

"These things take time": The United States, China, and Beijing's challenges to the existing international order

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The rise of China has led to a number of questions regarding Beijing's grand strategy. China has become an economic superpower, and is a signatory to a number of International conventions regarding free trade. It is a valuable member of intergovernmental organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Yet Beijing is concerned primarily with the interests of the Chinese people; the economic and military considerations of the rest of the international community are secondary at best. This paper assumes that the goal of the Chinese government is to establish a system of investment and security parallel to that offered by the United States and its allies.

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Abstract

The rise of China has led to a number of questions regarding Beijing's grand strategy. China has become an economic superpower, and is a signatory to a number of International conventions regarding free trade. It is a valuable member of intergovernmental organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Yet Beijing is concerned primarily with the interests of the Chinese people; the economic and military considerations of the rest of the international community are secondary at best. This paper assumes that the goal of the Chinese government is to establish a system of investment and security parallel to that offered by the United States and its allies; it attempts to do so in order to offer a less restrictive product than that offered by the existing international order. Part of this assumption pertains to Chinese assertion of claims in the South China Sea. The purpose of this paper is to address the issue of China's economic penetration into Latin America and Africa, and to consider the options available to the United States to prepare for potential operations in the South China Sea.

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As China's economy has grown, it has begun to expand its sphere of influence beyond the Asian continent; China has a footprint in many of its neighboring Asian countries, and is developing markets in Latin America and Africa. Friction between the United States and China is, to some degree, inevitable. Samuel Huntington wrote of the irreconcilable geopolitical fault line between the two nations in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, wherein he proposed that there will be perpetual tension between China and the West because of the political and ideological differences between the two cultures; this idea was expanded upon by Lawrence Harrison in his book *The Central Liberal Truth*, where he notes that, despite China's economic growth, "its politics remain authoritarian" (Harrison 40). It has also been proposed that the Chinese government may feel threatened by the United States and its allies, as the United States is both a Pacific and an Atlantic power - surrounding the Chinese mainland. As such, China perceives itself as enclosed. Competing with America in every direction runs counter to China's pre-communist national image of itself as the "Middle Kingdom"; Henry Kissinger discussed how this self-image influenced Chinese diplomacy and international relations in his book *On China*. China's growth has become more aggressive since 2008; after the global financial crisis, the country's leadership was instilled with a new sense of confidence. Since then, China has pushed back against Western elements of security, in some cases violating international law. Beijing's investment in artificial islands in order to increase its coastal area of influence was deemed unlawful, yet China continues to challenge the ruling. While China's investments in neighboring

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markets and in Africa are to be expected, its increasing presence in Latin America could be perceived as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. The penetration of Chinese businesses into the Western Hemisphere is a direct economic challenge to the investments of the United States; as military action may be reduced to politics by other means, so, too, the thoughtless use of the Economic instrument of power by one nation could easily lead to the use of the Military instrument by another. Considering all of the aforementioned elements, China could be perceived as building and marketing a parallel system to that established by the west in the wake of the Second World War, where security and economic investment is exchanged for exclusive rights to a client nation's resources and trade. The purpose of this paper is twofold; first, it seeks to address the issue of China's economic penetration into Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere; second, this paper will discuss what the United States military can do in order to prepare for possible operations in the South China Sea.

Background

No less a figure than Henry Kissinger has written extensively on China's complex relationship with the rest of the world; the former Secretary of State and National Security Advisor provides some insight into China's self-image in his book *On China*. Chinese culture has long held that theirs is the middle kingdom, with the "Mandate of Heaven", the center of the world which leads all other nations; for the Chinese, "there was no New World to populate, no redemption awaiting mankind on distant shores. The promised land was China, and the Chinese were already there" (Kissinger 31). Even in times of strife, the lens of Chinese culture would give the perception that the people

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were enduring hardship in the present in the interest of the long game; eventually, an enemy of China would exhaust itself financially, militarily, and ideologically, leading once again to China becoming the world's major power.

What is Beijing offering an alternative to, exactly? A little discussion of history is necessary. In the wake of the Second World War, the economic system as we know it was established, and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were founded. These intergovernmental organizations were created and serve to assist developing nations - but only under certain circumstances. In return for assistance, a government must liberalize its economy. Further, the United States usually demands a certain degree of democratization and human rights reform prior to investment. In return, a nation is put on a path towards economic prosperity and its security is provided by the system of alliances between the United States and its partner nations. This arrangement started in Breton Woods in July 1944, where economists planned how the global economy would operate after the conclusion of hostilities; "In this new order, trade would be progressively liberalized, but restrictions on capital would remain in place" (Ferguson 306). It was here that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were conceived; after the war, participants in the new system had to choose any two of three policy options, which were "1. full freedom of cross-border capital movements; 2. a fixed exchange rate; (and) 3. an independent monetary policy oriented towards domestic objectives" (Ferguson 307). After the establishment of the IMF and the World Bank, participants began to place conditions on lending; "American aid in particular became hedged around with political and military conditions that were not always in the best interests of recipients" (Ferguson 308). These conditions have been

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referred to as "The Golden Straitjacket"; a number of rules which generally result in the growth of the economy and the recession of big government - "As your country puts on the Golden Straitjacket, two things tend to happen: your economy grows and your politics shrinks" (Friedman 105).

In addition to this new system, the United States and its allies established other major intergovernmental organizations, not the least of which are the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. China has been a begrudging participant in this order at best. A number of beneficiaries of the system have had issues; "some nations were finding the price of membership to be onerous. 'Structural Reforms' demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed hardships" on some of the nations, to include rising food prices in Egypt - an issue that contributed to the Arab Spring (Rubel 19).

Rebalance to the Pacific: The strategy of the previous administration

The issue of Pacific Security is discussed in a *Foreign Affairs* piece entitled "The Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Security: Building a Principled Security Network". This article, by the previous administration's Secretary of Defense, discusses the importance of the existing security network in the Pacific, and of the United States maintaining its relationships in the region. Secretary Carter begins by reminding the reader of the commitment of the United States to security in the Pacific, and by describing the purpose and the elements of the security network established by America's allies – namely, deterring aggression and securing the sea lanes. The secretary explains that the relationship involves all of the instruments of power; as a result of this security

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relationship, the region has flourished economically. Despite commitments in the Middle East and elsewhere, the previous administration made it clear that it intended to continue to build the relationships in the Pacific region; Carter outlines the diplomatic, military, and economic initiatives made by the United States, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which the current administration has abandoned.

Carter restates that the existing security arrangement will continue to exist – with the United States being the lead provider of that security. He addresses the effect of the rise of China; rather than acknowledging that China is offering an alternative to the model of international security offered by the United States, Carter states that China is making itself an international pariah. The author acknowledges the fact that the United States and Chinese militaries have recently trained together, and suggests that it is in the best interests of both nations to continue to cooperate within the same security network. However, the essay does not acknowledge that China's more aggressive posture may be a result of the country's efforts to offer an alternative to the American security network. The essay demonstrates the previous administration's lack of vision. The Obama administration sought to perpetuate the international order created after World War II, without acknowledging the fact that the Chinese have a say in whether or not they will subscribe to that order.

Legality of Chinese Expansion

It is interesting to examine China's attempts to bypass the post-war security and economic establishment from a legal perspective. A recent piece published in *Military Law Review* does just that; the author, an attorney and a naval officer, considers

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Beijing's attempts to increase the Chinese territorial waters by building artificial islands from a legal perspective. The article makes the argument that certain aspects of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea should be ratified by the United States and amended to implement compulsory dispute resolution without reservation in cases of maritime territorial disputes.

Riggio begins the article by describing an incident where a United States vessel entered into the waters of the South China Sea, in order to demonstrate the fact that America contests Chinese claims to certain territory. He goes on to describe Chinese claims to the territory as possibly excessive under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In particular, the author is writing of Subi Reef, a feature adversely possessed by China - this possession is contested by the Philippines - which is part of the Spratly Islands, and has seen "extensive land reclamation efforts by the Chinese since 2014" (Riggio 598-99). The Philippines is among a number of China's neighbors contesting possession of the Spratly chain.

In order to support his argument, Riggio gives a brief history of the attempts to formalize the Law of the Sea; like most international law, it is based in legal assumptions and authorities that are centuries old. The most successful effort to formalize the law of the sea has been the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); the purpose of the convention was to settle "lingering disputes about the breadth of territorial waters and provides a framework for determining security, economic, and regulatory rights on the seas (Riggio 600). After two previous attempts, the current document was drafted and signed in 1982; of note is that it took eleven years for the ratification, and among the sixty ratifying nations, fifty eight were

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considered to be developing. The treaty establishes the “baseline” for nations with a coastline that is dependent on the shape of the coastline and on the presence of islands - a coastal nation may claim ownership of twelve nautical miles of its baseline. Further, the UNCLOS creates an Exclusive Economic Zone within that area. The islands, such as they are, contain twelve parcels of land large enough to be considered islands, and are claimed by other nations as well as China. In 2014, China began to reclaim some of the Spratly Islands; “The majority of China’s land reclamation efforts appear to be designed for military use” (Riggio 615). Beijing also applies the UNCLOS definition of an island to Subi reef, therefore laying claim to its “full complement of maritime zones, including territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf” (Riggio 617). This is extremely important - and controversial.

Riggio makes a strong legal argument that the territories that China attempts to claim are examples of territorial overreach; the excessive claims to territory are the result of China’s rising economic power and confidence. He demonstrates excellent grasp of the UNCLOS as it currently exists.

The weakness is not in the source, but in the law. The Law of the Sea as it is currently codified provides suggestions for dispute resolution, but is not forceful enough for Riggio’s tastes. The author’s suggestion is that the United States finally ratify the treaty; after ratification, the United States can suggest amendments to establish a clear dispute resolution process – with adequate penalties for nations that violate the UNCLOS.

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Should Chinese territorial expansion be tolerated? If not, how should it be discouraged?

Another article that addresses the ruling of the tribunal in the matters between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea appeared in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*; the author essentially recommends tolerating China's bad behavior and soothing Beijing's bruised ego, lest they leave the existing international system and discredit the UNCLOS. Rapp-Hooper found the decision of the tribunal to be surprising; rather than addressing the issue and deciding some part of it in favor of the Philippines, the ruling declared a good number of China's maritime claims to be invalid under international law.

Rapp-Hooper argues that the devastating defeat has left China very few ways to maintain national dignity. The situation has the potential to escalate; however, the United States and its allies can still prevent escalation by upholding the ruling while simultaneously making China feel as though it has not been cornered by it.

The author gives a short background history of the contentious territorial claims in the South China Sea. The area in question, the Spratly Islands, were found by the tribunal to not actually be islands, but reefs and rocks. The definitions have a direct effect to a nation's claims to surrounding water and airspace; reefs generate no claim, rocks, a claim of 12 nautical miles – but islands carry a 200 mile exclusive economic zone. When the tribunal ruled that the Spratly Islands were actually rocks and reefs, they limited China's claims to the water and airspace around them. In addition, the tribunal stated that China's activities inside the Philippines' economic zone were illegal, and censured the construction of artificial islands in the area; these islands were

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detrimental to the environment and had caused anxiety in the international community. The tribunal went so far as to rule a Taiwanese possession, Itu Aba, to be a rock or a reef, even though it is the feature of the Spratly Islands most likely to be considered an actual island.

This harsh ruling has led some to speculate that Beijing may overreact. There is the chance that China could attempt to fortify its holdings at Scarborough Shoal, which it took from the Philippines in 2012. The Chinese could also attempt to detain a United States ship or aircraft as it proceeds through freedom-of-navigation operations as described in the Riggio article. Rapp-Hooper hopes that the Chinese will remain a part of the UNCLOS, as their departure would demonstrate an overt rejection of the existing international order. It is preferable for China to remain a partner in the international community, rather than having Beijing operate unilaterally, or worse, establish a network of allies that rivals and parallels the existing order, yet without the value and ethics considerations prescribed by the UN, IMF, and other intergovernmental organizations - however, as this paper will demonstrate below, that is exactly what Beijing seems to be doing. It is in Beijing's interest to remain a part of the existing order, as its actions of late have made China's neighbors nervous and led to them strengthening their own forces to balance Chinese aggression. Rapp-Hooper writes specifically of the nature of Beijing's relationship with its neighbors; "Many of those states - most notably the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - have become increasingly wary of Beijing in recent years"; these nations support the idea of having a means of dispute resolution in accordance with international law, enforcing consequences for aggressive or unlawful actions (Rapp-Hooper 81).

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The United States and its allies are presented with a number of options in order to maintain the current order. The United States must support the tribunal, without siding with either party in sovereignty disputes. The United States and its allies should continue to conduct freedom of navigation operations, in order to support the ruling. Further, the US should work with ASEAN in order to develop a code of conduct between that group of nations and China.

Balancing China's Influence

At this point, this paper has illustrated that China has continued to grow and gain influence, militarily and economically; Beijing has been chastised under international law, yet there are currently no consequences to the decision. Meanwhile, China, frustrated by the decision, continues to grow. Some policymakers argue against any action by the United States and its allies that could be misconstrued as aggression. As China increases in economic influence, the United States must not make irrational demands on China or on American allies. Rather, America needs to balance China's growing influence by proactively investing in its own networks, partnerships, alliances, and strengths.

Another recent article in *Foreign Affairs* addressed this delicate balance, and illustrated how the United States might best placate Beijing's ego. Feigenbaum's essay begins with a summary of a recent American misstep in diplomacy - the Chinese sought to create a new bank for the purpose of financing infrastructure projects, Washington bristled and attempted to steer its allies away from participation; the allies ignored Washington's guidance. The author argues that, in attempting to establish new financial

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initiatives, Beijing is not trying to totally overthrow the existing international system; rather, such efforts attempt to address gaps in the existing system, where demands by the US and its allies may be too demanding. Again, China is simultaneously a participant in and a challenger of the post-WWII liberal international system; Beijing sometimes finds the values-based restrictions of the established world order too cumbersome.

Rather than attempting to overturn the international order, Feigenbaum argues that China attempts to create parallel structures – an example being the aforementioned investment bank – without the liberal restrictions of the existing world order. The author illustrates Beijing's establishment of its own network, using the example of the Chinese relationship with India, and stating that, as the Asian economies become more dependent upon one another, they will naturally move away from the postwar western system. This argument is made more frankly by another author; an article in the *Naval War College Review* stated that "when China eventually got its economy booming, it brought real money to the table, and it was agnostic on how one ruled one's own country" (Rubel 17). If a nation has a resource Beijing wants, they'll do business, regardless of the partner nation's liberalization of its politics or its human rights record.

Feigenbaum states that the United States must continue to work with its own network of allies in order to "counterbalance" Beijing's growing influence.

Feigenbaum's argument is similar to that made by other authors; where some argue that China is creating a parallel system of international security, the author here illustrates that China operates a parallel system of international investment.

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Exporting Security as a Product

The parallel order suggested is not limited to simple economic investment. Beijing has begun to train and educate officers of foreign militaries at its defense universities, especially those of Latin American and African Nations. This topic was considered in a recent article in *Parameters*, wherein the authors made the argument that tensions between the United States and China will possibly continue to escalate, as China's intervention in Latin America and Africa are indicative of the Chinese attempt to market a new type of international security. Beijing is marketing such military education programs directly to those regimes most likely to have conflicts with the human rights and economic liberalization requirements imposed by the intergovernmental organizations of the West; these programs are "most effective with countries outside of East Asia, particularly with authoritarian states in the developing world, who share China's suspicion of what are often perceived as Western-imposed values" (Van Oudenaren 110).

Rubel's piece in the *Naval War College Review* further addresses the alternative system offered by China. This new security is not of the type provided by the United States and its allies, where security is provided based on subscription to Western principles of human rights and democratization; rather, the type of security provided by the Chinese is based upon exclusive trade arrangements; "China adopted a form of mercantilism in which it attempted to create exclusive arrangements with foreign companies and nations" (Rubel 17). The client states for China's new product are usually smaller developing nations, including "a number of Latin American and African nations as well as Greece, whose economy is in shambles and whose attachment to

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NATO is not as strong as it once was" (Rubel 18). This new product is in direct competition to the product provided by America and the post-WWII group of Intergovernmental Organizations; it is easier to obtain and maintain as the cost to the client state is exclusive trade, rather than governmental reform - further developing a parallel system to that offered by the West. Rubel is the first to note that the product seems to be a variant on international security; arguing from the realist perspective, he writes "all great powers must export security if they are to achieve the key national imperatives of defense of the homeland, economic well-being, and a favorable world (or at least regional) order" (18).

The weakness of Rubel's article is not in his argument; he makes his point clearly and illustrates it well. The weakness is in the situation the United States currently faces; Rubel describes the options available to America as "a dog's breakfast". Essentially, the West can either aggressively stand against China's product, or it can tolerate it.

Military Education as Diplomacy

Thus far, this paper has demonstrated how China has advanced its foreign policy agenda using the economic and military instruments of power. Beijing uses all of the instruments at their disposal, as illustrated in a recent article in *Parameters*. The authors argue that, in addition to using the Economic and Military instruments of power to develop international relations, the People's Liberation Army has extended training opportunities to the nations of Africa and Latin America in order to advance Diplomatic and Information Operations initiatives.

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The authors begin their article with a vignette regarding a graduation ceremony from China's National Defense University, noting that the ceremony celebrates not only the graduating class, but also the 70th anniversary of the "War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression" (Van Oudenaren 105). There are a number of subtle messages within the ceremony; it is a celebration of Chinese military education and military victory over an oppressive regime. However, the authors point out that there are a number of officers from Latin American and African nations in the graduating class, and proceed into the crux of their argument: China is using public diplomacy to cultivate international influence; China is securing its interests through multiple foreign policy strategies, and China is seen as a security partner by nations in the developing world (Van Oudenaren 106).

The authors make it clear that China is not yet a peer competitor of America in such endeavors, however, they further demonstrate the perception that Beijing is offering an alternative to the international system offered by the United States and its allies since World War II. President Xi has stated that China will "use every instrument of statecraft" in pursuit of its foreign policy goals; part of this includes "an expansive role for military diplomacy" (107). Chinese forces are also able to somewhat compensate for a lack of real combat experience through these relationships; they do so by "participating in multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions and military operations other than war" (108).

Solutions - Are there any?

As this paper has demonstrated, there are two distinct issues at hand. First,

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Beijing has begun to create relationships in Latin America and Africa, effectively bypassing the existing international order and its demands of human rights reform and smaller government. Second, China has begun to create a parallel security apparatus to the one offered by the intergovernmental organizations of the West, offering security in exchange to exclusive rights to a country's resources. It has been argued that the parallel system offered by China is "neither complementary nor adversarial, but rather generally ambivalent" toward the system upheld by the United States. In addition to training the future leaders of its partner nations, China has asserted claims to exclusive economic zones based on its own creation of artificial islands. China has aggressively asserted itself on the world stage as a major competitor to the United States and its allies. Beijing's client states are those that would have issue with Washington's foreign policy agenda; "States that do not share US foreign policy prerogatives such as promoting good governance, democracy, free markets, and human rights can now turn to China's more active international diplomacy for support" (Van Oudenaren 116). The question of whether or not "China will be content as a regional hegemon with global interests or will seek to displace the United States as the primary global power" has yet to be answered.

The possible "solutions", such as they are, have been referred to as a "dog's breakfast": none of them are particularly palatable. The United States must recognize China as a rising peer competitor, and must use all of the instruments of national power to compete with Beijing.

D - The United States should ratify the UNCLOS, and then move to amend it. This solution was suggested by Riggio.

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D - The United States should continue to strengthen its existing relationships and alliances, to include NATO and ASEAN.

D - America should continue to try to work with China in combined military operations and military education programs. This serves the dual purpose of training American Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen, and Marines, while demonstrating the capabilities of the American armed forces to our peer competitor and potential adversary.

I - Washington should ensure that it gets the messaging right, publicly acknowledging that to align with China is to seek a pass on the human rights and rule of law requirements imposed by the Western system.

M - The American armed forces and NATO and ASEAN allies must actively work to check Chinese expansion in the South China Sea, in Latin America, and in Africa.

E - Washington should demonstrate its commitment to the developing world by increasing investment in Latin America and in Africa. Military Education programs should be expanded, and combined training opportunities increased.

Conclusion

Despite the efforts of the previous administration to rebalance to the Pacific, contingency operations in the Middle East prevented the focus from shifting as much as President Obama and his staff would have preferred. Recent developments, including overt aggression by North Korea, have made the rebalance more of a priority than ever. Beijing's sphere of influence has grown - and continues to grow - beyond the Asian continent. Using all of the instruments of power, China exudes influence on its neighbors; its use of the military and economic interests has extended to Latin America

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and Africa. It is even possible to perceive the penetration into the Western Hemisphere as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Social character theorists have long argued that direct conflict between the two nations is inevitable. America must express its frustration with China's activity through strong diplomatic alliances with partner nations throughout the region. Further, the United States armed forces must demonstrate their commitment to alliances with regional partners, training with and supporting the military forces of those nations China's actions threaten. Military training must move beyond the instruction and evaluation of warrior tasks and drills tailored to operations in the CENTCOM region and into the realm of conventional military operations - including, as recent events in Syria have made evident, training in Chemical-Biological-Radiation-Nuclear-Explosive operations. As the United States armed forces move towards a regionally-aligned forces model, service members should begin training in Chinese and other nation's language and culture. Service members must be trained to be able to perform on a conventional battlefield in the PACOM region; planning for large scale operations should begin now - including, most importantly, interagency and joint training pertaining to phase IV stability operations to be conducted in the wake of any large scale conflict.

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