
Preface

The international security studies community, to which this volume addresses itself, is increasingly focused on questions roiling policy discourse: with China's growing power redrawing the security landscape, will Sino-US strategic competition lead to conflict, or will the current hegemon/system-manager and its pre-eminent potential rival non-violently manage systemic fluidity to a new power-equilibrium? Strategists ponder Sino-US competition, how it affects and, is in turn, affected by, transitional turbulence at a time of eroded clarity and definition. The literature examines specific aspects of the dialectic dynamics shaping mutual threat perceptions, doctrinal evolution, military force- and platform development and deployment, and a steady sharpening of national security policies vis-à-vis each other. Few titles adopt a holistic view of the binary relational duality giving comparable weight to American and Chinese contributions to strategic complexity. This work seeks to fill that gap by analysing these mutually reinforcing processes to reveal the contours of contention linking America's primacy, China's growing capacity to question it, America's response and China's countermoves.

'Seeking truth from facts', this is a forensic examination of the empirical evidence tracing the evolution of Sino-US security-interactions since these were defined by their tacit anti-Soviet alliance during the Cold War's final decades, to temporary marginalisation, subsequently unstated antagonism and 'near-peer rivalry', to eventual strategic competition admixed with cooperative elements. Using the 'power-shift' and 'power-diffusion' frameworks, it reviews America's 'unipolar era' amidst incremental and incomplete multipolar trends, from both US and Chinese perspectives. It examines the Obama Administration's efforts to manage China 'rise', initially as a cooperative subordinate-partner and, when these failed, as a more competitive potential 'peer-rival' whose ascent called for a sophisticated mix of incentives and disincentives. It examines four cases of flashpoints carrying the potential, given Sino-US systemic pre-eminence, to escalate into triggers for wider conflict: maritime/territorial disputes between China and its US-aligned neighbours across the East- and South China Seas, Sino-US disputes triggered by mutually exclusive interpretations of the UN Convention on the Law of

the Sea (UNCLOS), disputes over cyberspace operations, and Korean nuclear challenges. The work finally examines efforts by the second Obama Administration and China's Xi Jinping-Li Keqiang leadership to fashion a new framework essential to a pacific transition to a more complex, dynamic, but non-confrontational new order.

The volume is organised in six chapters. Chapter 1 records the angry mutual critique American and Chinese national security establishments and their acolytes often trade. Heated rhetoric coloured America's 2012 election campaign and China's semi-synchronous leadership changes. Given that America and China were covert allies collaborating in clandestine campaigns to undermine the Soviet Union during the Cold War's final decades, this marked a dramatic reversal. The chapter examines the evolution of post-1989 Sino-American mutual perceptions as recorded in official and semi-official assessments: America focused on the consequences of China's 'rise' for the US-led international security system; the Chinese debated post-Cold War power- diffusion into a multipolar order, and the construction of the 'comprehensive national power' framework to capture that process. The chapter identifies elemental divergences in strategic assessments of the security ecology, and optimum approaches available for pursuing respective interests therein. It establishes the two powers' locus as each other's potential strategic nemesis in the eyes of key national security elite-groups despite growing interdependence, and how mutual insecurity defines the current security milieu.

Chapter 2 assesses the theoretical/conceptual evolution focusing on post-Cold War processes of power-shift and power-diffusion, and their cumulative impact on the international security system. Primary documents and academic literature, both American and Chinese, are reviewed to establish the major strands of trans-Pacific scholarship on the drivers of change. The sudden advent and relative brevity of America's unipolar primacy, and incremental crystallisation of evolving multipolarity, are analysed from both US and Chinese perspectives. Contrasting objectives, interests and preferences separating the two shores of the Pacific across a perceptual gulf, generating strategic distrust, divergent responses to a dynamic rebalancing of Sino-US power relations, China's emphasis on historical models and templates for modern-day policymaking, and America's primary reliance on its military dominance are examined to identify the key contradictions shaping the discourse against the backdrop of systemic transitional fluidity. Together, these themes establish the context in which the narrative paints a contemporary picture of Sino-American strategic rivalry inherited by the Obama Administration.

Chapter 3 examines the Obama Administration's diplomatic, national security- and military policies directed towards the Asia-Pacific region generally, and China in particular, during its first term. It analyses Obama's 'all-of-government rebalancing' towards the region, formalised in 2011–2012 and implemented around the military kernel of the 'AirSea Battle Concept' (ASBC) of operations and the 'Joint Operational Access Concept' (JOAC) designed to neutralise the PLA's growing 'area-control' capabilities in the Western Pacific and, thereby, restore and indefinitely extend America's systemic primacy. It also assesses Beijing's responses to this robust refocusing of American interest and attention to China's

periphery, China's efforts to effect credible deterrence in a dynamic security milieu via rapid military modernisation resulting in a potential 'break-out', and thereby deepen the adversarial dialectic defining the regional insecurity complex. The chapter thus explores and outlines escalatory risks generated by Sino-US strategic competition contextualised by systemic transitional fluidity.

Chapter 4 shines a light on several acute challenges to regional peace and stability as China, the USA, and countries allied or aligned to America engage in competitive claims over rights and territorial jurisdiction across East Asia's extra-territorial waters. It examines three interlinked strands to maritime/territorial disputes—that between China and Japan in the East China Sea, those over overlapping claims pressed in the South China Sea by China/Taiwan on the one hand, and Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei on the other, and Sino-US disputes triggered by mutually exclusive interpretations of the rights, jurisdictions and responsibilities assigned to littoral, insular and peninsular states on the one hand, and extra-regional 'user states' on the other, by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The chapter assesses the disputes' historical roots, contemporary complexities and mutually reinforcing attributes, and emergent linkages between the China–Japan–US and China–ASEAN–US strategic triangles, against the backdrop of Sino-US rivalry, rendering the East- and the South China Seas two incandescently inflammable flashpoints.

Chapter 5 reviews efforts by the second Obama Administration and China's Xi Jinping–Li Keqiang leadership to fashion less adversarial and more collaborative relations against the backdrop of deepening interdependence and the coalescence of coalitions. Differentiated outcomes of the 2008–2010 economic crises, magnified by globalised economic, financial and commercial linkages, forced US and Chinese economies on divergent trajectories, sharpening perceived polarisation. Sino-US competition did not comport with the Cold War-era 'bipolar' rivalry, but underscored an erosion of strategic clarity and definition. The chapter examines transitional uncertainties which encouraged major and minor actors to 'hedge and engage' with a view to diplomatically shaping the security environment while preparing to robustly defend respective interests if engagement failed. The chapter analyses the ability of atypical challenges reflecting and reinforcing Sino-US competition to upset East Asia's subsystemic equilibrium, and threaten major upheaval with potentially systemic reverberations. Cyber-threats and North Korean behaviour early in the Obama–Xi diarchy are assessed to identify challenges facing Sino-US efforts to manage a non-violent transition, and locate the contours of a still amorphous security architecture struggling to emerge across this crucial and troubled region.

The concluding chapter sums up the inquiry, updating the narrative to the end of 2014, and draws inferences on the competitive dynamics at the fluid systemic core while limning the efforts being made on both shores of the Pacific to forge a mutually acceptable equilibrium for a somewhat different, perhaps less clear and more fuzzy, future facing the region, and the world.

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