



## Pivot Toward Asia and March West Diversifying Forms of Rebalancing Conflicting Strategies

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China's foreign policy community contemplates is how to counter the U.S. rebalancing to Asia. A grand strategic proposal has been made that China shift its attention from the heated competition in East Asia and rebalance its geographical focus westwards to the vast area from Central Asia to the Middle East, where the U.S. is pivoting away from.

The research problem is concentrated on the question content: What kind of competition between the U.S and China among their strategies? and could it turn into a struggle or manage their relationship peacefully?

The main findings of the research can be summarized that both strategies are aimed to reach a status of power balancing in both the Middle East and East Asia.

**Key Words:** Pivot to Asia, March West, Strategies Competition, U.S China Power rebalancing.



## Introduction

**1, Introduction:** The accelerating U.S.-China rivalry carries profound implications for the security architecture in the Middle East, Northeast, and Southeast Asia. The rivalry is the main driver of the region's political polarization. Although countries have in recent years found opportunities to play the great powers off each other to extract maximum benefits, it will probably get harder to do so. Countries are also already learning that more generous benefits can accrue to countries that choose to align more closely with Beijing or Washington. But this same decision could come at the cost of antagonizing the rival country. Australia, for example, gained security and diplomatic benefits when it opted to work closely with the United States to build nuclear submarines. However, this decision also resulted in greater tensions with Beijing and various Chinese economic diplomatic and economic retaliation forms. In the coming years, many decisions, even those that seem technical and apolitical, may take on political overtones as the rivalry intensifies. The United States and China aren't satisfied with their relationship, but both sides appear to be interested in managing their differences.

**2-1. Hypothesis:** It should be noted, however, that China- U.S. strategic competition remains an inevitable and perhaps irreversible trend in the short and medium-term. Though their leaders have made



it clear conflicts are undesirable, the risks of miscalculation remain high. However, should the shift away from all-out, geopolitics-centric competition toward a competition of development models remain the dominant form of the China-U.S. competition, the region should stand to benefit.

### **3. Pivot Toward Asia U.S Strategy:**

In October 2011, Foreign Policy magazine published an article by then-U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Titled “America’s Pacific Century,” the subheading of the article reads: “The future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action.” This article is widely viewed as the manifesto of the Obama administration’s Asia policy — originally stated as the “pivot to Asia” but subsequently rephrased as the “rebalance to Asia.” For most Chinese officials and analysts, this rebalances to Asia is a thinly-disguised U.S. attempt to “encircle” a rising China. Indeed, considering the chain of U.S. military deployments and defense alliances in the Western Pacific, Washington can’t refute such an interpretation of its rebalance. (Is This China’s Eurasian Century?) (Tao X. , October, 10, 2015)

President Barack Obama's East Asia Strategy (2009–2017) represented a significant shift in the foreign policy of the United States. It took the country's focus from the Middle





Eastern/European sphere and began to invest heavily in East Asian countries, some of which are near the People's Republic of China. Additional focus was placed on the region with the Obama administration's 2012 "Pivot to East Asia" regional strategy, whose key areas of actions are: "strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights that reactions to the pivot strategy were mixed, as "different Asian states responded to American rebalancing in different ways." (Goldberg, 26 August 2016.) (Bush III, (31 January 2012). ) (Clinton, 11 October 2011)

On 4 June 2013, the Asia-Pacific Strategy Working Group at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) released Securing U.S. Interests and Values in the Asia-Pacific, a memorandum to President Barack Obama and the United States Congress. The President of the United States can achieve his goals in the Asia-Pacific, the memorandum argues, by working with Congress to employ a comprehensive, long-term strategy that satisfies the following four conditions: promoting economic integration and liberalization; strengthening alliances and security partnerships; reinforcing U.S. military posture in the Asia-Pacific; draw on the



full range of U.S. diplomatic and national power. (Dan Blumenthal; Ellen Bork; Jacqueline Newmyer Deal; Christopher J. Griffin; Randall G. Schriver; Gary J. Schmitt; Mark Stokes; Robert Zane., 5 June 2013.)

The United States has] strengthened its military deployments in the Asia-Pacific region, strengthened the US-Japan military alliance, strengthened strategic cooperation with India, improved relations with Vietnam, inveigled Pakistan, established a pro-American government in Afghanistan, increased arms sales to Taiwan, and so on. They have extended outposts and placed pressure points on us from the east, south, and west. (Robert Kagan, 2012)

Though other areas of the world remained important to American foreign policy, Obama pursued a "pivot" to East Asia, focusing the U.S.'s diplomacy and trade in the region China's continued emergence as a major power was a major issue of Obama's presidency; while the two countries worked together on issues such as climate change, the China-United States relationship also experienced tensions regarding territorial claims in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. (Clinton H. , November 2011 ) (Obama, 17 November 2011) (Nakamura, 1 March 2016)

The beginning of the 21st century witnessed remarkable changes in the distribution of global power. The lack of strategic





vision by the United States has resulted in a power crisis, which in turn accelerates the trends of new multipolarity with several power centers in the world. Since President Trump took office in January 2017, the United States has been challenging the established norms of international relations on many fronts and, in particular, shifting its policy toward China to one that trumpets geopolitical rivalry amid their economic interdependence. The ever-increasing anxiety of the United States has undermined multilateralism and globalization, generating profound consequences and impacts on major-power relations around the world. In the future, Washington and Beijing must seek common goals that can bring them together to resolve disagreements and set boundaries for potential conflicts. The U.S. leadership should always keep in mind that China is an important partner; and if the two powers fail to cooperate, there will be devastating implications for the whole world. In the meantime, Washington and Beijing need to be aware that an acute conflict of any kind between two high-tech countries may substantially change the world for all. (Arežina, 2019)

The new approach of American Strategy toward China was previously articulated by Secretary of State Antony Blinken: “Our relationship with China will be competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be. The



common denominator is the need to engage China from a position of strength.” (Pham, October 13, 2021)

Strategically, Biden Administration could also profit from the United States’ seemingly tougher approach toward China. After the devastation of alliance relations in the Trump era, Biden needs to find common ground for the United States to regain its allies’ trust and cooperation. A “China threat” thesis seems ever more tempting in this regard. One of the main aims of Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his visit to Japan and South Korea was to draw attention to what he called China’s “coercion and aggression” in the region. Domestically, with party politics becoming more polarized, the China challenge is one of few issues to receive overwhelming bipartisan support. Biden will likely use this issue to advance his agenda in the name of national security. (Chen, May 04, 2021)

To Oppose Chines “Marsh West” strategy, the United States proposes a counter-initiative called the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy" (FOIP). US officials have articulated the strategy as having three pillars – security, economics, and governance. At the beginning of June 2019, there has been a redefinition of the general definitions of "free" and "open" into four stated principles – respect for sovereignty and independence; peaceful resolution of



disputes; free, fair, and reciprocal trade; and adherence to international rules and norms. (MInistry, June 2019)

There has been concern over the project being a form of neo-colonialism. Some Western governments have accused the Belt and Road Initiative of being neocolonial due to what they allege is China's practice of debt-trap diplomacy to fund the initiative's infrastructure projects. (Brautigam, 2020)

China contends that the initiative has provided markets for commodities, improved prices of resources and thereby reduced inequalities in exchange, improved infrastructure, created employment, stimulated industrialization, and expanded technology transfer, thereby benefiting host countries. (Blanchard, 8 February 2018)

### **3.1- The Retreat U.S. Credibility of Deterrence:**

mid all the uncertainty about the world that will follow the pandemic, one thing is almost sure to be true: tensions between the United States and China will be even sharper than they were before the coronavirus outbreak. The resurgence of U.S.-Chinese competition poses a host of challenges for policymakers—related to trade and economics, technology, global influence, and more—but none is more consequential than reducing the risk of war. Unfortunately, thanks to today's uniquely dangerous mix of





growing Chinese assertiveness and military strength and eroding U.S. deterrence. (Flournoy, June 18, 2020)

The United States is amid the most consequential rethinking of its foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Although Washington remains bitterly divided on most issues, there is a growing consensus that the era of engagement with China has come to an unceremonious close. The debate now is over what comes next. Like many debates throughout the history of U.S. foreign policy, this one has elements of both product innovation and destructive demagoguery. Most observers can agree that, as the Trump Administration’s National Security Strategy put it in 2018, “strategic competition” should animate the Diplomacy rather than the aggressive tools dealing with China. (Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, September- October 2019)

The credibility of American deterrence rests on a simple foundation. America prevents wars by convincing its adversaries they cannot win. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said it succinctly: Deterrence is achieved when the enemy decides, “Not today. You, militarily, cannot win it, so don’t even try it.” Currently, in the Indo-Pacific, that foundation of deterrence is crumbling as an increasingly aggressive China continues its comprehensive military modernization. Five years ago, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter warned that China was modernizing its military “to try to close the



gap and erode our superiority in every domain.” Then, two years ago, Mattis assessed that’s exactly what happened, stating that America’s “competitive edge has eroded in every domain of warfare ... and it is continuing to erode.” Even more bluntly, the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission report cautioned, “America’s military superiority...has eroded to a dangerous degree” to the point that “the U.S. military could lose the next state-versus-state war it fights.” The best way to protect U.S. security and prosperity in Asia is to maintain a credible balance of military power. But America’s ability to do so is at risk. And it’s not just U.S. interests at stake. Allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific are watching closely, and wondering whether they will be able to count on America. (SIN GIM INHOFF and SIN JACK REED, MAY 28, 2020)

The China-US rivalry has many dimensions, but at its heart is a strategic contest over primacy in the Western Pacific. Although this contest is being waged on many fronts — including economic, diplomatic, and ideological — it is essentially military. China seeks to challenge US leadership in the Western Pacific by opposing the US maritime military supremacy. The United States is trying to resist that challenge and preserve its military preponderance.



Two US Navy aircraft carrier strike groups began operations in the disputed waters of the South China Sea on 9 February 2021, the Biden administration's latest show of naval capabilities as it pledges to stand firm against Chinese territorial claims. Neither side wants a war. Instead, both hope to win by convincing the other side to back off in the face of the other's evident military power and strategic resolve. In other words, they hope to deter one another. The United States is in danger of losing this contest because its historically unassailable maritime power is being challenged by China's growing naval, air, and missile forces. US forces remain more powerful overall, but China has many advantages in the Western Pacific — fighting a defensive campaign close to home bases. China's massive investment in maritime capabilities over the past 25 years has effectively exploited these advantages, so today it has the potential to exact a heavy toll on US ships and aircraft projecting power towards China. (Hugh White, 10 May 2021)

**4. March to West China's Strategy:** The logic of “March West” is rather simple and reflects the complex regional quagmire China is in. As Washington rebalances to Asia, the relation between the U.S. and China has become increasingly contentious and “zero-sum”. In Beijing's view, deeply embedded in the rebalancing is Washington's profound concern about China's rise in the region and



a determination to curtail its expanding influence. Under this overarching theme, Beijing sees a comprehensive policy of Washington to block China's rise in the East through strengthened military alliances, "sabotaging" China's ties with ASEAN and undercutting China's effort to lead the region's economic integration by pushing U.S.-centered and China-free Trans-Pacific Partnership. Since both Beijing and Washington are seeking to expand their influence in East Asia, as Wang argued, if China continues to push forward, more problems, even a head-on military confrontation with the U.S., would be inevitable. In comparison, the region to the west of China, including Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, bears no such risks. In Wang's view, the area is free from a U.S.-dominated regional order or a pre-existing economic integration mechanism. Strategically, Washington is retreating from the area (manifested by its withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan), leaving more space to be filled and China a perfect opportunity to advance in. Unlike in East Asia, the relationship between the U.S. and China would conceivably be more cooperative in the region, due to their common interests in economic investment, energy, anti-terrorism, non-proliferation and regional stability. Furthermore, "March west" would offer Beijing additional strategic leverage against Washington since "The U.S. is desperate for China's assistance in stabilizing Afghanistan and Pakistan." In this



sense, it will help build a “more balanced” U.S.-China relationship.  
(Sun, January 31, 2013)

The Asia Pacific has entered a period of profound change characterized by a shifting power balance and increasingly contentious great power rivalry. Key questions that loom large on the strategic horizon for the region and beyond are to what extent peace, stability, and prosperity in the region can be maintained? And what steps need to be taken to strike the right balance between strategic competition and collaboration? (WANG, 26 December 2021)

“March West” is not the first time prominent Chinese strategic thinkers argued for the strategic importance of the West. Neither is it free of controversy. Generals and thinkers proposed for China to march westward to “seize for the center of the world (the Middle East)” as early as 2004. The proposal is met with strong opposition from strategists who argue that China’s strategic priority invariably ends in the East and with the sea. They believe China’s expansion into the Pacific and Indian Oceans is a prerequisite for China’s rise to global great power, therefore the West is at most a strategic backyard where China should pursue stability rather than advancement. (Sun, January 31, 2013)

“Marching Westwards”: The Rebalancing of China’s  
Geostrategy abstract China should not confine its sights to its coast



and borders, and traditional rivals and partners; instead, it should make plans to “move westwards” and establish a new inter-national geostrategic pillar for its Western Development strategy. The “march west-wards” strategy is conducive to the establishment of a more balanced Sino-u.s. relations and helps build Sino-.us. strategic mutual trust. As its economic interests grow in western countries, China is facing favorable opportunities for participating in multilateral coordination and contributing to its international status. However, the strategy will also bring risks and more attention should be paid to the environment, people’s livelihood, and employment in the invested countries. Consular rules must be improved to better protect local Chinese and help them get integrated into local communities. (Wang, 2014)

Some Chinese analysts propose that China should instead “march west,” looking for potential geopolitical allies and new economic opportunities in the vast Eurasian continent. They also point out that this “march west” has the additional benefit of boosting economic development in China’s underdeveloped western regions. When the Silk Road Economic Belt (the Belt for short) was announced in September 2013, it seemed that advocates of the “march west” had won the full endorsement of China’s top leaders. The Belt is an ambitious Chinese initiative that aims to enhance interconnectivity and economic cooperation among



Eurasian countries located along what used to be the ancient Silk Road. China's Eurasian century dawns, if only because it is unable and unwilling — at least for the moment — to compete with the United States for predominance over the Pacific century. (Tao X. , Is This China's Euroasian Century?, October,10 2015)

#### **4.1- The Belt and Road Initiative:**

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road, is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived. Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the vast collection of development and investment initiatives would stretch from East Asia to Europe, significantly expanding China's economic and political influence. The BRI forms a central component of the "Major Country Diplomacy" strategy, which calls for China to assume a greater leadership role for global affairs by its rising power and status. (Stephen, 21,September 2021)

Some analysts see the project as an unsettling extension of China's rising power, and as the costs of many of the projects have skyrocketed, the opposition has grown in some countries. Meanwhile, the United States shares the concern of some in Asia that the BRI could be a Trojan horse for China-led regional development and military expansion. Under President Donald J. Trump, Washington has raised alarm over Beijing's actions, but it



has struggled to offer governments in the region a more appealing economic vision. (McBride, 2020)

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a strategy initiated by the People's Republic of China that seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade, and stimulate economic growth. The name was coined in 2013 by China's President Xi Jinping, who drew inspiration from the concept of the Silk Road established during the Han Dynasty 2,000 years ago – an ancient network of trade routes that connected China to the Mediterranean via Eurasia for centuries. The BRI has also been referred to in the past as 'One Belt One Road'. The BRI comprises a Silk Road Economic Belt – a trans-continental passage that links China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe by land – and a 21st century Maritime Silk Road, a sea route connecting China's coastal regions with southeast and south Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, and Eastern Africa, all the way to Europe. (Bank, 2020)

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#### **4.2- China's Epidemic Diplomacy a soft power tool of expansion:**

On 19 March 2020, the United States President Donald Trump blamed China for the virus outbreak. Trump said, “The world is paying a very big price for what they did. . . . It could have been stopped right where it came from, China.”. He stated that Washington would have been able to act faster if Beijing had shared the information regarding SARS-CoV-2 with the United States. Trump has repeatedly referred to SARS-CoV-2 as the “Chinese virus.”<sup>8</sup> Some United States officials have also used the terms “Wuhan virus,” “China virus”. (Verma, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic threatened to damage China's international reputation just as the Chinese government under Xi Jinping was peaking in its promotion of China as a model political system and superior international citizen. Beijing launched a massive diplomatic effort aimed at both foreign governments and foreign societies. The goal was to overcome initial negative publicity and to recast China as an efficient and heroic country in the eyes of international public opinion. The crisis created an



opening for China to make gains in its international leadership credentials as the world saw the superpower United States falter. (Roy, 2020)

Chinese pandemic-related messaging saw two distinct phases. During the first phase from January to early March, the emphasis was on damage control and the external messaging was mostly an extension of the Chinese government's domestic propaganda. There were four major themes. The first theme was that the Chinese government's response was correct. Chinese officials said the authorities moved quickly to contain the outbreak in China, take care of the sick, and share information about the virus with the international community, including its genome sequence. The Chinese government acted with "openness, transparency and a high sense of responsibility," Chinese officials said repeatedly. For its heroic efforts, Chinese officials said, foreigners and international organizations were lauding China. The second theme was anti-"stigmatization," meaning objection to associate the virus with China, such as calling it "the Chinese virus." The third theme was anti-"overreaction," which meant Beijing objected to foreign governments restricting travel from China into their countries and advising their citizens against traveling to China. The fourth theme was China's generosity in sending medical supplies to help other virus-stricken countries. (Shuang, on January 23, 2020)



In April 2020, in light of the pandemic, the Group of 20 decided to freeze debt payments for countries that would struggle to pay them. Interest on Chinese loans continued to accrue during the freeze. In June 2020, Chinese leader Xi Jinping decided to cancel interest-free loans for certain African countries. Since 2000, these types of loans have accounted for 2 to 3 percent of total loans China has issued to African countries. Furthermore, foreign aid is a controversial topic in China due to it having its areas with significant poverty (Sun, "The domestic controversy over China's foreign aid and the implications for Africa", Retrieved on 8 April 2021)

The Covid-19 pandemic has offered China an unprecedented opportunity to shore up its international influence by providing the world with much-needed public health goods. The CSIS China Power Project published a detailed study of China's "Covid-19 diplomacy," which assesses the scope and impact of China's efforts to supply countries with medical aid and vaccines. The study developed a unique Chinese Covid-19 Diplomacy Index (CCDI), which brings together thousands of data points to score countries based on the extent to which China engaged them in medical diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy and how receptive they were to Chinese activities. The study and the index generate important insights into the strengths and weaknesses of China's



approach to Covid-19 diplomacy and the implications for the United States and its partners. (Bonny Lin , Matthew P. Funaiole, September 30, 2021)

## 5. Conclusion

5-1. The geopolitical calculations of counterbalancing and excluding China are carefully couched and camouflaged in an ideological narrative. The vision of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ region becomes one that is consequently divisive rather than inclusive. A healthy dose of suspicion and studied vigilance is needed toward any such narrative of the region. The future regional order has to be one of inclusion and integration, rather than one of exclusion and bloc-rivalry.

5-2. Genuine multilateralism in the region that is inclusive and does not discriminate against particular countries should be fostered. The impetus for regional economic and trade cooperation needs to be enhanced rather than weakened. The politicization, weaponization, and over-securitization of trade issues are corrosive to the development of healthy and prosperous regional economic dynamics.

5-3. The change from all out to “responsible” competition presents an opportunity for the Indo-Pacific.



5-4. The Strategy of Marching to West for the people’s China and the strategy of a pivot toward East that the United States adopted in the administration of the former US President Barack Obama does not mean that both powers abandon the areas of their vital fields of competition as much as it is an arrangement of their priorities, as well as the opening of additional areas of competition,

5.5- No matter which direction China turns, it has to eventually face up to the reality developing in the western Pacific and try to find a way to break U.S. “encirclement.” Regardless of what official rhetoric says about the importance of periphery diplomacy (that is, building up good relations with neighbors), the most important country in China’s foreign relations remains the United States.

5.6- China’s Covid-19 diplomacy is not primarily based on need or reciprocity. Political and strategic calculations—including the desire to strengthen existing relationships and forge new ones—figure prominently in Beijing’s decisions to provide medical aid or vaccines.

5.7- U.S. enduring strengths in its alliances and partnerships around the world while China’s regional gains in economic and diplomatic influence.



5.8- The intensifying rivalry between U.S, and China has exacerbated tensions over flashpoints suchas Taiwan and the South China Sea, even if all overall risk of war remains low.



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