

Chinese Grand Strategy vs. "One China" Policy:

Replacing Flawed Strategic Options with Military Diplomacy to Prevent Future Conflict

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14. ABSTRACT The People's Republic of China (PRC) represents one of the largest national security concerns for the United States and the international community. PRC's grand strategy to achieve core national interests via incremental advancement is winning, while the Belt and Road initiative foreshadows world-wide ambitions. If the United States seeks to achieve freedom, security and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific region it will require a more aggressive and confrontational foreign policy towards PRC that leverages all aspects of national power to compel PRC leaders to pause all territorial ambitions in favor of safeguarding their national security interests. Over the next 10 years the U.S. will require increased military capabilities focused on Taiwan, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and Australia that will strengthen economic capabilities and support increased diplomatic engagement to confront China and achieve U.S. strategic political objectives. In the end, strategic military-diplomatic engagement will create a free and open Indo-Pacific region by compelling China to acquiesce in order to preserve their political and economic systems.					
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Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) represents one of the largest national security concerns for the United States and the international community. "Since the demise of the Soviet Union, PRC leaders have considered the United States to be their country's primary rival. Despite having benefited tremendously since the late 1970s from cooperation with the United States, Chinese leaders are wary of U.S. intentions.¹" In comparison, the U.S. "One China" policy, adopted in 1979, created a policy of appeasement towards PRC making territorial claims^{2,3} - it started with Taiwan and now includes the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. This policy of appeasement has enabled and emboldened Chinese grand strategy causing instability across the region. If the United States seeks to achieve freedom, security and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific region it will require a more aggressive and confrontational foreign policy towards PRC that leverages all aspects of national power to compel PRC leaders to pause all territorial ambitions in favor of safeguarding their national security interests.

A more aggressive and confrontational approach to China, particularly on the territorial claims relating to Taiwan and the Spratly Islands, that leverages military and economic capabilities while allowing for a diplomatic "exit" will better solve the current security, economic and political challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Over the next 10 years the U.S. will require increased military capabilities focused on Taiwan, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and Australia that will strengthen economic capabilities and support increased diplomatic engagement to confront China and achieve U.S. strategic political objectives. Ultimately, a robust military-diplomatic intervention integrated with increased economic opportunities for strategic partners will best support the national security objective of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.⁴

Chinese Grand Strategy

Beginning with Sun Tzu and continuing with Mao Zedong's 20 year insurgency that created the PRC, there exists a strong cultural narrative for Chinese grand strategy that extends decades rather than election cycles. For example, the PRC's economic success and increasing military capabilities would not have been possible without decades of U.S. support but they operate under the assumption that the U.S. is also the main threat to China.^{1,5} PRC leaders view maintaining cordial and cooperative relations with the United States as a top priority, while assuming American duplicity regarding the "one China policy" and that international opposition to maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea are anchored in U.S. interests.⁶ Chinese Grand Strategy to defeat the U.S. thus depends upon balancing cooperation and engagement, in areas of mutual benefit, against competition and confrontation, in areas of China's national interest.

PRC leaders, to include Xi Jinping, often speak of three specific core national interests: 1) preserving China's basic political system and national security; 2) maintaining conditions for China's economic development; and 3) protecting national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unification.⁷ Considering that military buildup is contingent upon economic success and PRC political survival depends on control of the populace, to build the economy, it becomes evident that preservation of the communist political system is the highest priority of China's core national interests. Secondly, the economic rise of China has supported national sovereignty while creating opportunities for territorial expansion via increased military capabilities. Given the Chinese cultural narrative of grand strategy, it becomes clear that the PRC would, at a minimum, pause territorial ambitions if the long term consequences threatened preservation of the political system, economic stability and national security.

Failed Strategy and Flawed Options

As discussed by Brands and Cooper in the Naval War College Review, "Getting Serious About Strategy in the South China Sea," the United States lacks a coherent strategy to respond to PRCs territorial advances on the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.⁸ The lack of strategy is further supported by the 2019 Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report that names "Risk Reduction" through high level bilateral military engagement with China as a top objective.⁹ In response, China continues a calculated, incremental and unflinching advance in the South China Sea and across the globe under their Belt and Road Initiative.^{1,5,8} In contrast, the U.S. has failed to critically evaluate the strategic geopolitical issues that would inform a coherent strategy to counter PRC advancement in the South China Sea and beyond. Consequently, the U.S. follows a flawed, fragmented, and confusing policy on China's territorial expansion, coercion of allies, economic manipulation and military force projection in the Indo-Pacific region.^{1-5,8,9} The current strategic debate on countering China mirrors the challenges in the South China Sea and centers on four strategic options: Rollback, Containment, Offset, and Accommodation (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Summary of South China Sea Strategic Options⁸

Rollback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically attack Chinese forces in the South China Sea • Blockade Chinese forces on South China Sea features until they withdraw • Apply economic sanctions to force Chinese military to withdraw • Undermine “core” Chinese interests, such as Taiwan, unless China withdraws
Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land US forces on features controlled by China’s neighbors • Provide military support to other South China Sea claimants • Maintain a large regional military presence, especially near Scarborough Shoal • Recognize China’s neighbors as rightful claimants of disputed features
Offset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance US political-military engagement in Southeast Asia • Impose economic/diplomatic penalties in response to Chinese advances • Offset Chinese gains with greater US military deployments • Encourage diplomatic and legal challenges to Chinese activities
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly accept Chinese reclamation, construction, and militarization • Cease freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea • Communicate that Washington will not intervene in regional disputes • Clarify that US commitment to the Philippines excludes the South China Sea

Rollback represents the most dangerous, coercive and potentially kinetic strategic option that would involve attacking Chinese forces vs. blockading Chinese forces on South China Sea features in addition to applying economic sanctions to force Chinese military elements to withdraw. The strategy also involves undermining “core” Chinese interests, such as Taiwan, unless China withdraws. The "Rollback strategy" could be repeated in any area of Chinese influence given the growing global impact of the Belt and Road Initiative but would risk escalating the conflict across the world. Rollback, thus, risks plunging the U.S. and China into a world-wide military conflict that would alienate Indo-Pacific allies while creating regional instability.

Containment would allow current PRC gains to be kept but would prevent further advances in the South China Sea, or across the world, while increasing the risk for non-compliance. Containment could involve increasing U.S. forces in the South China Sea, providing military support to other claimants, and recognizing international law and U.N. designated countries as the rightful claimants of disputed features. The major drawback to containment involve economic costs, the need for multilateral engagement and the risks of a slowly evolving and escalating military conflict.

Offset involves a passive indirect strategic approach focused on penalizing or "offsetting" PRC gains through diplomatic, economic and soft-power costs. This particular strategy is inherently challenging because it hinges on multilateral cooperation to include leveraging political-military engagement to ensure an appropriate Chinese response to economic and diplomatic penalties, increased military deployments to the Indo-Pacific region and encouraging legal challenges to Chinese activities. Unfortunately, this strategy fails to account for the lack of

Chinese response to the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the history of appeasement between U.S. and PRC territorial ambitions based on the "one china" policy.

Accommodation recognizes the status quo and would be most consistent with the "one china" policy in recognizing PRC hegemony in the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific region. This would further allow the U.S. to re-focus efforts on cooperation and leveraging U.S. elements of national power to better preserve U.S. interests in the form of a strong U.S. - China partnership of mutual benefit. The U.S. would publicly accept Chinese reclamation, construction, and militarization while stopping freedom-of-navigation operations, and communicate that Washington will not intervene in regional disputes to include Philippine claims in the South China Sea. Similar to other world powers recognizing the U.S. sphere of influence in the Caribbean, the U.S. and other world powers would recognize the PRC sphere of influence in the South China Sea. However, accommodation would place the nail in the coffin of U.S. decline on the world stage and undermine U.S. influence in one of the world's most important sea lanes.

Brands and Cooper ultimately advocate for a hybrid containment/offset strategy but they qualify the recommendation with, "There is no guarantee that this hybrid strategy will work."⁸ There are three major flaws with this strategic option: 1) PRC territorial gains are maintained; 2) PRC ambitions regionally and across the world go unchecked; and 3) Risk of U.S. - China military conflict increases, rather than decreases, over time. Additionally, the strategy fails to address PRC military diplomacy described as "the pursuit of foreign policy objectives under the guidance of China's national grand strategy through the peaceful employment of military resources and capabilities to maintain national interests, security, and development."⁵ If China's

grand strategy, focused on military diplomacy, is not equally matched by the United States, then strategic failure remains the greatest long term risk.

Military Diplomacy & Increased Capabilities

In order for the U.S. to avoid long term strategic failure in countering the rise of China, it will require an updated strategy centered on a modernized concept of military diplomacy — one that integrates economic and diplomatic initiatives with peaceful military force projection. Over the next 10 years, the U.S. will need to increase military cooperation, reposition assets and build infrastructure in Taiwan, ASEAN countries and Australia to confront PRC grand strategy and achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific region. While "military-diplomacy" is not diplomacy in the traditional sense, military relationships between countries build foundations that strengthen connections while supporting interoperability, humanitarian response, economic prosperity, improved communication, shared principles and cultural exchange.⁵ This modernized military-diplomatic strategy to counter China will require focused and integrated budget increases that capitalize on civil-military cooperation to combat climate change; an existential threat recognized by ASEAN.¹⁰ Civil-military cooperation focused on climate change mitigation will further serve as a vehicle for enhancing military force projection and diplomatic engagement.

Leading with the military as the main effort, under the auspices of peace and supporting climate change mitigation, the U.S. will reposition forces and build infrastructure in Australia, ASEAN Countries and, eventually, Taiwan. Cooperation with USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) to build the required civilian infrastructure and strengthen diplomatic engagement will pave the way to coordinate year-round military exercises with partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region and, in particular, the South China Sea. The primary goal will be to showcase military strength, interoperability and capability through climate response missions

between the U.S. and ASEAN allies, which will send a clear message to China. These year-round interactions will significantly improve trade relationships and stimulate economic ties through logistical contracting, commerce on the local economy and military equipment sales, which would decrease China's regional economic and military influence. Through increased diplomatic engagement, the next step would involve achieving "manufacturing independence" from China by shifting the manufacturing of critical resources away from China to ASEAN allies.

Combining an economic plan with military force projection represents a critical aspect to modern military diplomacy and differentiates this strategic approach from the "Rollback" advocated by Brands and Cooper. The necessity for strong diplomatic engagement as a foundational element further divorces the military-diplomacy strategic approach from the Brands and Cooper hybrid containment/offset strategy. Economic initiatives, represent another key aspect, that will follow in the wake of the battleships accomplishing military exercises; thus, creating opportunities for diplomats to negotiate security arrangements, build trade relationships and offer evidence that U.S. interests are aligned with host country interests. For this strategy to work, the U.S. needs to join UNCLOS (United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea) and create a security assistance fund that can support military exercises and is integrated with a USAID Indo-Pacific climate mitigation fund. The end goal will be the creation of a U.N. security council resolution for the Indo-Pacific region focused on climate change mitigation, supporting freedom of navigation and enforcing the South China Sea Arbitration — under UNCLOS China's maritime claims in the South China Sea were deemed unlawful.¹¹ The final strategic step would be for China to recognize the South China Sea Arbitration in the face of unyielding pressure by the international community and U.N. Security Council.

Once the military has gained a foot-hold and economic initiatives strengthen partner countries while mitigating Chinese influence, diplomacy will shift from a supporting effort to the main effort. In the face of year-round military exercises in the South China Sea, increased economic integration with the U.S., funding to combat climate change in partner countries and the movement of a U.S. numbered fleet into the area as a supporting effort,¹² China will have no choice but to negotiate an international resolution to the presented dilemma. Two critical final actions would push China to the international arbitration and negotiating table: 1) recognizing the American Institute of Taiwan, de facto Embassy, as a consulate or full embassy to support climate change mitigation efforts; 2) negotiating for a U.N. peace-keeping force to be stationed on the Spratly Islands for the next 50 years. The strategic deployment of a diplomatic corps will be critical to this final effort in order to counter Chinese influence, increase U.S. authority and strengthen government-to-government cooperation with allies in the Indo-Pacific region. However, this diplomatic main effort will only be possible after utilizing the military to gain a foot-hold through military-to-military cooperation augmented with economic engagement.

Counter-Argument

Although the U.S. has followed a flawed, fragmented, and confusing policy — as evidenced by the unopposed aggressive regional actions and global initiatives by China — it has, at the very least, avoided a costly war. Despite the limitations of U.S. policy, it has maintained economic and diplomatic relations in the Indo-Pacific region to include the South China Sea. Regional military conflict remains a risk with any confrontational strategy, which could rupture diplomatic relations, alienate regional allies and create devastating consequences for world commerce. In particular, any increased engagement with Taiwan could cross a PRC "red-line"

given that it directly conflicts with the national interest of unification and violates the "one china" policy recognized by the United States.^{2,7}

It can be argued that the only valid long-term strategic solution would be to support the unification of mainland China and Taiwan while containing PRC territorial expansion to the South China Sea. However, this counter-argument fails to take into account global PRC ambitions as evidenced by the Belt and Road Initiative as well as their expanding military capabilities. Once China achieves the objectives associated with their core national interests, China will completely focus on their long term 2050 vision of becoming the "triumphant China."¹ China's 2050 vision as the most socially stable, economically prosperous, technologically advanced and militarily powerful country in the world, would necessitate supplanting the U.S. on the world stage in order to re-write the rules of the international order in China's own favor. Thus, generating maximum strategic pressure on China - militarily, economically, diplomatically and politically - in order to force them to prioritize current core national interests represents the soundest long term strategic plan to counter China's grand strategy, rising influence and expanding power.

Creating a campaign of maximum strategic pressure focused on military diplomacy that will leverage allies in order to influence China represents the biggest strategic difference between Brands and Cooper's Rollback or hybrid containment/offset strategy. While Brands and Cooper seem to endorse a direct approach focused on China, confronting Chinese actions and directly counteracting Chinese strategy, the military diplomacy strategy endorses an indirect approach that leverages diplomatic and economic engagement of U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region via the development of a military foot-hold. The military arm would guarantee the space for diplomacy to work via deterrence through a forward-deployed presence in support of regional

allies. The focus of the diplomatic arm would leverage combating the existential threat of climate change to produce the strategic regional effects required to create a strategic dilemma for Chinese grand strategy and force Chinese leaders to prioritize preservation of the communist political system, maintaining economic stability and supporting national security against their continued territorial ambitions.

Conclusion

PRC's grand strategy to achieve core national interests via incremental advancement is winning, while the Belt and Road initiative foreshadows world-wide ambitions. In order for the U.S. to counter the grand strategy of China, a coherent strategic policy that incorporates a modern military diplomacy represents the best opportunity for success in the face of multiple flawed options. A combination of military force projection, economic engagement and diplomatic action synchronized in a package of "military diplomacy" will be needed to create a strategic dilemma for Chinese grand strategy. China will be faced with a choice: national security and continued economic development vs. territorial expansion and international conflict. The combination of U.S. military and economic capabilities will engage Indo-Pacific allies to pressure China, while diplomatic engagement will ensure the availability of a "hard exit" to avoid military conflict. In the end, strategic military-diplomatic engagement will create a free and open Indo-Pacific region by compelling China to acquiesce in order to preserve their political and economic systems.

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