geoff Dyer



Xi Jinping, the man destined to become China's leader later this year, is steeped in the country's military. The son of a famous communist guerrilla leader from the 1930s, his first job was as personal assistant to the defence minister and he proudly wore military uniform to the office every day.

So when Mr Xi arrives in Washington on Monday for an official visit, he will doubtless pay particular attention to the historic shift in military strategy that the US is putting in place in Asia.

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when the country's finances are under huge pressure. "We will be strengthening our presence in the Asia-Pacific," Mr Obama declared last month, "and budget reductions will not come at the expense of that critical region."

The reason is China. As Mr Xi will be asked to discuss when he visits the Pentagon on Tuesday, China has invested heavily in recent years in weapons that may be able to challenge American primacy in the Pacific, including radar-evading stealth fighters and anti-ship ballistic missiles. Those investments have now very much captured the attention of American policymakers.

Even before the US started to develop its new strategy, [military rivalry in the western Pacific](#) was already becoming one of the main geopolitical stress-points of the coming decades. That process is now accelerating.

Yet Mr Xi's visit will bring to the fore the important questions that this change in strategy has generated. In an era of austerity, can the US afford the greater presence in Asia? And how can Washington prevent this push from turning China into a resentful adversary, in the process sparking an arms race?

For much of the past two decades, American officials say, the strategy towards China has been a mixture of hedging and engagement – [the alliance with Japan](#) being the main form of hedging and China's entry to the World Trade Organisation an example of engagement. But in the past two years there has been a lot more hedging. It started when Hillary Clinton, secretary of state, [infuriated Beijing](#) in 2010 by saying the US could act as a mediator in the territorial disputes between China and some of its neighbours in the South China Sea.

Since then [Washington has agreed to open a base in northern Australia](#), which will provide a training platform for US, Australian and possibly Japanese marines. The US, which was kicked out of its bases at Clark and Subic Bay in the Philippines in 1992, is now in negotiations with Manila about allowing more of its warplanes and ships to refuel in the country.

While American officials tend to be coy about talking about the threat in public, the strategy unveiled in January was not so shy about naming China as the reason for the "pivot" to Asia. Indeed, at one stage the review mentions China in the same sentence as Iran as the two principal looming military threats – hardly reassuring for Beijing, given the current level of rhetoric directed at Tehran.

Deep in the bowels of the Pentagon, a group of officials is devising a military fighting concept called [AirSea Battle](#) that has China very much in its sites. Planners use seemingly bland military jargon to describe the project – they say they are trying to develop strategies to counter other countries' capability for "anti-access/anti-denial", or A2/AD for short. "Sometimes the biggest fight is

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getting to the fight,” as one of the Pentagon officials puts it.

Chinese response: From riled to reflective

“Completely baseless accusations.” That was the official response from Beijing when the Pentagon unveiled its new defence strategy in January, which singled out China as one of the principal military challenges facing the US, write *Kathrin Hille* and *Geoff Dyer*.

Senior Colonel Geng Yansheng, spokesman for China’s defence ministry, called on the US to “follow the trend of the era and deal with China and the Chinese military in an objective and rational way” and warned Washington to “be careful in its words and actions”.

Chinese officials have also decried the recent strengthening of US military alliances in Asia as “cold war thinking” and warned that such moves could destabilise the region.

Yet beyond that, the Chinese government and military have both sought to avoid direct criticism of AirSea Battle, the military doctrine that Pentagon planners are developing to deal with China’s growing capabilities.

While the perception that the US is looking to contain China is one with deep roots among the Chinese military and officialdom, there has also been a period of reflection in Beijing about the way that opinion in the region has moved against China so strongly over the past couple of years.

Lin Zhiyuan, an expert on the US at the Academy of Military Science, the top research institution of the Chinese armed forces, said recently in *Liberation Daily*, the main military newspaper, that the US was simply resuming a move of its strategic focus to the east that it had begun after the end of the cold war but which had been disrupted by its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“The US’s interference in some hotspots creates an even more complicated environment for

But the title of the new doctrine is suggestive – it is a reference to the cold war strategy of AirLand Battle, developed to cope with the massed ranks of Warsaw Pact soldiers in Europe. Pentagon planners also make no secret of the fact that, apart from in limited circumstances near Iran, China is the one country developing the weapons, ships and technologies that could block American access to strategic waterways.

• • •

The **Pentagon has been forced to cut \$485bn** out of the budget that it was planning to spend over the next decade, leading to delays or cancellations in 60 different projects. On the face of it, however, the main planks of the shift to Asia appear to have been preserved. Air and naval power are the keys in Asia, and it is the army that is bearing the brunt of the cuts. “This budget protects, and in some cases increases, investments that are critical to our ability to project power in Asia,” Leon Panetta, defence secretary, said last month.

The navy will retain all 11 of its aircraft carriers – the principal platforms for projecting power over the vast distances of the Pacific region. It will also invest in “littoral combat” vessels, high-speed ships made for operating close to shore, some of which may be based in Singapore. The project to develop a new long-range bomber has been maintained – another system deemed crucial by many for Asia’s large distances and China’s emerging capabilities. The Pentagon plan also calls for expanded investment of the Virginia-class attack submarines.

Yet critics have also pointed to plenty of holes. Not only is the tactical fighter programme being scaled back but the navy is also having to streamline its overall fleet. According to Lieutenant General Chip Gregson, formerly the Pentagon’s senior official for Asia, the navy is likely to end up with 246 ships, well short of the 346 that a bipartisan expert panel recommended in 2010. “This is important because no matter how capable the ship, it can only be in one place at a time,” he says. “And power projection that stays is about ships.”

Notably, one of the very few specific foreign policy commitments that Mitt Romney has made during the Republican presidential primaries has

China's strategy of a peaceful rise," he said, adding that China needed to respond by trying to improve relations with its neighbours to allay their concerns about its ascendancy.

Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says the administration of President Barack Obama has gone to considerable lengths to try to assuage Chinese concerns about its new military posture in Asia.

Hillary Clinton, secretary of state, and Tom Donilon, national security adviser, conducted a long briefing with Dai Bingguo, China's senior foreign policy official, she adds. "There is growing concern about what kind of power China will become," says Ms Glaser. "But this is not strategic encirclement or containment."

been to raise the rate of naval shipbuilding from nine to 15 keels a year.

For some observers, the real cost pressures will come not from budget cuts but because the US appears intent on maintaining dominance of the seas in the western Pacific. As China continues to invest in its own military in the coming decades, that will force heavy US investments in anti-submarine warfare, and in the weapons and technologies needed to counter China's anti-ship missiles.

"If the objective is just to prevent territorial expansion, then the US strategy could work," says Raoul Heinrichs at Australia's Lowy Institute. "But what the US is saying is that it wants to deny China the ability to control even its own maritime approaches, which is much more expensive. They have set themselves a very high bar."

Whether Washington can afford its new push is only one of the questions this raises. The other pressing issue is how China reacts.

Even before Washington started to place more emphasis on Asia, it was commonplace in Chinese politics and society to hear that America was bent on encircling China. With the moves the Obama administration has made over the past couple of years, that paranoia about an American policy of containment has only become stronger. The US and China have a "trust deficit", as [Cui Tiankai](#), Chinese vice foreign minister, politely phrased it in a speech last week.

Some believe that the growing rivalry has already sparked an arms race, with investments in weapons and technology by one side sparking spending by others. "We are seeing the interactive pattern of military procurements that have all the hallmarks of the early part of an arms race," says Mr Heinrichs. "The long-term trend is for more friction, tension and tests of resolve. The idea among Chinese that they are being encircled has only become stronger."

Friendly Asian governments have already cautioned the US to tone down its rhetoric. In Washington, some fear that the new attention on China could become an excuse to maintain levels of military spending that would otherwise be cut as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars fade.

...

Against these mounting concerns, however, Ernest Bower, an Asia expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says it is important not to overstate the extent of the military shift towards Asia. "The communications on this have not been great," he says. "But the military footprint is designed to be nimble and light. There will be no new huge American bases across Asia."

US officials and scholars stress that the recent push did not happen in a vacuum but was a response to Chinese actions. Indeed, as China's diplomacy

became more assertive in recent years in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, several governments in the region urged the US to increase its military presence in Asia. The **US did not force Australia to give it a base**: it was invited.

Washington needs to make sure that “China sees that the US reacted to Asia’s own response to China’s actions”, says Richard Bush, a former diplomat now at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think-tank. “Our goal is to encourage China to use diplomacy, not coercion.”

Washington also insists that its new focus is not part of zero-sum military rivalry with China. Instead, it is part of an agenda for pushing for greater multilateral co-operation in the region. After remaining on the sidelines for much of the past decade, the US last year joined the East Asia Summit, a main regional forum for economic, political and security issues (China is also a member). The Obama administration has also revived its trade agenda in the region, throwing its weight behind the trans-Pacific Partnership, a free-trade agreement being negotiated by nine countries.

“If China presents its own ideas, its own plans for expanded multilateralism in Asia, then that is fine, it is part of the process,” says one senior administration official.

Washington and Beijing also talk frequently, including at the annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue, which brings together most of the US cabinet and large swaths of the senior Chinese leadership. Yet American officials say there are two missing pieces. The militaries of both countries are barely on speaking terms. And at the very top, leaders need to have franker conversations about their countries’ long-term interests and intentions.

Hu Jintao, China’s strait-laced current leader, is said by US officials to give little away even in private. That is why all eyes will be on the avuncular Mr Xi in Washington this week.

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Comments



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Wild Cat | February 15 6:13am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@Felix Drost: You are uncommonly generous but US generosity to continually police sea lanes for rest of world, particularly a China that is poised to overtake it economically in as little as less than a decade, begs credulity (more so given the incessant barking against China emanating out of Washington these days).

China would be real foolish to keep assuming US goodwill and generosity forever. Assuming your line of thinking and US sincerity, won't it be more logical for the US to encourage rather than hinder China's growing propensity to fend for itself in keeping its own shipping/trade routes safe?

Chris08 | February 15 2:53am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

The area in "dispute" is adjacent to China and far away from the US. That puts the US at a great disadvantage in almost every way. In a conflict China would be defending itself and the US would be trying to maintain imperial outposts that are not vital to its existence.

Felix Drost | February 14 11:51pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

China owes its growth to access to world markets over seas kept tranquil by pax Americana. While this may be galling to some in the defense establishment, the common Chinese ought to breathe a sign of relief that her tax money isn't being spent on keeping shipping lanes open and competitive. The Yanks now pay for keeping Chinese shipping costs to its distant markets no decisive competitive factor.

It is in the long term interest of China to develop the ability to maintain open shipping by itself if for some reason the US were to retreat, but the main concern of all parties (except pirates) is that there is peace on the seas. It seems natural that China takes on a greater part of that burden since it so profits from it.

Jeannick | February 14 5:23am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Yep, except that the intentions are quite clear, local military supremacy, if needed

Wild Cat | February 14 4:00am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@Jeannick: The Sunda straits is Indonesian territorial waters (I think) and one unintended side effect of US forces landing recently in north Australia was that it raised a stink in Jakarta about US and Australian real intentions.

Wild Cat | February 14 3:57am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@RGB California: As you let your imagination run wild, let it also be said that those with like imagination can make exactly same speculations as yours about the US right now!

Boomer | February 14 2:59am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

MONCREIF, can you tell us more about the Japanese sinking the

" Russian fleet in the Bay of Tushkin 1916"

I've never heard of that one before. And neither has anyone else.

Jeannick | February 13 8:17pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@ Gary Struthers

There is a pipeline running through Burma, for long this country and it's oil was treated as a tribute state, and good allie, the side window by-passing the Malacca strait
the recent gushing embrace by la Clinton has raised a few eyebrows in Beijing

Yes the vast bulk of the oil come through Ormuz and Malacca, a bit less from the later as the ships get bigger and Malacca is quite shallow and crowded
they tend to use the Sunda passage more those days ,
it's not just oil vast amount of seaborne trade pass through there too
also Australian coal and Iron ore in massive quantities come by the South East passages ,
the Lombok and Timor Straits are the favored gates for nuclear subs

@Renatus ,

I'm not certain what proportion of the U.S. population could locate the Pacific Ocean on a map
was it Jeferson who kipped that God made the U.S. go to war to teach them geography ?

Living in Lux | February 13 4:50pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@ RGB California

Exactly right in my opinion. The Chinese state uses nationalism frequently to distract people from other issues. Beware when China enters a recession...

RGB California | February 13 3:09pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

The danger is not China's supremacy, the danger is their self-perception of their supremacy. That country has so many problems they may want to solve them on the back of other Pacific rim countries, or distract their people with real or perceived external threats.

grybarre | February 13 1:40pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Who thought that "domination by land, sea, air and space" was a doctrine that died with the Neo-cons?

You were wrong.

America is still behaving like the Mad Emperor Ming.

Sheer insanity rules OK.

Allah | February 13 11:30am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Cut to the chase.

Both countries want to rule over asia (the us having ruled for the last 50 years !).

Once again, who will have more firepower will rule for next 50 ones !

Sinopticus | February 13 11:24am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

All that spending requires an enemy or a threat to justify it. This is the concern, and will doubtless lead to tensions.

Don't bet against the USA though. China's economy and institutions have an AWFULLY long way to come.....

Renatus | February 13 11:04am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@Jeannick

"...we are pretty much aware that the yanks are rather ignorant of Asia's mores
Singapore is 90% Chinese..."

Ignorant, did you say?

Renatus | February 13 11:02am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

@ Italian European

Never has a nom de plume been more indicative of schizophrenia.

Renatus | February 13 10:58am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

"Prepare for war and you will fight wars for generations."

Had Britain properly done so, we would not this week be celebrating the 70th anniversary of her defeat in Singapore and, rather more importantly, all the human misery that accompanied it.

That is the cost of decadent utopian pacifism.

MONCRIEF | February 13 9:43am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

China is not a threat because if they were they would sell 3 trillion dollars of US debt and throw a spanner in the works. They have one nuclear powered aircraft carrier purchased from Russia. China never attacked the USA....Japan sunk the entire US fleet in Hawaii 1941 and also the Russian fleet in the Bay of Tushkin 1916 and previously the Chinese fleet; plus invading Manchuria for natural resources in 1933. China gets oil from Iran and Central Asia plus huge investments in AFRICA. America has nothing to fear...except fear itself (FDR).

tdmc | February 13 9:25am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

ADDENDUM:

To my immed. last comment below:

We should remember,while China is a rapidly-emerging(emerged)manufacturing and ascending military giant,their greatest weakness(apart from their 'undemocratic' political system and excessively high population),is they lack natural resources(oil,commodities for manufacturing)and must import nearly everything.

The only natural resource they have in abundance,a definite plus+ point,is vast amounts of shale gas,which will diminish their reliance on imported oil,as yet undeveloped.

The Chinese,before the recent Japanese nuclear power station disaster,had intended to build at least 40 new nuclear power stations.They have not indicated whether they are deferring this programme in the light of the Japanese disaster.I suspect deferrals of programmes to build new nuclear power stations by many nations will be short-lived in nations short of natural resources.

China's continuing emergence in military might is dependant on their continuing economic well-being and their above cited weaknesses have a definite bearing on that.

Josef Franek | February 13 9:19am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

This new cold war will destroy America economically as the previous cold war destroyed the Soviet

Union.
Too bad the US can't live happily as no 2. Their quest to dominate the world is sickening.

tdmc | February 13 8:57am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Why not,(after more frequent high level talks between senior US&Chinese leadership,including high level military contact,lacking today),try "Salt" type treaties to limit this regional arms race-and in so doing save cash spent on military hardware unnecessarily.

But of course we have the "trust deficit"(first coined by a top Chinese militarist),justifiably.....

Would the Chinese abide by such treaties?Well there would be bilateral inspection/observer teams for compliance.

The Chinese elicit this mis-trust('trust deficit') by their secretive ways,possibly unintended but belying a lack of maturity in political insight.They are a new rapidly- emerging giant,lacking centuries of political sophistry and maturity,although an historic old culture,progress in political maturity and sophistry has been hampered by feudal systems under its emperor dynasties that stayed too long,supplanted by the greater evil of Mao,with a party-dominated alternative 'democracy' of a sort existant today,which causes it to wobble from time to time.This system has built in a succession stability,in part also designed to prevent ascent of another Mao.

We should avoid,while protecting our interests and promoting trade(which prevents military conflict),being outright adversarial,but show we can give and take and compromise and meet halfway or more and that our real intentions are peace,not conflict,and we should encourage and get that over to China.

z10 | February 13 7:20am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

USA will go bankrupt next year, what arm race? After USA go bankrupt, the country will fall into mass riot and anarchy (check what George Soros said). The most likely outcome is USA will break up into 3 separate countries. A few states will declare a new Confederate States of America (control by whites), another will be control by Latino (supported by Mexico) and another one will be the original USA but with much smaller territory.

Italian European | February 13 5:23am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Renatus wrote:

"The possibility of collapse and fragmentation of the Italian state over the next few years cannot be ruled out with plenty of other negative surprises emanating from Europe are possible."

Can anyone, please, advise Renatus about a good therapist....?

Hu Jin Ta Ta bye bye | February 13 3:23am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

What if anti-Submarine and anti-Ship Missiles were based in Phillipines, Vietnam, S.Korea, Indonesia all the way to India ? Chinese Navy will be like the Dowager Empress - all hot air and unable to fight . The Chinese asked for it they are now going to get it, The whole of Asia barring their Puppets i.e. Singapore, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are against them and their puppets don't matter . As for Russia and the Sthans, well once Putin their puppet is gone is Russia then an ally at all ? Chinese intent and ineptness is demonstrated in Libya, Egypt and now Syria . Xi Jinping is another wood head Chinese leader . Time for him to eat his own head as soup .

swoosh | February 13 2:46am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

The americans are dreaming if they think they can beat China in the next cold war. The Chinese are not Russians. They play for longer game.

Gary Struthers | February 12 11:54pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Carrier killing missiles and a blue water navy won't change the fact that China's oil supply flows through choke points at Hormuz and Malacca. They remain vulnerable as long as their oil comes by sea. Pipelines from Russia and the 'stan countries should be their highest priority followed by domestic shale oil.

Wild Cat | February 12 11:37pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Why does the US seem bent on "encircling" China? Trust is severely lacking in both Washington and Beijing. Most ordinary Chinese and their government, I dare say, treat the US with a healthy, even admiring (until the latest US economic meltdown), respect. The US and Americans only return the favour with a mixture of awe and fear of China, perhaps not helped, again by the current economic crisis which has in turned spawned political paralysis.

China demands mutual respect; the US seems prepared only to give a Cold War-era modicum of peaceful co-existence. With that mismatch unresolved, expect the mutual mistrust and the arising tensions to continue.

util | February 12 10:53pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

"one axiom has withstood 1600 years of stress testing: if you want peace prepare for war"
... Rubbish. Prepare for war and you will fight wars for generations. The history of man is a history of

war... military industrial oxygen is fear.
Trade, engage and cooperate and you may not. Surely mankind can't repeat the mistakes of the last 1600.

Jeannick | February 12 9:56pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Thanks Renatus, perfect warmongering neocon thesis

First point, China "blundered horribly by revealing its hand".....whot?!?!?!?

China maritime strategy has been unchanged, unchanging and pretty much shouted to everyone since Mao proclaiming the People republic foundation on Tien A mien square

the first islands line is was and remain the base of their maritime strategy
the third islands line is a desire to secure their maritime approaches ,
that's not a secret either , anyone in their shoes would thinks the same
in fact it's military bloody common sense

They took the Spratly island from the crumbling South Vietnam regime in a race with the North Vietnamese, there was some shooting ,

The only thing which has changed is that now they have enough money to play with a blue water navy, on a small scale
they have one aircraft carrier, bought from scrap merchant and useful for maritime parade and training their aero naval forces from non existence to minimum competency
their newest and more exciting new ship is an amphibious landing ship
Like the U.S. Navy calling a carrier R.Reagan
the name say it all "Jinggangshan" was the first soviet created by Mao ,
It indicate a strong beginning, a general direction for growth
useful for regional action and thumping the locals but hardly blue water
so far the Chinese ire has been against the pesky Vietnamese inviting Idian warships in Cam ran bay .
Chine destroyers were waiting just offshore and quite rudely summed to identify themselves
in Navy speak it signifie "what are you bums doing around here "

As for the neighbor, Australia is as solid and as unflinching as any the U.S. got
but we are pretty much aware that the yanks are rather ignorant of Asia's mores
Singapore is 90% Chinese and would never get involved against the mainland
Taiwan is hardly more than an Chinese opera ritual
Japan would totally freak out if told to make a choice ,
South Korea at the most would bash the North after asking pretty please from Beijing

Renatus | February 12 8:43pm | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

As Asia celebrates the 70th anniversary this week of the collapse, in Singapore, of a half millenium of European hegemony in this region, certain reflections may be in order.

First, 3 generations after the momentous British battlefield collapse, now Europe itself totters like a drunk stumbling face first into the gutter. Chicken or egg can be debated, but what is historically clear is the game changing military defeats are often a forerunner of complete moral and then social collapse.
America must rise to the emerging Chinese challenge for more reasons than the interests of its allies.

Second, after its detour these last three years with Obama's Afghan escalation, it is now clear that America--and indeed all of SouthEast Asia--has woken up to the utterly obvious military threat from China which has, uncharacteristically if providentially, blundered horribly by revealing its hand. The best single hard evidence of real American resolve is what clearly will become the first permanent basing for the American Navy for decades in SEAsia in, no surprise, Singapore.

Governments from Rangoon to Washington understand the implications of the Chinese build up in Hainan, then the jumping off point for Japan's slash thru Malaya. This challenge can only be met by clear resolve. Romney's plan to sharply increase the number of keels laid annually would be a case in point. Returning the Air Force to U-Tapao (Thailand) and Clark (Philippines) air fields is an even more necessary move.

Third, even as all eyes are on Asia, the American geostrategists and in particularly its navy cannot ignore the Med and, critically, Suez. The possibility of collapse and fragmentation of the Italian state over the next few years cannot be ruled out, and enduring chaos in Greece, Syria, Libya and Egypt seem highly probable, with plenty of other negative surprises emanating from Europe are possible. Managing the collapse of allies is always challenging, particularly so in a trade route so vital as this.

Finally, one axiom has withstood 1600 years of stress testing: if you want peace prepare for war. That was the lesson forgotten 70 years ago, and in an even more dangerous world it must not be repeated.

