

Security Dilemma, Balance of Power Vs. US Policy Towards China in the Post-Cold War Era

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As long as the concept of a unified world government is an ideal, the essential feature of international politics will remain as the state of anarchy. The theories of "Security Dilemma" and "Balance of Power," which result from that anarchy, are still playing important roles in international politics today. The author holds that the US has adopted these two theories in formulating and implementing policy towards China. Hence, this article intends to analyze and interpret US policy towards China from the perspectives of "Security Dilemma" and "Balance of Power."

Security Dilemma Vs. US Policy Towards China in the Post-Cold War Era

In the anarchic international environment, national states/regions are fearful of each other because of mutual misunderstandings. Security thus becomes the first priority. All countries try to gain security, obtain military superiority, and improve one's own security status by increasing military expenditure. Since an arms race is a perpetual concern, one's military superiority will quickly be surpassed by others' military building-up efforts; absolute security is therefore impossible. So all countries are trapped in a dilemma. This kind of phenomenon is called the "Security Dilemma."²

In the Asia-Pacific, where any powerful, regional multilateral security regime like NATO or OSCE is lacking, the security dilemma is really the major cause for practical and potential hot spots (i.e. Taiwan, Kashmir, South China Sea, Korean Peninsula) and issues (i.e. proliferation of WMD, particularly nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, rapid augmentation of

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² John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, Vol. 2(1950), p.157-158; *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, Columbia University Press, 1959, p.231.

military budgets, and weapon acquirement). The Asia-Pacific is the most prevailing and outstanding security dilemma in the world.³

Since China is viewed as a rising "revisionist" power in the Asia-Pacific, the "China Threat" is very popular in Japan and Southeast Asian countries. The territorial disputes between China and Japan, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia—plus tensions across the Taiwan Strait—have provided the US with certain opportunities to alienate China from its neighbors by playing up the security dilemma. In *Strategic Appraisal 1996*, the RAND Corporation recommended that the US government reinforce alliances with Japan and ROK, improve cooperation with ASEAN, and support the defense of Taiwan and ASEAN in order to contain China.⁴

The most conspicuous example of the US using the security dilemma theory to contain China is the issue of Taiwan.⁵ The US never ceased, but continued to upgrade arms sales to Taiwan in order to guarantee the so-called military balance between the Mainland and Taiwan. In April 2000, newly elected President Bush proclaimed that the US would assist in the self-defense of Taiwan at all costs, sending a clear signal to the concerned parties that the policy goal of the US was to prolong the "no war, no independence, and no unification" situation infinitely.

Some Americans believed that the arms race between the Mainland and Taiwan, and the security dilemma they sank into, would be conducive to containing China for the following four reasons:

1. The upgraded arms sales to Taiwan could drive the two sides across the Strait into a vicious cycle of arms build-up. The Mainland would then have to abandon its basic line focusing on economic construction. In the end, economic stagnation, or even economic collapse, would force China to disintegrate like the former Soviet Union.
2. If reunification with Taiwan could not be fulfilled, ethnic separatists in Tibet and Xinjiang would be strongly encouraged. Then the territorial integrity

³ SHI Yinhong, "Security Dilemma and the Need for a Security Regime in East Asia", *Strategy and Management*, 2000.4, p.87.

⁴ Zalmay Khalizad, "U.S. Grand Strategy: Implications for the United States and the World", *Strategic Appraisal 1996*, Rand, 1996, p. 23-34.

⁵ Although Taiwan is a province not a state, we could still apply the security dilemma theory to the case given the fact that Taiwan is publicly engaged in military confrontation with the Mainland.

and frontier security of China would be at stake. China would also encounter Soviet-type disintegration.

3. As long as the *status quo* of "no war, no independence, and no unification" across the strait is maintained, Taiwan would remain a pro-US entity that has no other option but to totally rely on the Americans for security and protection. The Mainland would then be on the strategic defensive, and its influence in East Asia would be largely constrained. The US could then ensure that the regional situation will continue to be favorable, and maintain its unique dominance in East Asia. Taiwan publicly confronting the Mainland would not only justify the American involvement in regional security affairs, but would also worry China's neighbors that a potential reunification by military means could lead to regional turmoil and endanger the economic and security interests of the region, hence creating a disadvantageous security environment for China.
4. To sustain a certain degree of tension across the Taiwan Strait would not cause any loss to the US. On the contrary, it would only destroy the peaceful internal and external environment needed by China for modernization, and delay the speed of China's revitalization. Since Taiwan is publicly defying the Mainland, China can hardly look after its own problems. How, then, could it challenge the American hegemony in the Asia-Pacific?

The arms race and security dilemma between Taiwan and the Mainland gave a very good excuse for the American military presence in the Asia-Pacific. China's moderate military modernization efforts (i.e. buying some fighters and warships from Russia), aimed at deterring the Taiwan independent forces, are unfortunately mistaken by its neighbors as a security threat or indication of ambition. By making use of such concerns and exaggerating the so-called "China Threat," the US not only justified its military deployment in the Asia-Pacific but also maintained the ideal state—"relations among Asian countries are far less close than their respective bilateral relations with the US."⁶ In addition to

⁶ LIU Jinghua, "The Rise and Fall of Hegemonism", China Economic Press, 1997, p. 148.

consolidating military bases in Japan and South Korea, the US has succeeded in strengthening its military presence in Southeast Asia. For example, in 1998, US troops went back to the Philippines according to a newly signed agreement of warship port-calls; in March 2001, the Kitty Hawk Aircraft Carrier combat group anchored at Singapore's naval base. These activities have obviously revealed that the US would like to interfere in the affairs of the South China Sea and entrap China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines into security dilemmas and arms races over their conflicting territorial claims.

One strategic goal behind the US attempts of deploying NMD at home and TMD in Asia is to further the existing security dilemma among Asian countries. In case NMD is finally deployed over the American homeland, China's limited nuclear deterrence will be eroded. China would then have to enhance its nuclear capability, and India and Pakistan would definitely follow suit. Other Asian countries would respond by increasing their development and acquirement of conventional weapons. The endless nuclear/conventional arms races thereafter would enhance the existing security dilemma among Asian countries, pound their economic development, and jeopardize their economic cooperation. The FY1999 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Secretary of Defense to "carry out a study of the architecture requirements for establishment and operation of theater ballistic missile defense systems for...Taiwan." The final decision of deploying NMD and TMD made by President Bush on May 1, 2000 increased the possibility of Taiwan being incorporated into TMD one day. If that comes true, China's reunification course will face unprecedented challenges.

In addition, the US has effectively used contradictions, mistrust, and security dilemmas between China and Japan and China and India to undermine their bilateral relations and has successfully reaped the third-party profits. Enough has been written on this.

Balance of Power Vs. US Policy Towards China in the Post-Cold War Era

The "Balance of Power" and the "Security Dilemma" were born together. The representative figure of New Realism, Prof. Kenneth Waltz, once said, "Rational countries living in the state of anarchy and the security dilemma would be suspicious of and hostile to each other because of their

tense relations, although that was not their original idea."⁷ In such an international environment, it is natural that countries would use the "Balance of Power" to protect their own security. This would then make the "Security Dilemma" a regular phenomenon in international politics. We can therefore conclude that the "Security Dilemma" is both the root, and outcome, of the "Balance of Power,"⁸ while the "Balance of Power" is a natural demand by countries in the "Security Dilemma."

According to traditional Realism, "Balance of Power" is centered in power. Prof. Hans Morgenthau believed that "Balance of Power" referred to the reality in which power was shared equally by a group of countries.⁹ In the eyes of traditional Realists, the most direct and fundamental goal of one's foreign policy is to acquire power. This idea is not exceptional to the "Balance of Power" theory. The only thing that could prevent any single country from being too strong to threaten others' independence is the policy of a "Balance of Power." Prof. Morgenthau also pointed out that a group of countries hoping to maintain or break the *status quo* would finally come to the structure of "Balance of Power" and adopt the necessary policies to sustain such a structure.¹⁰ New Realism illustrated the necessity of balanced diplomacy from the perspective of the importance of "Balance of Power" to national security. Prof. Waltz warned all countries against both "practical threats" and "potential threats", because in the security dilemma, "...measures taken by one country to increase its own security meant measures decreasing others' security."¹¹

Always striving for global hegemony, the US has been concerned about prevailing and escalating security dilemmas in the Asia-Pacific for a long time. The rise of China was seen as the most notable practical and potential threat. In the minds of many Americans, China is the only possible country that could challenge the US hegemony in

⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics* (Chinese Translation), University of People's Public Security Press, 1992, p.3.

⁸ GUO Xuetang, "Collective Security Vs. Balance of Power—the Evolution of International Political System", *China Social Science*, 2001.2, p.167.

⁹ Hans Morgenthau, *International Politics—Striving for Power and Peace* (Chinese Translation), Shanghai Translation Press, 1995, p.223.

¹⁰ Hans Morgenthau, *International Politics—Striving for Power and Peace* (Chinese Translation), Shanghai Translation Press, 1995, p.222.

¹¹ Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics* (Chinese Version), University of People's Public Security Press, 1992, p.3.

the Asia-Pacific, either from the Idealistic perspective of values (Western democracy, human rights, etc.) or from the Realistic perspective of national interests. In December 2000, the US National Intelligence Commission released a report on the world in 2015 saying, "...if China becomes stronger, it will then seek favorable rearrangement of power in the Asia-Pacific and may engage in conflicts with its neighbors and some outside forces. As a rising power, China will keep on expanding its own influence without considering the US interests."¹²

The US, whose foreign policy is guided by Realism, of course will not forget the teachings given by Prof. Morgenthau and Prof. Waltz and let off any chance to check China by the use of "Balance of Power." According to the former Secretary of State Baker, to guard against the emergence of a big country or bloc capable of challenging the US hegemonic position in the Asia-Pacific is the long-term strategic goal of the US.¹³ "One basic principle of the US national security since the 19th Century is to prevent East Asia from being dominated by one power."¹⁴ When addressing the April 1st EP-3 Collision, American scholar Thomas L. Friedman said that the foreign policy goal of the US in Asia was to forestall the emergence of a country strong enough to contend with the US. The US beating up Japan in World War Two and containing China today are both based on this strategy, which is the same as the preventative diplomatic strategy of the British Empire regarding the European continent.¹⁵

If the US wants to play the role of "stopper" like the British Empire did in the 19th Century, it will need to entrap other regional powers, i.e. Japan, India and Russia into confrontational or strategic, competing relations with China. The American scholar Huntington said, "Theoretically speaking, the US could contain China by playing a balancing role if other powers would like to balance China as well."¹⁶ Since Russia is friendly to China owing to the antagonism with the US over NATO

¹² Lee Kuan Yew, "How Will Bush Administration Maintain Stability in East Asia", The Straits Times, April 13, 2001.

¹³ MA Yu'an, "Japan's Geo-Foreign Strategy—Seeking the Big Political Power Status", World Economy and Politics, 1997,9, p.56.

¹⁴ Janis C. Hosing, *The Reagan Administration and U.S. Policy toward PRC and Taiwan*, Mass: Oelgesch Lager Gun and Hair, 1983, p.19.

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, April 21, 2001.

¹⁶ Samuel Huntington, *Cultural Conflicts and Restructuring of World Order*, www.shuku.net

expansion, ABM revision, and Chechnya, the US could only place the hope of balancing China on Japan and India.

The US chose Japan to balance China because of the following reasons. (1) They have identical positions towards the issue of Taiwan: Both believe that "the no unification, no independence and no war" situation would serve their own national interests best and therefore is the most favorable strategic option. (2) Japan and the US have reached consensus on the excuse (guarding against the DPRK) and real cause (China) of deploying TMD and already have begun joint research and development of the system. (3) Japan hopes to realize its ambition of restoring a big political and military power through the support of the US while the latter hopes Japan could continue to share its political responsibility and military bills in Asia. They do need each other. (4) Speaking from geopolitics, economic strength, and Sino-US-Japan triangular relations, the US and Japan have other common grounds and needs in containing China.

The main approach adopted by the US to win over Japan is to strengthen the US-Japan military alliance. In 1996, the US-Japan Joint Declaration on Security claimed that the US-Japan alliance would continue to serve as the corner stone for stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific in the 21st Century. In 1997, the new Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation were introduced. Two years later, the Japanese Diet passed three bills related to the new Guidelines, which provided detailed approaches to enhance the Japan-US alliance. The US hopes to realize its long-term strategic goals of "maintaining a US presence, containing China, and constraining Japan" by converting the US-Japan alliance into a "NATO in Asia". In October 2000, the Institute for National Strategic Studies, NDU published a research report—*The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership*. "In this promising but also potentially dangerous setting, the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship is more important than ever. Japan remains the keystone of the U.S. involvement in Asia. The U.S.-Japan alliance is central to America's global security strategy." With the guidance of such thinking, the Japan-first Asian policy was introduced as soon as President Bush was inaugurated.

Japanese Asian expert Takashi Iguchi pointed out that the target of the Japan-US alliance had changed from the Soviet Union during the Cold War into regional dangers

like North Korea and China.¹⁷ Former Secretary of Defense Perry went further by saying that the main agenda for the US-Japan security cooperation in the 21st Century was to guard against instability on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait.¹⁸

One important goal of the US strengthening alliance with Japan is to push China and Japan into a security dilemma of mutual hostility and mistrust. Such a scenario will enable the US to play a role of "arbitrator" or "balancer" and profit from the struggle between China and Japan. As Dr. Kissinger has said, "If the US wanted Asia free from control by a single power center, it must maintain the strategic balance between China and Japan."¹⁹ The vicious intention of the US to sow discord and play the "Balance of Power" between China and Japan is reflected in the ambiguous expression of "situations in areas surrounding Japan". Although "the concept, situations in areas surrounding Japan, is not geographic but situational"²⁰, senior Japanese officials, i.e. former Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiroku Kajiyama, have made "indiscreet" remarks many times that the Taiwan Strait was actually included in the scope of Japan-US joint defense.²¹ It becomes clear that the US is trying to achieve two goals. First, the US could retain a military deterrence to China in the Taiwan Strait and the option to interfere in Chinese domestic affairs by military means at the excuse of China using armed forces to invade Taiwan. Second, China was deeply concerned about the "indiscreet" remarks made by Japanese officials and hence condemned Japan for its intention to get involved in potential conflicts across the Taiwan Strait. In the end, China and Japan could fall into the vicious cycle of the "Security Dilemma" and both turn to the US for help. Then the US would realize its goal of being the arbitrator.

While using Japan to balance China, the US has also exploited Sino-India relations. Troubled by border disputes, the issue of Tibet, the "intimate" Sino-Pakistan relations, and India's nuclear weapon program, the Sino-

¹⁷ CHEN Fengjun ed., *International Relations in the Asia-Pacific after the Cold War*, Xinhua Press, 1999, p.162.

¹⁸ *Tokyo Shinbun*, April 16, 1996.

¹⁹ *The Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1994.

²⁰ Michael Green and Patrick Cronin, *The US-Japan Alliance: Past, Present and Future* (Chinese translation), Xinhua Press, 2000, p.365.

²¹ WANG Hongbin and NI Feng, "US-Japan Alliance Vs. Asia-Pacific Security", *Contemporary Asia-Pacific*, 1998.3, p.6.

India relationship today is "just like an unsunken, unrotten, but static boat".²² The stagnant Sino-India relations opened a door for the US to attempt to rope in India to contain China. The unhappy experience with China in the past and the current suspicion of Beijing has made New Delhi an ideal partner in Asia for the US when implementing a containment strategy against China.²³ In order to contain China, the US even acquiesced in the Indian nuclear tests because it felt Russia from the North, Japan and South Korea from the East, and India from the West and the South could check a rising China. "One day Americans will be grateful to the Indian nuclear tests."²⁴ When visiting India, Mr. Huntington advocated in an undisguised way that, "...in the future India has three options. First, to remain an insolated country, then it will be marginalized; second, to stand only with other Asian countries, then it will be under the shadow of China forever; and third, to coordinate with the US, then it will not only enjoy economic prosperity but also safeguard its security."²⁵ Some believed that the US was building a security line encircling China by allying Japan, South Korea, India, the Philippines and Thailand. India was viewed as the fortress in the West wing.²⁶

India always regarded China as "the biggest challenge in the region and threat to its security in the 21st Century."²⁷ American scholars also perceived the Indian intention of containing China through the hands of the US. "India's strategy is to exploit the conflicts between China and the US and to act as a part-time agent for the latter so to resist the danger from China."²⁸ This means that there are quite a number of common interests between India and the US in containing China, and there could be more common ground between them in this regard in the future.

Besides, the US did its utmost to expand its military

²² Ms. Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea's (Co-Chairperson, Institute of Chinese Studies, India) speech at the Seminar on the Status Quo and Prospects of the Sino-India Relations sponsored by *China Review* (a Hong Kong-based magazine). *China Review*, 2001.3, p.61.

²³ *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2000.

²⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, "Indian Asks Why America Ignores It and Courts China", *International Herald Tribune*, 1998.

²⁵ *Global Times*, June 1, 2001.

²⁶ Joe Pan Cousie, "Pressing China", *Intelligence Digest*, January 21, 2000.

²⁷ LIANG Jiejun, "India's Trans-century National Security Strategy", *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, 1999.5, p.23.

²⁸ William Walker, "International Nuclear Relations After the Indian and Pakistani Test Explosions", *International Affairs*, July/August 1998.

presence and political influence to China's other surrounding countries in Central Asia and Southeast Asia. The intention is apparent: to suppress China's diplomatic space and to look for partners balancing China.

Conclusion

To contain China by utilizing the theories of "Security Dilemma" and "Balance of Power" has become an important tendency for the US's China policy. China should deal with it seriously. However, strategic competitors do not all develop into strategic enemies. The reason why the author listed many containing measures taken by the US towards China is not to paint a pessimistic picture of future Sino-US relations, but to probe the deep roots of the unstable Sino-US relationship in the hope of finding a direction leading to improvements. Only by acknowledging the reality that the US is containing China by resorting to the "Security Dilemma" and "Balance of Power" theories could we find a breakthrough point to eliminate the US's and our neighbors' suspicions and to promote Sino-US relations.