

The Fundamental Dynamics of East Asia Security by PRC Maritime Expansion

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Chinese Foreign Policy Objectives: The Fundamental Dynamics of East Asia Security

By PRC's Maritime Expansion

In 1405, by Chinese Admiral Zheng in the Ming Dynasty, China had clearly built a lead in maritime dominance before the Western hemisphere entered into the Age of Exploration. China today, with its rise to one of the G2 global powers, does not suffer in comparison to its historical golden ages in the Tang or Ming Dynasties. China is once again in its heyday. Recently, China officially published its first white paper on military strategy, highlighting the “active defense” guideline and pledging closer international security cooperation.[1] Especially, the paper warns of threats to China’s maritime rights and interests. The paper describes “some of its offshore neighbors taking provocative actions and reinforcing their military presence on China’s reefs and islands, which they have illegally occupied.”[2] The revealed perceptions about neighbor states in the paper increase a concern of potential regional conflicts because China replaces the problems with Chinese national security issues rather than with reconciliation and cooperation.

In terms of the rapid emergence of China, there are basically two schools of thought in the international relation discipline when approaching Chinese foreign policy objectives: David Kang sees China as a gently rising power without any regional conflicts, while Gilbert Rozman expects China’s East Asia neighbors to collide with China’s neo-realistic foreign policy. Moreover, Bobo Law argues that China’s attempts to expand its geopolitical interests, not only in East Asia but also in Central Asia, are done with the purpose of global leadership. However, David Shambaugh argues for the moderate position that China is only a partial power due to the absence of soft power. Also, Larry Wortzel emphasizes the military modernization effort in security and foreign policy issues in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Although diverse opinions and research floods the interpretations of Chinese foreign policy objectives, reality shows only one way forward: the pursuit of hegemony. In light of its foreign policy doctrines, maritime expansion, and military reformation, it is easy to see that Chinese foreign policy has a consistent direction. China aims to become a global player by means of neo-realistic balancing.

Schools of Thought

David Kang, in *China Rising*, argues that China has interests in constructing a Sino-centric international order. Kang’s research shows that most East Asian states perceive a rising China as more advantageous than threatening. The only exceptions are Taiwan and Japan, which are clearly relying on a U.S. security umbrella to balance Chinese power.[3] However, given that most Asian states have no interest in pursuing checks and balances against China rising, Kang expects that China does not need to focus on European neo-realist notions of balancing but rather should pursue a benign regional system.

On the other hand, Gilbert Rozman and Bobo Law are wary of China’s rise. Gilbert Rozman, in *Chinese Strategic Thought toward Asia*, depicts China’s foreign policy as actually preoccupied with neo-realist balancing against its East Asia neighbors and with conventional power projection strategies, even if this reality is not always reflected in

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Beijing's official rhetoric. For example, even though Chinese President Hu Jintao announced reassuring rhetoric such as "peaceful rising" or "harmonious world," the Chinese PLA shows its huge efforts in military buildup and reformation. Similarly, Bobo Law, in *Axis of Convenience*, contends that China concentrates on calculating its geopolitical interests. This is not only its global role but also its regional hegemony in East Asia and Central Asia

Of course, there are scholars arguing moderate positions. David Shambaugh believes China is only a partial power due to the absence of soft power. Shambaugh says that China will never rule the world. This is not because of the potential vulnerability of China's economy. Rather, China lacks close friends or allies and has internal problems that impede the integration of whole nations. Finally, Larry Wortzel concentrates on the PLA's role in China's foreign policy, especially in regard to the PLA's military modernization.[4]

A History of the PRC's Foreign Policy Doctrines

Many scholars in those two schools of thought often quote a 12-Chinese-character aphorism that Deng Xiaoping maintained: "韬光养晦, 厚积薄发, 随机应变" (juébu dangtou, taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei)."[5] It means "bide its time, hide its brightness, not seek leadership, but do some things." [6] For a few decades, the 12-character-aphorism has been referred to as China's foreign policy doctrine. Among the 12 characters, one phrase, 韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui), is representative of Chinese foreign policy in the second generation of PRC leadership, led by Deng. Actually, the term 韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui) was first introduced in the historic Chinese novel *The Three Kingdoms*. Liu Bei lived as a houseguest of the Prime Minister Cao Cao, keeping a low profile and making himself look silly in order to loosen Cao Cao's wariness. During a hard time, Liu Bei took powers and then became the ruler of the Kingdom of Shu. Later, historians, depicting Liu Bei's strategy, made the saying "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)" or "hide its brightness, build up one's strength under the shadow." "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)" is a stratagem based on deception and the orthodox strategy stemmed from it in ancient China. We can see a similar thought expressed by Sun Tzu when he said, "all war is based on deception." [7] The Chinese foreign policy doctrine based on "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)" was sustained under the third generation of leadership led by Jiang Zemin.

However, it is noteworthy that Chinese foreign policy objectives have fallen into two schools of thought: "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)" vs. "有所作为 (yousuo zuowei)."[8] Hu Jintao and the fourth Chinese leadership adopted the phrase, "有所作为 (yousuo zuowei)," rather than "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)." Even though Deng used the two phrases together, "有所作为 (yousuo zuowei)" has a totally different meaning from "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)." In Shambaugh's book, "有所作为 (yousuo zuowei)" is paraphrased as "doing something," [9] but the literal translation means "reveal one's position and carry through work." This shows China's plan to adhere to the new foreign policy and more actively intervene in international affairs as a great power. Many scholars and leaders warn that the rapid growth of China and its ambition will create cracks in the U.S. centric-international order as well as conflicts with neighboring states. In late 2003, during the Boao Forum for Asia, PRC premier Wen Jiabao first introduced a new concept in Chinese foreign policy: "和平崛起 (Peaceful rising)." It was adopted as the foreign policy doctrine of the PRC's fourth generation leadership.

The situation went into reverse with the fifth generation of PRC leadership led by Xi Jinping. China now openly expresses its global ambitions. In early 2013, the official magazine of China, *World Knowledge*, described the new concept in Chinese foreign policy as "主动作为 [10] (zhudong zuowei)." It means that "leading actively work that you ought to do." The blunt implication is that China wants to be a great power in international affairs. At the 2013 event, China unilaterally declared an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over conflicted areas with neighbors. This revealed that China no longer wants a low-profile; it has adopted a new foreign policy framework based on "主动作为 (zhudong zuowei)."[11] In the same context, the new doctrine leads PLA's new military strategy to make the "active defense" guideline. As seen in the history of changing Chinese foreign policy doctrines, from "韬光养晦 (taoguang yanghui)" and "有所作为 (yousuo zuowei)" to "主动作为 (zhudong zuowei)," China has prepared to seek global supremacy step-by-step with minimal conflicts with its neighbors.

The Neo-Realistic Approach of the PRC's Foreign Policy

As Gilbert Rozman emphasizes, China has openly revealed its ambition of pursuing supremacy through the neo-

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realistic approach. A key term in the neo-realistic approach in the international relation discipline is “balance of power.” It describes the structure of international relations. Each state in the international relations structure desires to maximize its relative power and constrain others. However, the lack of trust, due to uncertainty, gives rise to the security dilemma that all nations face. Theoretically, nations have two ways of growing in the balance power: internal balancing and external balancing.[12] Internal balancing works in accord with the state’s capabilities by increasing economic growth and/or increasing military spending. External balancing comes by making alliances with others. In the same context, it is easy to see China’s efforts to improve its internal and external balancing capabilities.

China challenges the U.S.-centric financial order by expanding the influence of the Chinese currency (RMB) as a key currency as well as by establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to counter the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) led by the U.S. and Japan. Many states now enter into MOUs with China in order to establish a direct money exchange that eliminates the need to exchange currency into U.S. dollars when settling accounts. Chinese economic influence has been expanding beyond the Asia region and around the world after many allies of the U.S. (such as France, the U.K. and even South Korea) joined the Chinese led AIIB.

The effort to increase military power is another pillar of internal balancing. In light of China’s substantial increases in defense spending, the situation between China and its neighbors appears to contradict the core precept of neorealism.[13] Moreover, as Larry Wortzel warned, the PLA is rapidly transforming its military to deal with regional conflicts.[14] In January 2014, senior Chinese military officers revealed that the PLA was planning to transform its military organization from seven military regions (MR) to five new theatres of war (WR) based on battle theatres. The PLA is also aiming to install a joint command system, which will integrate all ground, navy, air, and secondary artillery forces.[15] The PLA authorities have established headquarters for joint operations in the Jinan MR, Nanjing MR, and Guangzhou MR. Within five years, these regions will respectively take charge of operations in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea. The remaining regions—Shenyang MR, Beijing MR, Lanzhou MR, and Chengdu MR—will merge into two WR groups.[16] This plan will change the PLA’S inherent limitations as primarily being ground-oriented forces. Maneuverability and the coordinated movements of all forces will improve. Moreover, Seoul and Tokyo will have the diplomatic burden of dealing with the PLA’s advanced air and naval capabilities in conflicted areas. Both Seoul and Tokyo deem the reform plan to be a first step in China’s transformation from a primarily ground-based defense strategy to a strategy of maritime dominance based on air and naval capabilities.

The PRC’s Ocean Policy

Nowadays, the PRC is emphasizing its vital interests in oceans as security issues. These include: resources, Sea Line of Communications (SLOCs), and national defense. China is struggling to control crude oil reserves in the South China Sea and natural gas reserves in the East China Sea. China also announced the two oceans policy in order to safeguard its vital SLOCs. These are in the Indian Ocean with the Sting of Pearls strategy and the Western Pacific Ocean with the Two Island Chains strategy. Officially, the PRC claims its foreign policy for maritime expansion won’t create conflicts with neighbors (e.g. with Japan in the East China Sea, South Korea in Yellow sea, or the Philippines in the South China Sea). However, China expresses its neo-realistic approaches to deal with regional conflicts with neighbors. The National Economy and Social Development part of the 12th plan states that “China should carry on making overall plans for both land and maritime development, stipulate and bring into force strategies on developing maritime resources, [and] further improve our capability in exploring, managing and safeguarding our maritime affairs.” Also, the Shanghai Academy of Social Science (SASS) claims China’s strategic goal of maritime development starts by “developing China into a regional powerful country with abundant maritime resources, then further developing itself into an international big power of maritime resources.”[17] In order to reach at the goal, SASS suggests three steps, which are the way to change the PRC’s foreign policy doctrines. It says that:

- The short-term strategy aims to practice China’s sovereignty on legitimate islands and reefs. While China needs to minimize its exposure from external threats and harms, which can bring out regional disputes, China needs to make a mechanism related to maritime issues, such as establishing organizations and improving maritime policies and laws.
- The mid-term strategic expectations are that China will gradually resume its sovereignty of islands and reefs, which are presently under the illegal control of other countries. To fulfill this goal, China should try

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every possible way for developing maritime resources as a regional big power.

- The long-term strategy anticipates China will have 3 million square km of sea area under their legal administration without any external interference.

As many scholars have predicted, China is seeking to construct a Sino-centric order. However, Chinese foreign policy objectives on the basis of its “peaceful rise” cause debate over whether or not China’s expansion poses threats to the regional security in Northeast Asia. There is controversy over where the PRC’s foreign policy should be understood with the literal meaning of “peaceful rising” or with an ostrich belief. Especially in regard to the Chinese naval strategy for expansionism, however, China is watching for a chance to collapse the US-centric order in the Asia-Pacific region through neo-realistic means.

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