

## **U.S. Post Cold-War Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Policy of Containment or a Policy of Hedging toward Mainland China?**

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*The positive change of China's economic, political and foreign policy is shaping the country at the status of a regional power. Indeed China's fast economic growth and its military power without forgetting its real involvement in international institutions are concrete signs of its influence in Asia and on the international arena as well. Seen as a potential candidate and alternative power to assume the role of "peer competitor", China is considered as the counter-balancing power able to threaten and even block American hegemony. Hence the rivalry between the two international powers, constraining de facto the United States of America (USA) to revise its Grand Strategy in order to manage its relations vis-à-vis China's rise since China's growing economic strength, tied to its high demography and military modernization, would give it the capacity to project both power and influence at both regional and international level. To have an in-depth understanding of the US grand strategy in the Asia Pacific region, this paper seeks to analyze whether the USA is pursuing a policy of containment or a hedging strategy towards China (?) Furthermore, in order to give a full picture and a more comprehensible approach of the Sino-US strategic partnership, the present paper will also try to dig into China's strategic responses to US grand strategy in the Asia*

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*Pacific region, response that is akin to a strategic balancing against US hegemony.*

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### **Introduction**

The end of the Cold War in the 1990s, which has brought the world to the “end of history”<sup>1</sup>, has also witnessed a certain shift of US foreign policy in Asia Pacific in general and Northeast Asia in particular following the rise of China as a regional power.

Indeed, the positive change of China’s economic, political and foreign policy has shaped the country at the status of a regional power. China’s

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama has, in the early 1990s, written a book entitled “The End of History.” In his writings, Fukuyama argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union proved that liberal democracy had no serious ideological competitor and that the end of the Cold War represented the triumph of the “ideal state” and a particular form of political economy. It was perceived since then by many classical liberalists that democracy will spread around the globe and since democracies do not fight each other, “the end of history” had been reached. Such perception has been very popular until September 11, 2001 when that optimism had been faded, leaving *de facto* space to a stunning comeback of the realist thought with many realists opposing to the war in Iraq.

fast and impressive economic growth, its military power, without forgetting its real involvement in international institutions are all concrete signs of its influence both in Asia and on the international scene. Seen as a potential candidate and alternative power to assume the role of “peer competitor,” China is considered as the only possible contender or counter-balancing power able to threaten and even block American hegemony. Hence the rivalry or struggle for power between the two international powers, constraining *de facto* the United States of America (USA) to revise its Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region. For Washington, remodeling their grand strategy would have the noble goal of managing US relations vis-à-vis China’s rise since China’s growing economic strength, tied to its high demography and military modernization, would give Mainland China the capacity to project both power and influence at both regional and international level.

To have an in-depth understanding of the US grand strategy in Asia, this paper would like first and foremost to spell out what Grand Strategy could mean for a student in the field of International Relations (I). This definition of the concept of grand strategy would have a dual approach: one based on the military perspective of the notion of grand strategy and the other seen from a socio-political understanding of the term. Then this research paper will, from economic, political and strategic perspectives, try to figure out, through a meticulous analysis and based upon concrete examples, the strategic policy options available the US in its dealings with Mainland China (II). It is in this section that the question on whether the USA is pursuing a policy of containment or a hedging strategy towards China (?) would find its answer. Furthermore, in order to give a full

picture and a more comprehensible approach of the Sino-US strategic partnership, the present paper will also try to dig into China's strategic responses to US grand strategy in the Asia Pacific region (III), response that is akin to a strategic balancing against US hegemony.

Throughout this work, a dialectical approach combining both inductive<sup>2</sup> and deductive<sup>3</sup> thinking will be used interchangeably and theories such as the integration theory (in the context of economic interdependence), the offensive realist perspective along with defensive realism<sup>4</sup> would be used in the prospect of explaining, describing, and possibly predicting the outcome of the US Post-Cold War Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region in general and specifically toward Mainland China.

## **I. Definition of the Concept of Grand Strategy**

Before entering into any terminological debate with the concept of grand strategy, it is necessary to grasp the real meaning of the term

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<sup>2</sup> The inductive approach is a non-linear thinking going from specific to general. One must also know that according to the non-linear view, within uncertainty it is more important to identify direction rather than destination. Goals can be replaced by ethics, and transparency enables management to face uncertainty and complexity in an unknown future. It also argues that within uncertainty corporate skills for survival and sustainable growth include the ability to co-operate and collaborate with others including erstwhile competitors without the need to acquire equity or management control.

<sup>3</sup> The deductive approach is a linear thinking or emphasizing cause and effect. Its logic goes from general to specific.

<sup>4</sup> Contrarily to offensive realism which sees the USA containing China, defensive realism offers a more optimistic approach through hedging strategy by arguing that the security competition surrounding China's rise will not be too intense and that China, USA and the neighboring states should be able to coexist peacefully.

‘Strategy’ first. Indeed, the appellation ‘strategy’ refers to the direction, scope or long term plan of action taken by an individual or group of people in the prospect of achieving a particular goal. It greatly differs from tactics which are basically the techniques used in coordination with the main strategic goal of the subject. The concept ‘grand strategy’ presents indeed a dual reality, duality that can be translated on the one hand into a military definition of the term and on the other hand into a socio-economic and political understanding of the concept of grand strategy.

### **1-Military Approach**

Originally the concept of strategy is of military use. It has then been borrowed from the military and adapted for use in the business and political sectors.

Defined by Carl von Clausewitz, as “the theory of the use of combat for the object of war” and by Sir Lawrence Freedman as a theory of the application of power, with power as the ability to produce intended effects<sup>5</sup> or as the capacity to constrain without being constrained, a strategy appears to primarily be seen from a military perspective. It is often referred to as the means by which troops are deployed and policy effected so that it can be coined as the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy<sup>6</sup>. To make things even much

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<sup>5</sup> These definitions have been developed by General (ret.) Dr. Klaus Naumann, KBE *et al.* in *Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World: Renewing Transatlantic Partnership*, 90-91.

See: [http://www.csis.org/media/isis/events/080110\\_grand\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/isis/events/080110_grand_strategy.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Liddell Hart has extensively argued on the concept of strategy in his book entitled “Strategy” and published in 1967.

easier to understand, Henry Mintzberg, wrote that a “strategy is a means of getting from here to there.”<sup>7</sup> By so writing, he implies that militarily strategy refers to the planning and conduct of warfare campaigns, the movement and disposition of forces, and the deception of the enemy.

In March 2003, Thomas P. M. Barnett in his article entitled “Introduction to ‘The Pentagon’s New Map’” claimed that “Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been trying to come up with an operating theory of the world - and a military strategy to accompany it. Now there's a leading contender. It involves identifying the problem parts of the world and aggressively shrinking them.”<sup>8</sup> From his approach, he somehow tried to deliver a message about a US so-called grand strategy. Such understanding of the notion of grand strategy can be added to the argument of late American strategist Col. John Boyd who argued that a grand strategy focused a nation's actions - political, economic, and military in the prospect of increasing solidarity and internal cohesion, weakening opponents' resolve and internal cohesion, strengthening one's allies' relationships to oneself, attracting uncommitted States to one's cause, and ending conflicts on favorable terms, without sowing the seeds for future conflicts<sup>9</sup>.

Besides this military understanding, the notion of grand strategy can be approached from a socio-economic and political perspective, approach

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, (Free Press, 1994), 458.

<sup>8</sup> Fabius Maximus, *The Myth of Grand Strategy, Part one*, (In a series of articles about grand strategy in a 4GW Era, 2006).  
[http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/fabius\\_myth\\_of\\_grand\\_strategy.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/fabius_myth_of_grand_strategy.htm) (accessed January 9, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Fabius Maximus, *Ibid*.

that will receive an in-depth analysis since it better suits our current interests as students in the field of international relations.

## **2-Socio-Economic and Political Understanding**

Coined as the application of the means to achieve economic and political objectives, the concept of grand strategy is the art of using all elements of power (of either a nation or an alliance of nations) to accomplish an economically and politically agreed aim. Grand strategy is then a comprehensive plan of action, based on the calculated relationship of means to large ends. Far from being an exact science, grand strategy requires constant reassessment and adjustment and so, in order to respond to changing international landscape.

Widely used nowadays in the political sphere, the notion of grand strategy is considered as a future-oriented policy that takes into account a nation's economic, moral, human resources in the prospect of protecting its national interests<sup>10</sup> (with national interests understood, among others, in terms of territorial integrity, cultural identity, political stability, economic survival, and security). From this perspective, grand strategy, to a certain extent, overlaps with foreign policy with an emphasis on the security implications of the policy. So even though grand strategy overlaps with foreign policy, it focuses primarily on the military implications of a nation's policy.

If strategy (concept that derives from the Greek word *stratēgos* as a

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<sup>10</sup> The term national interest is often referred by the French as 'Raison d'Etat' or the great goals or ambitions of a country.

reference to a 'military commander' during the age of Athenian Democracy) refers to a long term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal, most often "winning", grand strategy *a contrario* encompasses the management of the resources of an entire nation in the conduct of warfare. Intertwined in the environment of grand strategy, diplomacy appears to be a fundamental component that influences grand strategy since it encompasses among others a nation's moves to forge strategic alliances or pressure another nation into compliance, thereby achieving victory without resorting to combat. Another element of a nation's grand strategy is the management of the post-war peace. Typically directed by the political leadership of a country, with input from the most senior military officials, grand strategy is a process whose development can take up to many years or even multiple generations.

Far from being an end in itself, a grand strategy appears to be a means to achieve larger goals, a state's collective policy with respect to the external world.

In a word, the concept of grand strategy then comprises the carefully coordinated and fully integrated use of all political, economic, military, cultural, social, moral, spiritual and psychological power that is available to an entity or a state. And one of Boyd's closest associates, named Chuck Spinney, has convincingly summarized Boyd's concept of grand strategy by affirming that "grand strategy (...) is the art of pursuing national goals in a way that improves our nation's fitness to shape and cope with the conditions of an ever-changing international environment. A nation's grand strategy is about its organic vitality and growth (...) or in Sun Tzu's



words, it is the ‘road to survival or ruin’ over the long term.”<sup>11</sup> From a Trinitarian perspective, a state’s grand strategy can be seen as the coordination of the diplomatic and military efforts of its People, its Government, and its Army in order to develop a plan on a global scale, and so, in the interest of the entire nation.

In other terms, grand strategy concerns a nation’s strategic goals and the means used to achieve them. It is, as argued international relations scholars, a theory characterized by three-step process which are first the determination of the state’s vital security interests; second the identification of any threats to those interests; and third the thorough decision on how to best make use of the state’s political, military, and economic resources to protect the above-determined interests.

After such definitions which will somehow ease the understanding of this proposed research paper, it is necessary to now analyze the strategic policy options available to the US in its dealings with the rise of Mainland China.

## II. US Strategic Policy Options toward Mainland China

China indeed is becoming a dominant regional power, investing heavily in military<sup>12</sup> and nuclear capabilities with an ever increasing

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<sup>11</sup> Fabius Maximus, *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> According to General (ret.) Dr. Klaus Naumann, KBE *et al.* in *Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World: Renewing Transatlantic Partnership*, China’s defense expenditure was about \$103 billion in 2005 and \$122 billion in 2006, 54.

See: [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/events/080110\\_grand\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/events/080110_grand_strategy.pdf)

In terms also of budget allocation, China’s military budget is around \$59 billion and ranked 4th as of 2008 estimations.

influence on the international arena. For instance, reviving its active diplomacy by inventing a new strategy which can develop and establish regional and international spheres of influence over weaker neighbors, such as the Central Asian republics or the Southeast Asian states as well as in other continents such as Africa, China is seen as the upcoming main player in Asia. Such foreign policy of China to re-broaden its regional and global image is not well-appreciated by the US administration, hence its qualification as a threat<sup>13</sup> to the US predominance and national interest, leading *ipso facto* the US to consequently design its China-centered diplomacy. Such a US grand strategy toward China appears to be dynamic evolving from a containment strategy toward a hedging strategy with the possibility of further strategic options known as conditioning and transformation policies.

### **1-From Containment to Hedging**

From an offensive realist perspective, the search for hegemonic posture as a best guarantor of survival is the ultimate goal of great powers such as the US. For Americans and based upon the Monroe Doctrine<sup>14</sup>, they want to avoid peer competitors. So their grand strategy in the Asia Pacific region seeks to divide the region into several competing major powers so that these major actors won't be in a position to focus on the

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<sup>13</sup> China has the world's fastest growing peacetime defense budget. This led Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to muse, "Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment?"

<sup>14</sup> The Monroe Doctrine is a U.S. doctrine first coined by President James Monroe who, on December 2, 1823, established one of the most defining moments in the foreign policy of the United States by trying to push European forces and influence out of the Americas, strategy which was just aiming at defeating and dismantling aspiring hegemony in order for the US to remain the sole and only regional hegemon in the world.

USA, the everlasting<sup>15</sup> regional power in the world. Therefore the US will work hard to contain China and ultimately seek to weaken it to the point where it could no longer either threaten the United States or spread too much influence in the Asia Pacific region. From such a perspective, the US appears to more likely behave toward China just as it behaved toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War period with fearsome signals to China's neighbors.

However, the rising anti-American sentiments since the USA has engaged itself into 'illegal' war in Iraq makes the rising of China a redemption for weak states especially for neighboring states, countries experiencing socialist system and African countries.

Coined as a "peer competitor" and a counter-balancer, China is making the US lose its position as a regional hegemony in the Asia Pacific region without forgetting the influence of the post Cold War international environment on US decision-makers.

Indeed the post Cold War order seems to have then thrown into question US grand strategy in general, especially its grand strategy toward China. For instance, war on terrorism, invasions of Afghanistan, war in Iraq, in Somalia and probably in Iran<sup>16</sup> have expanded military budgets

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<sup>15</sup> The Americans wish US could remain the everlasting only regional hegemon with global influence.

<sup>16</sup> However the war against Iran is not probable any more since the US intelligence found out that Iran has stopped its nuclear weapons ambition since 2003. And the recent military crisis between Iran navy and US navy at the Strait of Hormuz on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008 almost involved an exchange of fire between US forces and Iranian forces which was a dangerous move for world peace and stability.

and called criticism on American National Security Strategy. The American-led order appears to be eroding. Hence the affirmation that the American current global order, its role and place in Asian security framework are at a turning-point imposing a shift from a containment policy toward a hedging<sup>17</sup> strategy in its relations vis-à-vis China.

In earlier times, containment was followed as a tactic, rather than a strategy or a policy. Containment springs up from the idea that isolation will lead to stagnation. The forms of containment were, among others, cutting off supply lines, proxy wars, using espionage and sabotage in the view of subverting<sup>18</sup> the enemy. It was mostly a strategy of bankrupting the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) through the use of an expensive arms race that the Soviets could not match.

In the post-Cold War world, scholars have debated the extent to which containment, or some variant of that strategy, continues to animate the U.S. diplomacy, particularly vis-à-vis China. Hence the current debate in the USA on the concepts of “inside out” and “outside in” regarding the US strategy toward China.

Both “inside out” and “outside in” models, variants of the reductionist approach, derived from the realist theory. From the “inside out” approach, it is said that the Chinese domestic policies produce external outcome that

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<sup>17</sup> The hedging system is any technique designed to reduce or eliminate financial risk. For example, taking two positions that will offset each other at a certain time sequence. In other words it is an intentionally noncommittal or ambiguous statement; (As usually found in our daily-life, "when you say 'maybe' you are just hedging").

<sup>18</sup> It is an attempt to overthrow structures of authority, including the system in the state.

obliges the US to consequently shape its foreign policy toward China. Besides, based upon the Security Dilemma perspective, the “outside in” model argued that if the US has a defensive or offensive attitude toward China, it is mainly due to the anarchic nature of the international system influenced by the Chinese ambitious foreign policy which leaves the US with a feeling of being threatened<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, the notion of containment was more popular during the Cold War era and seems to be more suitable to a bipolar international system. However, the Asia Pacific region appears to be a rising multi-structural or multipolar world with three simultaneously emerging powers such as China, Japan and India without forgetting the resurgence of Russia (Former Soviet Union). In a multipolar region, a natural role for the US would be to assume the role of a “balancing wheel,” tailoring its opposition to whichever power may seek to dominate the region in concert with its other great power rivals. But unlike Britain in 19<sup>th</sup>-century-Europe, the US cannot be the balancing wheel of Asia, because it is likely that China, Japan or India, the other major powers of Asia like Russia, would aspire to regional hegemony<sup>20</sup>, thereby requiring the US to side with China<sup>21</sup> to contain probable rivals like Russia and

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<sup>19</sup> Refer to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s statement: “Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment?”

<sup>20</sup> This concern has been raised by Lincoln in his writing about “Regionalism in East Asia” especially his Chapter 9 about “East Asian Economic Regionalism” that highlights the struggle for East Asian regional leadership mainly between China and Japan.

<sup>21</sup> One must also be aware that despite the potential rivalries between the US and China, US used to borrow money from China to sustain its economic and mainly to fund its war on terror.

then use India to contain China<sup>22</sup>. This approach of big power politics has been witnessed under President Bill Clinton's Administration whose goal was to make sure that all China's neighboring countries possess the nuclear weapon so that containing China would become easier. This US game has also been perceptible since US is trying to build an alliance with countries like Vietnam, India and even North Korea in order to make sure that China's influence won't exceed its borders. President Bush recent move toward removing North Korea from the "Black List of States Sponsoring Terrorism" could be interpreted in that regard. Nonetheless, such a posture would question the credibility of relatively fixed US alliance commitments, especially to Japan<sup>23</sup> which has, under Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, already suffered from the Nixon shock in the 1970s and is now suffering again from a 'Nixon shock revisited' and known as the Bush shock.

Aware that a containment policy fits better in a bipolar world, the USA is strategically moving from containment to hedging policy toward China since the conditions of the Cold War era cannot prevail anymore in

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<sup>22</sup> Some US hardliners even proposed that Washington uses the Taiwan card by instigating escalating violence in the cross Straits relations in order to use it as an *alibi* or pretext to stop the rise of China (Hard Containment policy).

<sup>23</sup> The Japanese former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's declaration on the Cross-Strait Relations between Mainland China and Taiwan during his visit to China shows a strengthening of China-Japan relations and a weakening of the regional security framework set up between US-Japan-Australia basically regarding the issue of Taiwan security. During the Six-Party Talks, the US and Japan were opposed on the question of lifting North Korea from the terrorism list and have been able to overcome any attenuation of US-Japan alliance in this regard. However, the recent developments of this issue give us another interpretation of the question.

a multi-structural region<sup>24</sup>.

A hedging strategy combines both balancing<sup>25</sup> and engaging China, the latter exemplified in the former deputy secretary of State and current Chairperson of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick's description of China as a "responsible stakeholder."

The hedging strategy is also shaped by the changing nature of regional security threats. These are transnational in nature and include terrorism, transnational crimes, pandemics, humanitarian crises induced by natural disasters. The US security forces in the region are increasingly involved in addressing such threats, sometimes outside the framework of its traditional alliances so much so that China is often a partner in such

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<sup>24</sup> For the first time in its history, the region is witnessing the simultaneous rise of three major powers: China, India and in a different way, Japan. This Asia's emerging multipolarity takes into account the resurgence of Russia due to the jump in oil prices.

<sup>25</sup> The theory of balancing derives from the theory of balance of power. It can be internal (military build-up or reallocations of resources to increase their power) or external (coalitions formation against the stronger state in order to tilt the balance of power in their favor.) There are two categories of balancing policy in international affairs: soft balancing and hard balancing. Soft balancing means that weaker states conclude that stronger states need to be checked but that a military response is infeasible. Hard balancing refers to a state joining a weaker coalition to counter the influence or power of a stronger coalition. Balancing occurs when weaker states decide that the dominance and influence of a stronger state is unacceptable and that cost of allowing the stronger state to continue their policies unchecked is greater than the cost of action against the stronger State. Balancing is opposed to the neologism bandwagoning which derives also from realist theory and occurs when weaker states decide that the cost of opposing a stronger power exceeds the benefits to be gained from supporting it. The stronger power may offer incentives, such as the possibility of territorial gain or trade agreements for the weaker states, to induce weaker states to join with it. (China-Africa strategic alliance could be a tangible example)

operations<sup>26</sup>.

In addition, China appears to be indispensable in the US fight against terrorism. For example, the US needs borrow money from its rival China in order to finance and sustain its military and economic power. President-elect Barack Obama has affirmed during one of his campaign speeches that the US borrows from China approximately 700 billion US dollars each year to buy oil from Saudi Arabia and fund the war on terror.

From the integration theory, variant of the liberalist approach, the growing and promising economic interaction or economic convergence has also kept the cost of war/conflicts high while in return given a better chance to a greater cooperation. Viewed from a functionalist or a neo-functionalist perspective, economic cooperation starts with a functional cooperation in areas of lower sensitivity such as technological development and economic coordination, and then gradually spill over to high politics known as sovereign nations. So economic interdependence between the US and Mainland China is considered as an indispensable way to lubricate their existing or possible conflictual relations. It appears to be, so far, the best viable path able to smooth turbulent US-China relationships via politico-economic rapprochement and so, based upon the Marxist maxim according to which “What prevails in economy will ultimately prevail in politics.” This liberal proposition of trade and economic exchange as peace promoters results from the fact that economic interdependence binds trade partners to emphasize on mutual benefits and profits maximization, all of which will be lost if conflict

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<sup>26</sup> The case of the Six-Party Talks on North Korean nuclear issue is a tangible example.



erupts and interrupts their partnership. From such perspective, conflict appears to be a high priced tariff on their trade relationship since the correlation between import and export will be negatively affected because import prices will rise while the export prices go down.

So from the "Kantian tripod,"<sup>27</sup> trade interdependence, US democratic system and the presence of effective international organizations have made the containment strategy a "has been"<sup>28</sup> strategic option that no longer can be used as a sustainable strategic approach in the post-Cold War international environment, characterized by an ever-increasing globalization.

Moreover, in order to tackle the ongoing economic crisis, the US definitely needs China's cooperation and help. This redefines the purpose of the traditional US alliances<sup>29</sup> and makes them less exclusive. Indeed,

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<sup>27</sup> From a series of recent works by John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett with statistical empirical evidence, it is increasingly true that trade, along with democracy and international organizations, promotes peace. So trade, democracy and international organizations are called the "Kantian tripod."

<sup>28</sup> By the notion of "has been" I want to imply that containment policy is a non-popular option in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> One reason for the new approach is changes to US alliances in the region: 'the hub and spokes' system that describes the worsen partnership of the US international network. First, some spokes are in worse shape than others. The US alliance with South Korea is the most fragile, partly due to Seoul's former liberal government's reluctance to identify itself with the Bush administration's 'axis-of-evil policy' toward North Korea that killed Seoul's own 'sunshine' policy. Also, with democrat Present-elect Barack Obama, Washington-Seoul alliance will suffer since President Obama is a liberal and favors unconditional discussions with North Korea while Seoul's conservative government sees North Korea as an enemy to fear. The US alliance with Thailand is also wavering, as Bangkok courts Beijing for economic gain and strategic reassurance. By contrast, US alliances with Japan and Australia have

with some of its traditional alliances in flux, the US is developing new security partnerships, notably with India. But some Indian strategists would prefer to remain “swing players,” and not have India automatically side with the US in a confrontation with China. Only Japan can be expected to lend such relatively unconditional support to the US in dealing with China-related threats<sup>30</sup>. However, this could change if the Sino-Japanese relations improve<sup>31</sup>, hence another reason for American ‘hedging’.

Furthermore, the norms of dialogue and confidence-building developed through multilateral dialogues are also one of the reasons why an outright containment of China is politically difficult for Washington, and why a ‘hedging’ approach is preferable. This changing strategy from containment to hedging is sustained by the Pentagon’s Quadrennial

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become more robust, while the US-Philippines alliance is marked by uncertainty due to Manila’s fear of a popular backlash against using it too obviously to fight its southern extremists. Neither is the US too keen to give in to Manila’s desire to use the alliance to drag it into a confrontation with China over their dispute in the South China Sea.

<sup>30</sup> The “history problem” in terms of Japanese role during the China-Japan war, which resulted in the killing of many Chinese people, is a major issue undermining China-Japan relations.

<sup>31</sup> And now we can comfortably talk of an improvement of Sino-Japanese relations since the recent visit of Chinese President Hu Jin Tao to Japan in 2007 and the recent visit of Japan former Prime Minister Abe to China and who has backed China and USA in order to oppose to any referendum in Taiwan because Taiwan-centered diplomacy is one of China’s foreign policy features due the fact that China and Taiwan relations are based on the divided nation model just like North and South Korea, North and South Vietnam in the 1970s, East and West Germany until the 1990s, and North and South Yemen. In addition, the Bush shock after removing North Korea from the black list could weaken US-Japan relations and in the meantime led to China-Japan rapprochement.

Defense Review Report of 2006<sup>32</sup>, the recent National Security Strategy of the United States<sup>33</sup> and, last but not the least, by former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when, in her speech to Tokyo's Sophia University in March 2005, she emphasized: "[As] we look to China's life (...) I really do believe the U.S.-Japan relationship, the U.S.-South Korean relationship, the U.S.-Indian relationship, all are important in creating an environment in which China is more likely to play a positive role than a negative role. These alliances are not against China; they are alliances that are devoted to a stable security and political and economic and, indeed, values-based relationships that put China in the context of those relationships, and a different path to development than if China was simply untethered, simply operating without that strategic context." Such path has been followed by the new US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton during her first trip to Mainland China. This proves that the US hedging strategic is still current under the leadership of the new US Administration led by President Barack Obama.

In sum, since we are living in a dynamic world, the possible changing international environment may invite other possible strategic options that the US may possibly make use of in addressing strategically the rise of Mainland China.

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<sup>32</sup> In this report, it is written that "Shaping the choices of major and emerging powers requires a balanced approach, one that seeks cooperation but also creates prudent hedges against the possibility that cooperative approaches by themselves may fail to preclude future conflict."

<sup>33</sup> This specifies that America's new "strategy seeks to encourage China's participation in regional and global affairs. Hence the confirmation that US strategy is shifting from containment to a hedging policy since China is a new super-power. This is the only prudent choice for the US Administration willing to develop and implement policies that protect and advance American interests."

## **2-Future Possible US Strategic Options: Conditioning Policy and Transformation Policy**

In fact, by itself, the rise of a new power in Asia is not an alarming situation. But the rise of a new superpower that works against the interests of freedom, free trade and global stability<sup>34</sup> is now becoming a disturbing reality for the USA, hence the conditioning and transformation policies as possible developments of US strategic stance toward Mainland China.

As concerns the conditioning policy, its strategic goal is to modify Mainland China's behavior in line with US strategic interests. This strategic option is then based on US rewarding<sup>35</sup> or punishing<sup>36</sup> attitude toward Mainland China, attitude that strongly depends on Chinese regional and international behavior. For instance the conditioning approach would seek to reward China when Beijing adopts policies that secure US interests by easing trade restrictions, reducing military presence, or other diplomatic measures.

Meanwhile under the conditioning strategy, the United States would use a soft and smart approach such as diplomacy, economic measures, and, if necessary, force in order to ensure that its regional interests are well protected. Economic sanctions would somehow also be one of the tools that the US may use to punish or deter Chinese actions that could violate US interests. So US conditioning foreign policy toward Mainland China refers to the adoption of a tactical rewarding and deterrent attitude that

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<sup>34</sup> The issue of the Cross-Strait relations that involves Mainland China and Taiwan is a sensitive issue that could threaten regional security and stability in Asia.

<sup>35</sup> Rewards will be associated with positive behavior of the US toward China.

<sup>36</sup> Punishment will be associated with US negative behavior toward China.

will push and condition or shape up Mainland China to comply with and accommodate to the *desiderata* of United States of America, coined the sole global police.

Besides, US security presence in the Asia Pacific region will be a strategic approach to convince China that hard power diplomacy is a counterproductive approach; hedging *ipso facto* against the possibility that Beijing will become bellicose<sup>37</sup>. Hence the US request of China's being a responsible stakeholder reassuring Taiwan of its military build-up and security posture.

To a certain extent, the conditioning strategy is both similar to and different from the engagement strategy. Indeed like engagement, the conditioning strategy assumes that conflict with Beijing is not inevitable. On the other hand, unlike engagement, however, conditioning does not assume that maximizing US interactions with China will reduce the likelihood of conflict.

In brief, the conditioning option aims at deterring aggression and making clear that Beijing is aware of Washington vital interests through a consistent prioritization of US foreign policy goals so that China can be able to better understand them and abide by US strategic interests.

As regards the transformation policy, it is a strategic option that seeks

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<sup>37</sup> The conditioning policy is clearly expressed in the following assumption: If China threatens militarily Taiwan the US could announce its intent to provide Taiwan with a theater missile defense system.

to bring about democracy into Mainland China via economic and political means. Such a US approach will try to initiate subversive activities such as pushing for the release of political prisoners, supporting clandestinely Chinese pro-democracy activists in China and/or overseas. US will also try to build-up strategic alliances and military cooperation with China's neighbors and raise their awareness about the China security threat as they would be under containment so much so that they would have all the countries against China in the prospect of pressuring China to move for a democratic change by promoting political reforms and democratic governance that respect human rights. In fact, the transformation policy assumes that not only would democratization in China be desirable for moral reasons, a democratic China would be in the US security interest, as a democratic government in Beijing would be less inclined to use force but more willing to work with the United States, securing *ipso facto* US strategic interests<sup>38</sup>. Such approach seeks to increase chances for peace and stability, and so, based upon the democratic peace theory according to which democratic states do not go to war against each other.

In fact both US conditioning and transformation policy have the ultimate goal to transform China from within (through meaningful domestic reforms such as the acceptance of democratic values as understood by American and capitalist system) and make sure that China's regional and international behavior does not threaten US national or security interests both regionally and globally. Going a step further, Washington recalcitrance vis-à-vis Beijing is to ensure the American

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<sup>38</sup> A non-democratic China, by contrast, would be more likely to go to war and have more expansive ambitions than a democratic China, situation that will surely work against the US interests and jeopardize US-China relations.

society that China's 'capability building' (no matter military or economic capabilities) is not aimed at destabilizing American zones of influence or meant to damage US assets and international leadership. Nevertheless, beyond such capability building in correlation with US fears, still China's intentions need to be operationalized with accurate measurements for better evaluation.

In a word, if the United States of America is having a China-centered grand strategy in the Asia Pacific region, are there any Chinese responses to US hegemonic and strategic stance? If yes, what then are these Mainland China's responses to US grand strategy in the Asia Pacific region?

### **III. China's Strategic Responses: Balancing against US Primacy**

For Chinese, US is still viewed as ideologically hostile to China. A Chinese analyst named Wang Jisi spelled out such Chinese apprehensions by arguing that "It is strongly believed in China that the ultimate goal of US foreign policy is the elimination of communism from the face of the earth and the domination of the whole world."<sup>39</sup> So, as a strategic option that responds or counters US regional and global preponderance, Mainland China is consequently pursuing a dual strategy known as internal balancing and external soft balancing, strategies that seek to increase China's economic and military capabilities and at the same time minimize international concerns over China's rising power.

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<sup>39</sup> Jisi Wang, "The United States as a Global and Pacific Power," *The Pacific Review* 10 (1997): 13.

### **1-Internal Balancing**

The strategy of internal balancing adopted by Beijing aims at accelerating China's economic growth, technological achievement, military build-up and modernization in order to increase China's relative power and shrink the power gap with the United States, and so, in conformity with the Power Asymmetry Theory. Indeed there are imbalances or a power gap between the US and Mainland China. For instance, US defense expenditure for 2004-2005 was 47% of the entire world military spending without forgetting that US R&D sector consumed 56.8 billion in 2003-2004 (60% of the world total). However, due to the conflicting interests and security concerns between Mainland China and US, and from a security dilemma perspective, Beijing has no choice but to try to figure out the internal balancing approach as a policy option that can guarantee the survival of their political regime and secure their national interests. That's why China has started increasing its economic might, building-up its military capabilities so much so that it is currently the third largest military spender in the world with U.S.\$35.3 billion in 2006, a 14.7% rise over the previous year. This internal balancing strategy shows Beijing relying primarily on its domestic resources, its economic wealth, technological findings, and military capabilities to balance US primacy. Such Chinese strategic option is rooted on Deng Xiaoping's strategic claims according to which "If China wants to withstand the pressure of hegemonism and power politics and to uphold the socialist system, it is crucial for us to achieve rapid economic growth and to carry out our development strategy."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel Byman, et al. "US Policy options toward an Emerging China," *The Pacific Review* 12 (1999): 421.



In a word, the asymmetric economic and military tactics used by Chinese in order to shrink the strategic gap between US and China have helped Mainland China work out a reliable internal balancing strategy that may counter and prevent US hegemony from negatively affecting too much the peaceful rise of China<sup>41</sup>. Indeed facing a preponderant US in a world of power politics, China has to design a grand strategy that advances its own security interests by undertaking internal efforts aimed at mitigating the power gap with dominant US. Correlatively the strategy of internal balancing seeks to increase China's relative power through economic development and military modernization with an emphasis on asymmetric warfare that guarantees China's regional and global aspirations.

To such an internal balancing strategy, Beijing has added an external soft balancing strategy in the prospect of maximizing its domestic, regional and international strategic gains. To substantially balance US power, Mainland China has then favored a grand strategy that combines elements of internal balancing and external "soft balancing."

## **2-External Soft Balancing**

The external soft balancing strategy is a means by which Mainland China, through diplomatic efforts, aims at delaying, frustrating and undermining US behavior. Since Beijing perceives US primacy as a threat to China's security interests and sees US behavior as constraining China's rise, Chinese leaders and decision-makers are trying to build-up strategic

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<sup>41</sup> Zheng Bijian is the architect of the "peaceful rise" theory in China.

coalitions with friendly states in the prospect of mitigating Washington's capability to constrain or contain Mainland China. In its strategy, Beijing is trying to avoid any hard balancing tactics such as military alliances that may trigger a strong response or a retaliatory behavior from Washington, move that will negatively affect Beijing regional and international aspirations. In fact, China is aware that a hard balancing effort would likely provoke an active U.S. response (such as containment), and which would not serve China's current interests; hence China's strategic preference for two approaches: the soft power diplomacy and the great powers diplomacy.

One of the key features of Beijing's grand strategy is indeed the soft power diplomacy. Through this strategic option, Beijing seeks to take advantage of multilateral institutions, with the international institutions, from Beijing's understanding, as instruments of statecraft that serve primarily national rather than international interests. So since 1990s, especially when the former Chinese Foreign Minister QIAN Qi'chen was invited to the 24th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in 1991, Beijing started developing and improving its relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a counterweight to US regional influence by actively participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on security issues and has made a concerted effort to reassure ASEAN states that China's rise, far from being a threat, presents significant economic opportunities to the entire region. Such Chinese assurance and reassurance has made other regional powers see positively the rise of China so much so that they began to view Mainland China favorably at the expense of the US, especially after US engaged itself in an illegal War

in Iraq following its post 9/11 war on terror.

As another tangible international forum used by China to promote its regional image, one must know that Chinese leaders have set up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with the ambition of securing China's geo-strategic interests.

So both the ASEAN framework and the SCO model helped China gain a more prominent regional leadership (up to 1991, China has recovered or established diplomatic relations with ten countries of Southeast Asia) with an ever expanding international influence of Mainland China that seeks to build-up an harmonious world from within Asia first and then spill it over to the global society. Indeed the strategic implications of China-ASEAN relationship for China were that Chinese economy has achieved a rapid growth since its reform and opening, positioning China as a rising power and a prominent potential global power in world politics, threatening *ipso facto* US hegemony on the international arena.

Besides, Beijing's acceptance to sign the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea has revealed China's engagement to refute the use of force for settling disputes, signaling *ipso facto* China's interest in being part of the regional security community. The signature of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between China and ASEAN countries remains also a tangible example of China's desire of a more integrated regional economy. Such moves have been convincing that China seeks to engage in constructive cooperation and peaceful coexistence rather than

confrontation, situation that has inevitably led to increasing Chinese influence and decreasing US influence in the region as well as in global politics.

Furthermore, of all the multilateral institutions, the United Nations (UN) appears to be the most effective venue where China, a veto-holding permanent member of the Security Council, tries to constrain and counter-balance US hegemonic policies. For example during the Kosovo war in 1999, China has joined with Russia to prevent any UN approval that may legitimize a US-led intervention into Kosovo. China duplicated the same position when in 2003 it collaborated with France, Germany and Russia, at the UN Security Council, to oppose a US-led invasion of Iraq accused without tangible evidence of possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). In addition, China's balancing strategies have been perceptible in its disapproval of US proposals to sanction nuclear-aspiring states such as North Korean and Iran, positions that clearly show China's request for a greater role at the UN in the management of international affairs.

Going a step further, the strategy of external soft balancing adopted by Mainland China is designed to limit or frustrate U.S. policy initiatives deemed detrimental to Chinese interests through diplomatic efforts in multilateral institutions and bilateral partnerships. Its logic is to maintain a stable external environment for Mainland China to concentrate on economic growth and accumulate relative power (necessary for the construction of a harmonious society), without provoking a vigorous and deadly response from US. The idea of constructing a harmonious society

is nowadays a core foreign policy of Mainland China. It is at the same time a Chinese soft power that can be capitalized to rally the developing world (African and Latin American countries) around Beijing in order to counter American capitalistic and hegemonic rule. For instance China has been providing unconditional aid and equal footing economic assistance to various projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, including among others initiatives in educational opportunities, agriculture, fisheries, textiles, energy, infrastructure, water conservation, power generation and assisting in health care, assistance that officially started with the Non-Alignment Movement at the Bandung Conference<sup>42</sup> which took place on April 18-24, 1955 in Indonesia. Such unconditional and equal footing economic assistance appears to also be an appealing soft power approach that contrasts with American conditional economic assistance which is based on the Bretton Woods' special rules or conditionalities. Another concrete example of China's soft power usage to deter America in Asia can be found in China's special relations with North Korea. Indeed with China's economic assistance and historico-ideological connections with North Korea, Beijing has been able to maintain US influence away from impacting North Korean domestic affairs. Such strategy has given Beijing more influence on Pyongyang so much so that even during the recent Six-Party Talks, China proved to be the country best able to influence

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<sup>42</sup> The Bandung Conference was basically organized on 18<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> of April 1955 by Nehru from India, Nasser from Egypt, Tito from Yugoslavia who tried to unite the Third World countries in order to express their need for a new international order through the non-alignment movement. China also took part to this conference in order to express its sympathy and engagement to accompany the efforts of the developing countries. Even though China is not a formal member of the non-alignment movement, it shares many of its aims and frequently sends observers to the non-aligned movement's summits.

North Korea's nuclear program.

In addition, the recent cross-strait economic development that has been boosted by both Taipei and Beijing shows how China is determined to reshape its regional image in the prospect of slowing down US condominium in the region.

Besides this soft power diplomacy through international organizations and special links with developing countries and historical partners, Beijing is also playing another strategy known as the great powers diplomacy. One of the key features of this strategic option designed to balance US preponderance is that Mainland China is trying to capitalize its bilateral relations with great powers such as Russia, with which China has signed a strategic cooperative partnership in 1996, followed by the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, with in mind that better security relations with Russia will strategically help China balance U.S. influence in the region.

Likewise, in order to limit US regional and international dominance, Mainland China, in addition to deepening bilateral relations with France, Germany and United Kingdom<sup>43</sup>, is strengthening its relations with the European Union (EU), and China-EU summits are concrete examples of such a growing and promising partnership based on shared concerns over

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<sup>43</sup> As a tangible example, one should know that China has conducted search-and-rescue exercises with French and British naval ships, and plans are under way for further military exchanges. Such exercises are designed at deepening the bilateral relations between China and these European countries without forgetting that they all enjoy strong economic ties with each other.

US increasing global hegemony.

Yet, China-Africa growing partnership is another tangible case of China's strategic alliance with resourceful African states aimed at mitigating and balancing US influence in the African continent, while in return maximizing China's strategic interests and influence in the continent.

In brief, as history tells us, Mainland China has also been a multi-secular practitioner of realpolitik, and so, since its imperial past. From the realist perspective then, future developments of Beijing's strategic choices will be based on the following hypotheses:

- When China enjoyed power advantages over adversaries, its grand strategy in general would emphasize offense, launching more attacks against the threatening powers like US, and so, based upon an offensive realist perspective; - When China was in a relatively disadvantageous position, it would adopt a defensive posture and initiate fewer conflicts, and so, based upon a defensive realist approach; - When China's relative power was least advantageous, its grand strategy would become accommodationist, usually accepting the demands of adversaries, and so, based upon a realistic option since it has no choice but to do so.

Last but not the least, if Beijing's current grand strategy is emphasizing "peace and development," known as a soft power diplomacy in line with its peaceful rise theory, it remains obvious that, from a realist perspective, Mainland China's future move will be based on its own historical record and future ambition that not solely seeks to balance

American power in Asia but aims at reclaiming China's ancient place as the preeminent power in Asia, replacing *ipso facto* the United States.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the evolution in global affairs and in the Asian region as well has driven the US to reshape its image in the Asia Pacific and especially its grand strategy toward Mainland China, the potential and imminent threat to US regional interests. US, instead of its long story of realist approach, has been implementing a pragmatist foreign policy known also as a "principled realist approach" in its relations with Asia Pacific. US is then trying to shift its post Cold War strategy of containment toward a much more flexible foreign policy that accommodates, engages and encourages China's participation in regional and global affairs. Such policy of inclusiveness would help US avoid losing control over China, situation that would worsen Washington uncomfortable international leadership since its war on terror has made more enemies than friends for American society. Despite US resolute grand strategy to avoid China's increasing regional dominance and global influence akin to a resurgence of Chinese empire formerly known as the Middle Kingdom, one thing is certain: US is declining and so is its influence both in the Asia Pacific region and globally. Indeed the relative power of US should not overshadow its relative decline, especially with the current economic crisis that has displayed American vulnerability facing a strong Chinese economic system. Christopher Layne, in his review essay, even went further by affirming that US hegemony is



waning<sup>44</sup> Besides, right after US President Barack Obama's election, China's regional ambitions have been shown to the face of the world during the March 2009 incident when American and Chinese submarine vessels were about to affront each other in South China Sea. This incident has been an opportunity for China to show its "real teeth" to American *animus dominandi* aspirations (desire or aspiration to dominate), and so in order to avoid being referred to as a "paper tiger" only, sending *ipso facto* signals to the international community that from now China is a regional and global power that any international actor, especially the US has to deal with.

In view then of its own gradual decline, economic turbulences, undermined global legitimacy, tarnishing moral credentials, falling global leadership and the increasing reality of nonpolarity<sup>45</sup>, US has no choice but to manage and engage China in the prospect of taking advantage of opportunities offered by China's rise. From Washington's perspective, the common strategic wisdom requires to have Beijing on its side, especially in such a troubled period of economic crisis coupled with a critical and controversial war on terror, rather than having it against American society. So among the myriad of strategies<sup>46</sup> available to states in the conduct of

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Layne, "The Waning of US Hegemony: Myth or Reality?" *International Security* 34 (2009): 147-172.

<sup>45</sup> According to Richard N. Haas in "The Age of Nonpolarity: What will Follow US Dominance," the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been characterized by multipolarity (sometimes cooperative multipolar system, sometimes competitive multipolarity). Then 50 years later, the Cold War era has been marked by bipolarity. The post Cold War era has been characterized by unipolarity. However the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century is known for its non-polarity (a world dominated by dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power).

<sup>46</sup> These strategies are, among others: isolationism, hegemony, balancing, band-wagoning, containment and hedging policy.

their international relations, the US, aware of all the implications for its foreign policy and national security, has made a new option by privileging, instead of the long time containment policy<sup>47</sup>, the China-centric hedging strategy, a co-engagement<sup>48</sup> tactic which is, so far, the only prudent<sup>49</sup> choice for the US Administration willing to develop and implement policies that better protect and advance American interests regionally and globally.

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<sup>47</sup> This containment policy can be qualified 'long time policy' because it has been prevailing since the end of the Second World War in the US foreign policy. Such an option argues that a strong China will be an expansionist power. So before it is too late, the U.S. should prevent an increase in Chinese relative power by slowing down its economic growth and holding back its military modernization.

<sup>48</sup> So no matter China as a threat or an opportunity, the USA seeks to engage China. This co-engagement strategy seeks to "socialize" China into the norms of appropriate international behavior, so that it will democratize and live interdependently with the rest of the world without threatening other democracies. The setback of such a strategy is that it risks creating a powerful China whose future intentions may not be benign since there is no guarantee that China will resist the temptation to expand to get what it wants as its capabilities rise.

<sup>49</sup> It is a prudent option because this strategy can help the USA protect and defend its interests without hurting too much its opponents.

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