



**America in Response to China's Rise:  
Standing Still is not an Option**

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## **Executive Summary**

For those who see the long-term endurance of the United States as a certainty, the idea that China could challenge US position in the current international order seems ill-conceived. There remains, many believe, an enormous gap between the United States and a rising China, which is developing fast but still lags far behind. Many strategic constraints that China will be living with in the foreseeable future reaffirm this conviction. Yet, while it may be true that China is in a weaker position than past rivals, the US must be cautious because it is also in a less favorable position than it used to be.

This essay argues that there are mixed signals about US resilience in the context of China's (re)emergence and competition for global influence. To preserve its credibility and position, the United States cannot afford to stand still as China rises. If the recently announced US "rebalancing" toward Asia is to succeed, it needs to be more about substance than about public pronouncements. Specifically, a more tailored approach that emphasizes both enhanced political-diplomatic relations and increased military ties with Southeast Asia – the most volatile checkpoint of Chinese power in Beijing's immediate neighborhood – is desirable and the most immediate requirement.



## **America in Response to China's Rise: Standing Still is not an Option**

The 21st century did not start well for the United States. First came the sufferings of 9/11 and subsequent efforts in the Middle East did not pay sound dividends. Political polarization at home turned for the worse when US economic conditions began to falter. Concurrently, the rise of China has posed serious questions about the future of the international order and US position in the evolving global power structure. According to some estimates, China is expected to replace the United States as the world's largest economy by the end of the first quarter of this century. It is also poised to boast a credible military whose goal is reaching parity with US military power. As China's prosperity and confidence keep growing, the ambiguity in Beijing's long-term intentions coupled with China's mounting ascendancy has and will continue to stir up debates about the outlook for US power and status, especially in Asia.

Both within and outside the United States, many have lamented the inevitability of US decline, while others have refused to accept such an idea. Some try to defuse anxiety by downplaying the challenges posed by China and stressing the continued superiority of US military and economic power. Others warn against the temptation to consider China as the next challenger of US global position, believing that the US can avoid creating a hostile competitor by refraining from treating one as such. But as the late William Arthur Ward wrote decades ago, "The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails." Should the United States pull out from its global commitment, bewailing its own decline? Should it sit idly by, expecting that China will be a benign rising power devoid of any intention to challenge US interests? Or should the US begin contemplating appropriate steps to cope with challenges that are soon to come? Each choice will yield significant ramifications well beyond US borders, in the coming years.

### **Why America Should Not Stand Still**

Arguing against the current declining mood in US politics, Robert Kagan, writing in "Not fade away: Against the myth of American decline," recalls the triumphal hymn in the wake of the Cold War as a confidence-booster for worried Americans. The challenges confronting the US today, Kagan contends, "are not greater than the challenges the United States faced during the Cold War," when Washington worked to contain Soviet expansion by cultivating ties with many war-depleted countries in the Soviet Union's neighborhood. Today, having established strategic alliances with several of China's neighbors, the US is in a more favorable position than China, whose emergence as a rising power started from a "relatively weak" base and endures considerable limits due to its geostrategic setting. The United States no longer needs to "scramble" to get allies and "satellite states" to deter a giant rival threatening US interests in various strategic centers around the world. The US only needs to "hold on to what it has" while China stumbles around US allies to supplant US dominance.<sup>1</sup> If the United States was able to succeed in the Cold War, one would imagine that Washington would have an even greater chance this time.

Evoking the Cold War geostrategic contours to formulate future diagnosis is promising but problematic. Toppling US “strongholds” in the western Pacific, observes Kagan, would require China to gather at least a handful of allies to have a chance of success. If Beijing is bent on wresting regional hegemony away from the US, it seems to be China’s turn to scramble. Yet the optimists regarding US fortune – Kagan included – seem not too vexed by such a prospect. They posit that the gap between the United States and China is too big for China to imperil the US position any time soon. Surely arguments of US-China asymmetries deserve merit. After all, it was the recovery of Europe brought about by extensive US aid that helped curb Soviet ambition. It was its special geostrategic position – distant from other centers of power – that gave the United States decades of immunity and prosperity even at the height of global tensions and major world wars. Today, even though the contest arena has shifted, the United States has the same advantages – strong ties with key regional powers, many of which have risen to their current status thanks to US support and assistance, and virtual imperviousness, bounded by two oceans and countries that are either weak or content with US stewardship.

China, in contrast, enjoys no such advantages. Not only is China’s attempt to forge an East Asian Caucus frequently met with skepticism from Japan and South Korea, Beijing’s “charm offensive” toward its Southeast Asian neighbors has been ineffective in earning China any real stalwarts. As an Australian diplomat has pointed out, the fact that the United States is an offshore power has helped alleviate regional countries’ threat perception toward it and, indeed, has encouraged them to appreciate the US role in the region. Meanwhile, China’s troubled past with several East Asian neighbors and its geographical proximity to these countries have subjected Beijing’s “smile diplomacy” to inveterate suspicions.

Not only is China’s position difficult, the principles of the global system in which Beijing operates also present Chinese policy-makers with significant predicaments. The Soviet Union and the United States both emerged from World War II as victors; both were able to define their own spheres of control, endorse their own visions, and enforce these visions in certain areas of the globe. The estrangement and isolation between the US-led liberal order and the Soviet socialist model allowed the two to see one’s gains in the other’s vulnerabilities. Today, China emerges in a decidedly US-centric global system in which American liberal values prevail, US presence overwhelms, and US allies are found in almost every part of the world. In other words, the rules of the game have been set and China must play along. By engaging in the Western-based international political economy, China has accrued definite benefits, but it has also rendered itself vulnerable to whoever plays the global pipers such as the World Bank, the IMF, etc. to call the tune of its everyday affairs. Thus, Harvard professor Joseph Nye underscores the paradoxical logic of economic liberalism by pointing out that being less dependent in an interdependent relationship such as the one that is growing between the US and China might be a prescription for power.<sup>2</sup>

Anyone who then looks at China’s relative imperviousness and US travails in the recent economic crisis might be tempted to consider these signs as auguring well for China’s position vis-à-vis the United States. Yet, it should be noted that the reason China has been able to accumulate wealth and project its power further from its shore is because the United States has been trying to prop up the global economic system that allows China to thrive and



rise. Despite Beijing's discontent with several operating principles of the current international system, China is well aware that it needs the existing global milieu and guaranteed access to the US and world markets more than the United States needs cheap Chinese imports. China might attempt to redefine the code of conduct in the global playground when possible, but for the time being it still has to rely – if not free-ride – on what has been built to govern global economic activities to ensure its development.

As Nye points out, perceived mutual vulnerabilities have been the reasons why, despite calls within the Chinese elite circle to “break the US dollar's dominance” Beijing has been reluctant to give Washington the stick by selling its large reserves of US Treasury bills. Doing so would send a chill through the US economy, but would also hit China's own pocketbook, diminish China's hold on the US market, and create instability at home as China's unemployment rate soars.<sup>3</sup> The deeper China engages in the liberal economic system, the more it is exposed to mutual vulnerabilities. Yet, for Beijing to even think of a retreat from interdependence would mean revisiting the Soviet Union's situation several decades ago, when failure to deliver economic well-being to the populace brought the country to implosion. Such a situation would be far more disastrous. Thus, as long as China craves an environment conducive for growth, observes one former US government official, “there's a limit on how far China can push” its partners/competitors toward confrontation, let alone the United States.

Taking all the challenges facing China into account, it appears that the United States will continue to have the upper hand in global affairs for some time. There are, however, grounds for skepticism as to how long the United States can afford to stand still given China's increasing competition and influence. Indeed, put in the context of increasing mutual dependence between the United States and China, standing still may be unavoidable rather than elective. This pessimism was reflected, for example, in the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CSCAP Study Group on Countering the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in July 2010. When further reduction in global nuclear stockpiles was urged by several participants at the meeting, a US scholar questioned the merit of nuclear disarmament efforts by pointing out that the international community had yet to develop a structure to ensure global security that could replace the structure built on nuclear deterrence that has been in place since the end of World War II. That query, posed just a month after the second US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, should not have silenced everyone at the meeting, yet it did: no one mentioned an existing global structure based on economic interdependence between nations in the post-Cold War world. Apparently the efficacy of economic interdependence – a concept the US has been advocating vigorously since the end of World War II – in providing security for the globe had been overlooked, if not neglected.

Thus the agony of interdependence is clear: as we become more mutually dependent, we are more nervous about the means that are supposed to bring us more security. As the lead sponsor of the current world order, the United States may actually bear the larger part of the agony than an emerging player like China. With bigger burdens comes bigger liabilities and that requires the United States to commit greater resources and efforts to support the liberal economic system, thereby drifting deeper into mutual vulnerability, which significantly limits Washington's ability to redress glitches in the dyadic relationship using economic leverage. Talks of mutually assured destruction through economic means are therefore both less and

more threatening, for the pain would arguably be less severe but definitely more enduring than an all-out nuclear war.

Mutual vulnerabilities aside, there are many other caution signs for the United States. In fact, China's scramble today bears more resemblance to the US scramble half a century ago than Kagan seems to believe, which should portend a hard time for any antagonist that Beijing deems to be in its way. The foundation of successful US maneuvers in the Cold War was the ability to translate economic growth into military capability and "soft power" capacity, something the Soviet Union lacked because of its economic dysfunction and its over-investment in the armed forces. Today, for all the unease created by rapid increases in China's military spending, the Chinese defense budget has been kept at a far more sustainable level than that of the Soviet Union. It is also worth recalling that back in the 1980s increased investment in military industries forced the Soviets to halt the production of civilian goods. Today, the Chinese defense budget is not enlarged at the expense of a growing economy but because of China's growing economy, which has been projected to surpass US GDP by 2025.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Chinese housekeeping book today contains recipes similar to that of the United States several decades ago, which will allow China to become a regional military heavyweight without forfeiting the chance to be an economic hub, giving it the wherewithal to finance its military development. So China now has the luxury that the United States once had – that is, to throw money around to get friendly – if not satellite – states to support its role in the global arena when necessary.

The fact that China is now surrounded by a web of US alliances in East Asia and the Pacific may be comforting to many in the United States, but that should not be the case. For one thing, many US allies that represent "strongholds" in the region are also trapped in complex interdependence with China, which explains their reluctance to upset Beijing. Although it is not yet clear whether economic bonds with China would ever overshadow military ties with the United States in the strategic calculations of Japan, India, Australia, and South Korea as Gideon Rachman has suggested,<sup>5</sup> China's growing influence in these countries as their economic relationships deepen does not bode well for the US position in Asia. More importantly, if one looks at the US scramble several decades ago, there appears to be more similarities between China's maneuvers today and those US endeavors decades ago.

In the Cold War, to fend off Soviet advances, the United States threw its power into Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia – all strategic centers on the periphery of the USSR. Today, most attention is focused on China's posture in East Asia – and with good reason, given China's location, its growing, but still fledgling military capability, and the geostrategic alignment of the region. But China has also been courting Latin America,<sup>6</sup> engaging Europe,<sup>7</sup> expanding its presence in the Middle East,<sup>8</sup> and buying off Africa.<sup>9</sup> US allies' constraint of China may not be all that reassuring, for Beijing has found a bypass US fortresses on China's periphery to start its own game on the US "periphery," albeit with different degrees of success. Americans in the post-Cold War era tend to view the United States as a global power with dispersed interests that, in projecting its power into various regional theaters to advance those interests, often meet with local challengers seeking to defend their own sphere of influence. Yet China, as Michael Auslin has pointed out, is "not another ordinary challenger" like Iran, Venezuela, or post-Soviet Russia.<sup>10</sup> It is a regional power whose "global economic phenomenon" is breeding global ambitions. In reaching out to the rest of the world, China is

heading in the opposite direction of the United States, which is trying to reach into local playgrounds. It is a matter of time before the two find each other's quest discomfiting, for they are doomed to clash.

The fact that the United States has often run into domestic political deadlock may also make the scramble for global preeminence easier for China. Again, if Cold War history is any guide, it shows that the fall of a great power may stem from internal dismay rather than external pressures. In the Cold War, the United States weakened the Soviet Union by drawing the latter into an arms race that drained Soviet resources. In the same fashion, China's military buildup fills Americans with alarm, lures US forces out of battles in the Middle East to rally at US stations in the Pacific, and calls for the creation of a new military strategy that demands US martial strength<sup>11</sup> – in effect dragging the United States into a 21<sup>st</sup> century great power military competition. This kind of milieu shapes the condition of the contending powers, but it is not the whole story. The Soviet Union collapsed because of a combination of policy failures that had long undermined Soviet physicality before overexertion on foreign soil finally exhausted Soviet energy and sent the Soviet Union into a downward spiral. A similar diagnosis seems to apply to the United States today: a troubled economy marked by huge budget deficits and vitiated by a divided political system that has at times ceased to function, coupled with prolonged entanglement in overseas quagmires. The only difference is that in the past, the centralized Soviet model was crumbling first; today, the US liberal the democratic system seems to be breaking down faster. Yet the outcome will remain the same: the accumulation of power of the standing player, to the detriment of its declining contender. The emergence of a “Beijing consensus” in the global arena today, therefore, should be noted as bringing China's scramble closer to the US track: the Soviet Union was never able to enunciate any such consensus except the oft-promoted but ill-fated socialist solidarity that is based on ideological allegiance rather than economic expedience. After all, it was the development of the “Washington consensus” that helped entrench American influence and enabled the United States to prevail back then.

The good news for the US is that besides the “Beijing consensus,” China's attempt to sell its image and wield its soft power abroad has paid limited dividends. In Europe, China's soft power campaign has attracted little audience. Despite most Europeans' interest in tapping into China's investments, they do not buy into China's values and ideas. As Nye puts it, “using culture and narrative to create soft power is not easy when they are inconsistent with domestic realities.”<sup>12</sup> But it is not only about domestic realities. In Asia, few countries subscribe to China's “charm offensive” because of contradictions between China's words and deeds, between its announced foreign policy and its behavior overseas. However meticulous China has been in trying to craft its image and win friends in the US neighborhood, Beijing has achieved little in key strategic areas because its values are not shared and its foreign policy is not supported. Thus, the United States still has more soft power at its disposal as it is still seen in Europe and much of the Northern hemisphere as championing the liberal democratic model, and in Pacific Asia as representing an offshore balancing force that generally does not mess with regional countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity. To retain its prominent role, the United States must press its advantages. US global influence can be fostered only if the US system is able to function and to deliver promises that other systems cannot. Thus, Washington must keep its house in good shape if it is bent on preserving the current global order.

This is not to say that the United States should retreat from global commitments. Rather, the United States must be able to showcase its resilience and persistence if it is to continue to lead. In other words, Washington must demonstrate that it is both able and willing to defend global assets and values that it holds dear, including an open global trading system, free and fair access to global commons, and respect for the rule of law. This does not need to entail increased US presence in foreign lands, which would further jeopardize the shrinking US budget and instigate more discord at home and abroad. Kagan's argument for American resilience by recalling US ability to rebound from crises in the 1910s, 1940s, and 1980s would only hold water if one remembers that such ability was unleashed after the United States had consolidated itself, refocused resources on sound targets, and regained public support for American leadership. The experience in Viet Nam during the Cold War, which sapped US resources and "cut into the inner soul of Americans,"<sup>13</sup> was a severe blow to US credibility. With its withdrawal from Viet Nam, the United States was able to successfully insert its influence in Afghanistan and erode Soviet power in the subsequent Soviet-Afghan war. In an age of austerity, the handbook of the US today should contain the same formula: the wiser use of US resources on the more viable strategic fronts. The recently announced US rebalancing toward Asia is a correct move in this context, for much of the answer for what the future may hold lies in the region's seascapes. The pivot reflects a timely strategic adjustment when support for US missions in the Middle East is diminishing and concerns over China's future comportment are fast growing. By reaffirming US commitment to Asia, Washington is shifting the central playground back to China's yard, thereby compelling China to watch its action and reassess its ambitions in both the immediate neighborhood and far-flung sites.

Such a strategy, however, will only succeed if the Obama administration and its successors can prove that US reengagement is serious and durable, that it is more about substance than "public announcements" as one US commentator contends. Thus, the United States will have to respond to China's scramble with its own scramble, with might and main, both at home and abroad. To cope with the challenge by merely standing still is a dangerous concept.

### **Scrambling By Rebalancing**

Many who advocate an increased US commitment to the Asia-Pacific may see in the introduction of the Sea-Air Battle (ASB) doctrine in 2010 a promising initiative to cope with the challenges posed by China's anti-access/area-denial strategy in the Western Pacific. The doctrine reflects two important implications of the ongoing shifts in the global balance of power. First, ASB, set to succeed the Air-Land Battle doctrine of the 1980s and 1990s, marks a turning point in US power's purpose from maneuvering defense in continental Europe to "sustain[ing] a stable, favorable conventional military balance" in the Western Pacific.<sup>14</sup> This is because while Europe and the Anglosphere have become the "ballast" and "bulwark" of US primacy,<sup>15</sup> maritime Asia represents an increasingly perplexing arena where opportunities are rife, but US capability to take advantage of these opportunities can no longer be taken for granted. Second, the concept indicates an acknowledgement of the limit of American power as the US defense budget continues to shrink, while China's continues to expand. As the handbook of military strategists often reads, the surest way to ensure supremacy over an adversary is to overwhelm the enemy by displaying insurmountable capability in all contested

theaters. When that is no longer affordable, the alternative is to concentrate on a few strategic spots critical to the opponent's defense.<sup>16</sup> This is where ASB comes in: a focus on the Pacific and Indian Oceans that constitute the strategic gateways for China's naval power projection, since effective preemption is what future circumstances require and retrenchment is what current US conditions dictate.

The problem is that ASB also takes time and money to implement, which has raised questions about its feasibility.<sup>17</sup> Realizing this concept will involve building and/or upgrading base facilities, reallocating personnel, moving families and, over the long run, harmonizing public perceptions and settling local and national politics.<sup>18</sup> In making the case for the US not being overstretched by overseas commitments, Robert Kagan's focus on relative decreases in the number of US troops committed abroad for the last 50 years might be misleading since troop deployment statistics are rather symbolic and do not speak for investments in force modernization and weapons procurement, which have not increased in the last decade.<sup>19</sup> Human force capacity is static, but technology can develop with lightning speed. The fact that the US is geographically distant from major strategic centers of the globe means it must always employ cutting-edge technology to successfully defend its far-reaching interests. Thus, the physical overstretch that the United States is suffering might be less about force overexertion than it is about a self-imposed arms race that the US must pursue to sustain its preeminence around the world. In this context, a new military strategy that not only entails troop reallocation but also demands increased investments in military hardware to take effective control in remote combat, while necessary, may not be unanimously supported at a time when the US defense budget is constrained.

Furthermore, while the development of ASB might be considered by some as demonstrating US resolve and capability in protecting the US-led international system, that view isn't unanimous. The recently announced rotation of US Marines to the Australian base of Darwin will allow the United States to swing forces between US bases in Bahrain and Japan without being caught in the crossfire in the Yellow, East, and South China Sea in conflict situations.<sup>20</sup> This demonstrates some foresight, given that existing bases in Japan, Korea and Guam, increasingly fall within range of China's strikes.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, there has already been speculation that such a move, rather than enhancing operational flexibility in and underlining US commitment to the Asia-Pacific region, might actually signal relative decline as the boundaries of US dominance are being pushed out of Asia to the Pacific by China's growing influence.<sup>22</sup>

This does not need to be the case and a good way to ensure that this remains a remote scenario is to elevate the US commitment in Southeast Asia. In the near future, this will be the principal gateway for China to project its power as Beijing finds itself constrained in the north by Russia, in the east by Japan (and South Korea to a lesser extent), and in the west by India. For Washington, reaffirming the US position in Southeast Asia is therefore imperative now more than ever, and this is probably the best time for such a move as the region is willing and better prepared to welcome a US presence. The Obama administration has taken several good steps in this direction, but more needs to be done to raise the level of confidence and cooperation between the United States and regional states. This can be in the form of increased high-level visits, enhanced information sharing and closer military-to-military relationships. At a higher rung of the confidence-building ladder, Washington may consider

easing restrictions on arms sales to Viet Nam. The weapons embargo has been in place for nearly 30 years, but, like the trade embargo imposed on Viet Nam over 15 years ago, it has done little to advance US interests as Viet Nam has relied on other arms suppliers to enhance its defensive capabilities. A gradual easing of the ban would go a long way in alleviating lingering distrust between Ha Noi and Washington and fostering US-Viet Nam bilateral political and security cooperation, which is catching up but lags far behind the two countries' economic partnership.

Clearly these changes would strike some Americans as undesirable, but rigid adherence to ideology is never good for policy and may well erode the values that are meant to be safeguarded. The US has consistently proved that it is capable of thinking the unthinkable when it comes to protecting US interests and the liberal international order. The Marshall Plan in the 1940s, the investment in Japan's rehabilitation after World War II, and Nixon's visit to China in 1972 are examples of this. The conception of a "Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Power," which envisions America's "credible combat power" in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean,<sup>23</sup> and the establishment of a new US Marine base in Australia to prosecute this "Indo-Pacific" strategy by enabling US forces to switch back and forth between the two oceans while avoiding potentially contested areas in the East and South China Sea<sup>24</sup> may appear as prudent calculations. Alternatively, such a strategy might also signify US preparedness to play by itself and for its own sake rather than engaging in concerted efforts for collective security with America's de jure and de facto allies and friends in Southeast Asia should crises occur. Enhanced political and military-to-military ties with Southeast Asia in general and Viet Nam in particular would not only testify to US commitment to this critical region but also send a clear signal of US determination and perseverance to Beijing in this context.

Some have cautioned that enhancing strategic ties with Southeast Asian nations and especially increased US involvement in the South China Sea in the context of growing Sino-US discord risk escalating conflicts with China unnecessarily,<sup>25</sup> but the alternative may well be a prelude to more consequential repercussions. A failure to demonstrate US interest and commitment to Southeast Asia may drive China to believe that the US is in decline and prompt Beijing to consider more assertive actions to vie for regional – if not global – hegemony.<sup>26</sup> There have also been worries that increased US commitment to Southeast Asia might induce regional states to become overly reliant on the United States and encourage them to take a more confrontational approach toward China.<sup>27</sup> It is unclear what will be more detrimental to US interests: a Southeast Asia strategically tied to the United States or a region more accommodating toward China.

Indeed, as Michael Auslin observes, a belief in US decline and disinterest in regional affairs among countries in the Indo-Pacific region may set a tipping point at which the balance of power is tilted in China's favor as regional countries contemplate strategic hedging and readjustments to acclimatize to China's ascendancy.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the assumption that some Southeast Asian states can, or will, look to the US for a permanent security umbrella is simplistic and misguided. The Vietnamese who have fought numerous wars with many major powers and have been refused assistance by several others – some of whom decline to help after a sudden change of mind – have no such illusion. The Filipinos and those who watched the unfolding of the Mischief Reef incident in the 1990s should also have learned to take a

cautious approach when it comes to great power politics. Their hope is only for the region to be able to stand on its own feet, which converges with US interests and which the United States can help if Washington so chooses.

### **A more forward-looking approach?**

In a visit to Viet Nam in 2011, a prominent Chinese scholar, citing the Korean War in the 1950s and Viet Nam War in the 1960s, bluntly stated that Americans should learn their lessons because “whenever the United States is at odds with China, it is in serious trouble.” He failed to mention, however, that in both cases China was not the only protagonist or the primary target of American maneuvers, and that Sino-US rapprochement in the 1970s did not help America to achieve what it desired in Viet Nam. But such an assertion speaks volumes about the perception and attitude of the Chinese elites nowadays, which are likely to govern China’s posture as its power grows in the near future. It is in the United States’ interests, therefore, to apprehend such projected assertiveness and plan its response accordingly. There is much to be hoped for in the development of Sino-US relations, but there may be even much more to be expected from strategic ties with many former foes and long-time friends of the US in Southeast Asia in this era of increasing uncertainty.

Many US government officials have asserted that America’s recent “rebalancing” toward Asia is, as it should be, more about Asia than it is about China. The significance of Sino-US relations is not to be taken lightly, but so are US ties with its allies and friends in the region. Those who balk at the idea of enhancing US linkages with its Asian partners for fear of antagonizing China should bear in mind that the choice is not just between Asia and China – it is between securing friends now and losing their confidence in US commitment indefinitely, between staying relevant in a stable Asia-Pacific and tarnishing US credibility and power by consigning this strategic region to whatever the future may hold.

Until now, the US pivot appears to mainly focus on counter-contingency plans, concrete physical maneuvers on the outer periphery of China’s influence, and establishing a symbolic posture in China’s immediate neighborhood, suggesting a nuance of the China-first policy that the Obama administration embraced in its early days in office. But it’s time for Washington to consider a more forward-looking approach and start engaging in more substantive discussions with its traditional and potential friends about what is needed to keep alliances and partnerships viable and well-suited for the evolving regional land and seascapes. That, of course, would take a mass of manpower, brainpower, and willpower of the United States and its allies and partners to proceed.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kagan, *Not fade away: Against the myth of American decline*, January 17, 2012, [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2012/0117\\_us\\_power\\_kagan.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2012/0117_us_power_kagan.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> See Joseph S. Nye Jr., “American and Chinese power after the financial crisis”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 33: 4, 143-153.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> John Hawksworth, quoted in China Daily, “China to be world’s largest economy in 2025”, March 5, 2008, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-03/05/content\\_6510506.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-03/05/content_6510506.htm). The World Bank also forecasts that

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China will become the world's biggest economy around 2025, while The Economist has recently put the date of China's overtaking the US as number one economy a bit earlier, 2018 at the soonest and 2021 at the latest. See Jimmy So, "China claims to overtake Japan as No. 2 economy", July 30, 2010, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503983\\_162-20012188-503983.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503983_162-20012188-503983.html) and The Economist, *Daily chart: The dating game*, December 27, 2011, [http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2010/12/save\\_date](http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2010/12/save_date).

<sup>5</sup> See Daniel W. Drezner, Gideon Rachman and Robert Kagan, "The rise and fall of the American empire," *Foreign Policy*, February 14, 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/the\\_rise\\_or\\_fall\\_of\\_the\\_american\\_empire?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/the_rise_or_fall_of_the_american_empire?page=full)

<sup>6</sup> See R. Evan Ellis, *China-Latin America military engagement: Good will, good business and strategic position*, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB1077.pdf> and Katherin Koleski, *Background: China in Latin America*, May 27, 2011, [http://www.uscc.gov/Background\\_China\\_in\\_Latin\\_America.pdf](http://www.uscc.gov/Background_China_in_Latin_America.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See François Godement, Jonas Parello-Plesner and Alice Richard, *The scramble for Europe*, July 2011, [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37\\_Scramble\\_For\\_Europe\\_AW\\_v4.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37_Scramble_For_Europe_AW_v4.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See Jon B. Alterman, "China's soft power in the Middle East", in Carola MacGiffert, ed., *Chinese soft power and its implications for the United States: Competition and cooperation in the developing world*, Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative (March 2009), [https://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090403\\_mcgiffert\\_chinesesoftware\\_web.pdf](https://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090403_mcgiffert_chinesesoftware_web.pdf).

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Auslin, "Tipping point in the Indo-Pacific", *The American Interest*, March/April 2011, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article-bd.cfm?piece=924>.

<sup>11</sup> See Rep. J. Randy Forbes, "America's Pacific Air-Sea Battle vision", *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2012, <http://the-diplomat.com/2012/03/08/americas-pacific-air-sea-battle-vision/>.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Why China is weak on soft power", *International Herald Tribune*, January 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/18/opinion/why-china-is-weak-on-soft-power.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Klare, quoted in Geoff Simons, *Vietnam syndrome: Impact on US foreign policy* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Van Tol, Andrew F. Krepinevich and Jim Thomas, *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2010), p. 10, <http://www.csbaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/2010.05.18-AirSea-Battle.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Robert D. Kaplan and Stephen S. Kaplan, "America primed", *The National Interest*, March-April 2011, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/america-primed-4892?page=show>.

<sup>16</sup> For an interesting discussion on this, see James R. Holmes, "US confronts an anti-access world", *The Diplomat*, March 9, 2012, <http://the-diplomat.com/2012/03/09/u-s-confronts-an-anti-access-world/>.

<sup>17</sup> See Raoul Heinrichs, "America's dangerous battle plan", *The Diplomat*, August 17, 2011, <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/08/17/america%E2%80%99s-dangerous-battle-plan/>.

<sup>18</sup> See James R. Homes, "Beating 'Voldemort syndrome'", *The Diplomat*, April 23, 2012, <http://the-diplomat.com/2012/04/23/beating-voldemort-syndrome/>; Jose Carreno, Thomas Culora, Captain George Galdorisi and Thomas Hone, "What's new about the AirSea Battle Concept?", *Proceedings Magazine*, August 2010, <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2010-08/whats-new-about-airsea-battle-concept>.

<sup>19</sup> See US Department of Defense, *Defense budget: Priorities and choices*, January 2012, [www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Budget\\_Priorities.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Budget_Priorities.pdf). Study also shows that US share of sample military equipment corresponds with its military spending in world total, while US share of personnel does not; see



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<sup>20</sup> James R. Homes, “Beating “Voldemort syndrome””.

<sup>21</sup> Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, “Indo-Pacific grand design a recipe?”, *The Jakarta Post*, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/12/08/indo-pacific-grand-design-a-recipe.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Raoul Heinrichs, “A cold and clever US base move”, *The Diplomat*, November 17, 2011, <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/11/17/a-cold-and-clever-u-s-base-move/>.

<sup>23</sup> See “A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower”, October 2007, <http://www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> James R. Holmes, “US eyes Australia base”, *The Diplomat*, November 12, 2011, <http://the-diplomat.com/flashpoints-blog/2011/11/12/u-s-eyes-australia-base/>.

<sup>25</sup> See Mark E. Manyin, Stephen Daggett, Ben Dolven, Susan V. Lawrence, Michael Ronald O’Rourke and Bruce Vaughn, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration “rebalancing” toward Asia*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>; Bonnie S. Glaser, *Armed clash in the South China Sea*, <http://www.cfr.org/east-asia/armed-clash-south-china-sea/p27883>.

<sup>26</sup> Robert D. Kaplan also argues that any signs of American decline would not only presage increasing Sino-US competition but also threaten to ignite open hostility between China and other major powers including India as they all rely on the region’s vital sea lines of communication, which have thus far been safeguarded by US naval and air power. See Robert D. Kaplan, *America’s Pacific logic*, Stratfor, April 4, 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/americas-pacific-logic-robert-d-kaplan>.

<sup>27</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, “Armed clash in the South China Sea”.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Auslin, “Tipping point in the Indo-Pacific”.

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