Sino-US Strategic Dilemma — From the Perspective of Power Transition in Asia-Pacific and Middle East

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Abstract: The order in international system is defined as “a pattern or activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states”. The objective including the maintenance of the international system and national survival of society itself is to safeguard national independence and sovereignty. The nature and practice of international hierarchy helps explain patterns of the international order after the Cold War and understand its transition, especially the role of China’s rise in international politics. The Asia-Pacific region has showed a stable political order generally, but events in the region still may lead to uncertainties of military conflict, such as the North Korean nuclear issue, the Taiwan issue, terrorist attacks in the Middle East and Central Asia and so on. China’s rise will inevitably have an impact on US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. But China and the United States can work

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together to build an effective mechanism to address the challenges from regional security issues, to set up the sustainability of Asia-Pacific and the Middle East security decisions. This paper analyzes the concept of Sino-US Asia-Pacific and the Middle East strategic alternatives from maintaining the status quo; transition from the status quo must go through negotiation and dialogue to the transition of Asia-Pacific and the Middle East power structure.

**Key Words:** International Order; Sino-US Strategic Alternatives; Asia-Pacific; Middle East; Hierarchical Duet

“The Treaties of Westphalia (1648)” have established the state-centric world order. The sovereign state is the major actor of the international system. Westphalia is the “majestic portal” through which the age of sovereign states has allegedly arrived (Gross, L., 1948: 20-41). The principle of sovereignty is commonly understood to possess three primary components. First, the sovereign possesses absolute authority over the people and territory of a given realm. Second, external actors are excluded from possessing or exercising authority over the people and territory governed by the sovereign. Third, sovereignty is indivisible—of a single piece, a whole that cannot be disaggregated, shared, or divided between different authorities (Lake, D., 2009: 46-47).

After the end of Cold War, new developments in the international order have challenged the traditional concept of security due to transnational threats arising from those seeking to alter the balance of
power, from nuclear deterrence, military predominance and the uncertainty from non-state actors, like terrorism. In periods of international “legitimacy,” when states agreed on the rules of the game, practices developed that moderated state ambitions, and international law flourished (Hoffmann, S., 1978: 109). It continues to contain dual reference points that encompass the equality of states under international law and the hierarchy of states in the actual operation of international relations. The shared outlook of these two ideas relates to their focus on power either as the sovereignty and territorial integration of the state or the geopolitical control of relations among states by way of hegemonic mechanism (for instance, either great power diplomacy or superpower arrangements) (Falk, R., 2004: 8). The contemporary international order of US hegemonic stability has been affected by the enormous challenges, not only from the area of traditional security, but non-traditional security issues, such as, terrorism and the threat of extremist forces.

I. The Theory of International Order

On the international order, Chinese and foreign scholars hold different perspectives. Stanley Hoffman, a famous American scholar argues that the international order is an idealized model to establish harmonious relations between States and it is an important condition for the friendly coexistence between states or rules to regulate conduct. It is reasonable to resolve disputes, conflicts, international cooperation aimed at joint development of effective means and orderly condition
(Hoffmann, S., 1978: 180-190). Hedley Bull said “order in world politics does depend for its maintenance upon rules and in the modern international system (by contrast with some other international system) a major role in the maintenance of order has been played by those rules which have the status of international law.” (Bull, H., 1977: xxxiv). Speaking of world order, what we have in mind is the totality of relationships among states, the international political system as a whole. In fact, the stability of the international order in a given period often depends on the adherence of the major powers to the core concept of achieving and maintaining consensus, tacit or the necessary compromises.

Many Chinese scholars believe that the “international order refers mainly to certain historical circumstances, various international forces in certain norms or mechanism formed a relatively stable state or arrangement, which involves the objective elements of the balance of power, and the pursuit of state power.” (Ruan, Z., 2004). Some scholars explained it from the perspective of international order and national interests, claiming that “the international order is a time the community of international actors (sovereign states) over a certain goal between the interests of their respective countries are on the basis of interaction, struggle with each other to establish international rules of conduct and appropriate safeguards” (Zhang, C., 1999).

Scholars who stress the function of international groups and organizations argued that “the international order is derived from the international community of sovereign states, international
organizations, national groups and actors which act in accordance with certain principles, rules, objectives and means to address the relationship between, and the establishment or maintenance of certain international political and economic operation mechanism and the overall situation.” (Yang, Z., 2004). Scholars who focus on the levels of international patterns consider that the international order refers to a specific period of international relations based on the international patterns, in particular, the relationship between state conduct and a synthesis of the corresponding security mechanisms, any one of the international situation will inevitably lead to changes in the international order.” (Hou, B., 2001). Functions on the system of international order refer to “the majority of countries in the world [who] accepted and recognized principles, founded on the principle of the system, within the constraints of these systems in various countries around the world to regulate the conduct and relations between countries.” (Chang, X., 1997).

With the emergence of nation-centric world order after the “Treaty of Westphalia”, the traditional international order reflects the following features: (1) a world composed of sovereign states, a sovereign state does not recognize any higher authority (hierarchical structure); (2) international law aims at establishing minimum principles of peaceful coexistence between all nations which enjoy equal rights, and disputes between countries are often resolved by force; (3) there are almost no restrictions for use of international law on the use of force, and (4) restrictions on the freedom of the country
were reduced to a minimum. Since then, the international order has passed roughly three stages: First, from the nation-state formation to the outbreak of World War II, the international order was dominated by Western powers. Second, from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War, the international order was constrained by the confrontation between the East and the West, something like a US-Soviet hegemonic balance. Third, from the end of the Cold War to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the world financial crisis, the international order has been greatly transformed. The dominance of United States and other Western powers is decreasing. The status and role of emerging powers and developing countries are increasing significantly.

Hedley Bull claims that the balance of power has maintained order in the international system by preventing potential hegemons from controlling the international system and by providing “the conditions in which other institutions on which international order depends have been able to operate” (Bull, H., 1977: 106-107). He posits that all states do not automatically “seek to maximize their relative power position,” with states instead “constantly in the position of having to choose between devoting their resources and energies to maintaining or extending their international power position, and devoting these resources and energies to other ends” (Bull, H., 1977: 111). So, the realist argues in favor of a balance of power as an instrument for promoting order in international society, while the liberal favors international law and collective security as methods.
Realists contend that the United States will eventually be balanced by one or more states with matching capabilities, which in turn will produce a multipolar international system (Waltz, K., 2000: 5-41; Gray, C., 1999: 169; Layne, C., 2004: 103-126). They stress that power transitions occur over time because of the changes in the military, economic, and technological capabilities of major powers.

The British global hegemony in the 19th century not only was built on the basis of a strong naval power, but also on the ingenious use of the balance of power as British strategy was to prevent challenges from Europe and other regional powers. The United States effectively used strategies of balance of power and hegemony to contain other powers during the Cold War.

The traditional concerns of security associated with the international order, from the theoretical definition of level, usually for national and community security case; the international order, applied to regional and global levels. These two mutually reinforcing concepts rested on the logic “the environment on which all countries feel safe is conducive to the stability of international order.” Neo-realism assumes that the international system operates under conditions of anarchy (Waltz, K., 1979). It is necessary to create relatively enduring mechanisms that make governance at the systemic level consistently possible for significant periods of time. In return, many states agree to abide by norms, rules, and procedural mechanisms created by institutions to resolve either problems and conflicts or issues of coordination.
Liberalists stress the impact of the international order and international law. International order constrained by international laws displays certain features, such as the “international normative” perspective as well as international treaties. In an international anarchic setting, the implementation of international law lacks effective enforcement mechanisms, which means that the state is willing to accept it only within the framework of international law to prove its effectiveness. International organizations increasingly have played prominent role in maintaining international order either through collective security, or through multilateral diplomacy, which is reflected in the negotiation of international institutions, and rules of interaction between countries that can help regulate the international order. Liberal institutionalists offer a more decentralized view of international order, and articulate as well constellations of organizations, and institutions, regimes that when treated together appear to demonstrate substantial order in international politics (Keohane, R., 1984). Today, the structure of international organizations is much more diversified, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations which constitute the contemporary international political actors in particular and, it plays a balancer role in the maintenance of international order.
II. Sino-US Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations

In the new international environment, all the threats facing the world are only appearance and the deep-rooted problem of international relations is disorder. Some Western scholars believe that, “the basic responsibility for the construction of a new international order is the need to implement a new US foreign policy that recognizes the rule to increase investment in building the international system.” The United States should implement “intellectual leadership.” (Jones, B. & Pascual, C. & Stedman, S., 2009: 6).

There are two different points of view from Western scholars, who argue that China’s rise could lead to the power transition in the international order in the Asia-Pacific region. Realists argue that “the resurgence of China, while still in the early stages, portends a structural transformation in the Asia-Pacific system as the relative power matrix in the region is being altered in a way that deepens the security dilemma (Goh, E., 2009: 60). Liberal institutionalists and constructivists say that “power competition inevitably leads to war.” “The processes of interdependence, institutional norms and socialization can play a critical role in shaping how Chinese power is exercised.” (Bemstein, R. & Munro, R., 1997; Johnston, A., 2003). Some Western scholars and government officials argued that China is creating a new international security order region by region, promoting and building a network of mutually supportive security communities across Asia (Clegg, J., 2009: 121). They even consider that
“with its growing strength, China was ready to move beyond Deng’s caution ‘to lie low and bide one’s time’, and instead, setting aside the ‘victim mentality’ so deeply embedded in its century of ‘shame and humiliation’, to put itself forward as a major power on the world stage (Clegg, J., 2009: 176). A rather controversial view is that of China’s test with the United States; China may choose the number and location according to its own advantage, such as competing with the United States in the Taiwan Strait region.

Power transition of international order in the Asia-Pacific region may appear as three kinds of strategic choices: maintaining the status quo, negotiating to change the status quo and, the power transition. Robert Kagan, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace claims that “(China) like all rising powers of the past, including the United States, wants to reshape the international system to suit its own purposes, commensurate with its new power, and to make the world safe for its autocracy. Yes, the Chinese want the prosperity that comes from integration in the global economy, but might they believe, as the Japanese did a century ago, that the purpose of getting rich is not to join the international system but to change it?” (Kagan, R., 2005: May 15).

This article examines China’s three strategic alternatives, and each of them is trying to shift the power structure by assessing the impact on regional security in order to negotiate Sino-US coexistence in the Asia-Pacific. The United States seems to have been severely affected by the financial crisis, and the powerful economic linkages between
China and the United States as well as the importance of bilateral ties in the global economy, underscore the need for consultation and cooperation in addressing common issues and concerns.

Based on this international environment, the two countries’ primary objective in the Asia-Pacific region is to confirm the feasibility of maintaining the status quo of the Sino-US strategic dialogue to escape a regional security dilemma, and to establish the new geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific region. Western scholars and analysts have focused their anxieties on the potential power transition if and when China’s rise will change the Asia-Pacific and rest of the world international order and challenge US hegemony. However, this change is a long process. The Chinese emphasis is on domestic development by strategic choice, but the strength of Sino-US conflict of interest with the rise of China will be increasingly obvious. The two sides from long-term strategic interests are not able to sustain a negotiated regional order either in the form of a “hierarchical duet” structure or by moving toward a security community, the region will be left facing the destabilizing scenario of power transition (Goh, E., 2009: 61).

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① According to Barry Buzan, the security community exists where states share common values, mutual sympathies and loyalties, where a state has at least a partial identification with another’s image that creates a “we-feeling”, see Barry Buzan. “Security Architecture in Asia: The Interplay of Regional and Global Levels”, Pacific Review, 16(2): p.164.
III. Strategic Alternative I: Maintaining the Status Quo

The traditionalists believe that the international political system is anarchic, and that military security and survival should, therefore, supersede goals such as environmental sustainability. “Since security is the highest goal a state pursues in anarchy, states must first work to survive threats of force and war.” (Waltz, K., 1979). “The state only in ensuring the survival of the conditions can pursue peace, interests, power and other targets.” Today’s China is committed to domestic economic development and political stability and, to safeguard the security of the region and neighboring countries. The United States should adjust its structure of global and regional strategic interests in developing and strengthening cooperation with its allies, while other countries accepted to participate together to build the mechanism of Asia-Pacific international order. Meanwhile, China should adopt its own behavior patterns and clear strategic planning, to break the so-called “great tragedy in the history of the country’s law.” (Wang, J., 2009: 3).

Maintenance of the status quo in the Asia-Pacific region is characterized by the strategic choice to recognize the two world powers in the hierarchal regional order. In this instance, it is hoped that dialogue between the two powers would affect perceptions that the elites hold of each other, correct misconceptions and create opportunities for cooperation, thus developing a stable regional order. China for its part has chosen to join the multilateral system, using the
arena as a platform from which to balance the United States and its influence in the Asia-Pacific region rather than seek to form an anti-US coalition. In declaring its commitment to peaceful development, China has made clear its intention, as it steps up to its major power role, not to challenge or disrupt the US-led international political and economic system (Fu, M., 2007: June 9).

China has continuously adjusted its Asia-Pacific strategy to adapt gradually to coexistence with the United States in the region’s environment. “A significant degree of Chinese adjustment and accommodation exists relative to United States predominance. Chinese leaders have evinced their desire to make room for and to avoid open contestation of the United States dominance in recent years (Shambaugh, D., 2004/5: 70-72; 91). When the US-North Korea nuclear crisis broke out in 2002, China was well positioned to initiate the six-party talks. In doing so, it in effect stepped right into the path of the US unipolar drive. As an active facilitator, China well coordinated the six-party talks with the US.

The United States has elevated its role in Northeast Asia through strengthening the US-Japan alliance. This not only contains China, but also keeps watch on Russia, so the political order in Northeast Asia highlights the status of the US-Japan alliance, which forces China and Russia to work mutually to build a strategic partnership to address the threat of US hegemony from the considerations of their strategic interests of national security, and to enhance Sino-Russian relations as a power of “soft balancing” to prevent the reconstruction of the
political order in Asia-Pacific region under the control of the influence of a unipolar world dominated by the US. The Asia-Pacific geopolitical power structure relationships work for the superpower to play on offshore balancing role to provide itself strategic maneuver (Zou, Q. & Liu, T., 2008: 51).

Although China’s national security is also under threat, such as the Taiwan issue, China puts its primary strategic objective to solve the domestic development problems. According to Western scholars, China has neither the ability to forge a counterbalance coalition against the United States nor can it dabble in foreign policy adventurism. According to this logic, “China is a satisfied power.” (Xiang, L., 2001: 7-30). Today, China’s expanded engagement with ASEAN and the SCO... reflects an increased appreciation by the Chinese government of the importance of norms, and, as a consequence, “most nations in the regions see China as a good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a nonthreatening regional power” (Shambaugh, D., 2004/5: 64-99).

China’s growing economic power, expanding political influence, distinctive diplomatic voice, and increasing involvement in regional multilateral institutions have transformed the landscape of the Asia-Pacific security environment. Without question, the central element in any evaluation of the region is the question of Sino-US relations. Some feel that the military modernization program will radically shift the strategic balance and that China will actively seek to challenge American strategic predominance (Bisley, N., 2007: 52). In fact most
Chinese leaders declared that China has never sought to challenge American hegemonic status in the power structure of the existing international order from which China itself has also benefited. China’s rise is fundamentally “economic and social development, rather than seeking a strategic rising superpower.” But the United States is clearly focusing on containing China and doing what it can to prevent China from becoming the pre-eminent military power in the region. This containment policy is structured through alliances. Some Western scholars argue that a military response to China’s rise is not the most effective means of securing the region (Xiang, L., 2001: 7-23). After joining the WTO, China adhered to the existing international order as a prerequisite for international cooperation and participation in any strategic dialogue with various members of international organizations, and through the strategic dialogue mechanism, China is seeking to safeguard their common interests and regional security and stability.

Identity is the basis of interest. The system is a relatively stable set of interests. China is not attempting to challenge the current international situation. On the contrary, China has basically agreed with the existing international order and norms. “China’s actions prove that China defends the international system.” (Kim, S., 2004: 51). In accordance with the “status quo” model of Sino-US relations, therefore, the impact of the distribution of systemic power is balanced, and China is an emerging power, but her strength is not strong enough to threaten the United States preponderance for the next 20
years at least. The evolution of Sino-US relations is changing from the concept of structure to the structure of behavior in the field. Cautious when on the rise, China stressed economic development and promoted regional cooperation as its goal, and, its leadership can usually be accepted by another country’s diplomatic and institutional means. Thus, China’s rise is as a responsible big country action to maintain the regional security situation. Although it is in conflict with US interests, it is in terms of diplomatic and economic influence of cooperation, and competition is not in terms of the level of power and status. China’s objective is to stabilize China’s surrounding environment and to build political and economic cooperation mechanisms to enhance the development of national strength and power.

IV. Strategic Alternative II: Change the Status Quo through Dialogue

If the United States in the past has kept its relations with China along the lines of the “status quo” model outlined above in Asia-Pacific security issues at different levels, it would have been in large part the result of a gradual adjustment on both sides to the changing power dynamics in the region engendered by China’s rise and the United States’ continued predominance. If both sides agree that the importance of mutual coexistence, the Asia-Pacific region will be a “dialogue to change the status quo model.” However, here we are
concerned not with how to manage China’s displacing and taking over American hegemony in the international system, but rather with exploring the potential of finding some form of power sharing between them as the vast power gap between the United States and China is gradually reduced (Goh, E., 2009: 68).

At this time, China and the United States coordinate with each other to manage their regional affairs mutually. Changing the status quo through dialogue involves the internal structure of the national consciousness and national relevance, as well as the security notions of the coexistence of great powers. It is distinguished from the status quo of Sino-US strategic Asia-Pacific, which reflects American hegemonic stability under the “level of hierarchical duet” structure. Liberalists and constructivists agree that negotiations to change the international order structural model, they believe through what causal mechanisms can power transitions occur peacefully (Kupchan, C. & Adler, E. & Coicaud, J. & Khong, Y., 2001: 1-16). China’s growing power has shortened the gap with the United States, and how to build a Sino-US joint security management of a new order in the Asia-Pacific region is now worth exploring. European concert system (between the Napoleonic and the Crimean wars from 1815 to 1854) in the 19th century has been generally accepted among the major powers in order to maintain cooperation in the prevention of war as an alternative. Concert conduct is distinct from balance of power behavior in the fundamental acceptance that sustained cooperation between great
powers is possible and that war is undesirable as a policy tool (Jervis, R., 1985: 59-61).

China and the United States maintain “the hierarchical duet” power structure in the Asia-Pacific region that involves at least two sides in the international order of this region and four aspects of influence: 1, a potential sphere of influence (interests); 2, maintaining the status quo of power distribution; 3, the use of power; 4, the management of conflict.

1. Sphere of influence (interests): The major feature of the great powers concert is the acceptance of each power’s respective sphere of influence within the system, within which other powers are not expected to encroach. China and the United States can negotiate peaceful change in the Asia-Pacific region perhaps through agreeing upon mutual spheres of influence. Robert Ross, a famous scholar of China studies, said that existing geographical and geopolitical conditions in East Asia make China the incumbent continental power and the United States the dominant maritime power. This division of spheres of influence can persist because the United States and China each has a defensive advantage in its own theater sufficient to match each other’s military developments (Ross, R., 1999: 81-118). As the other regional powers, such as the limited capacity of Russia’s eastward expansion, Japan’s military strength is weakened by de facto bipolar Asia-Pacific region.
2. Power distribution: China adheres to peaceful coexistence, the basis for its multilateral foreign policy. China stresses its compliance with current norms of international relations, contrary to the United States’ intervention in other countries’ internal affairs, and bypassing the United Nations. China’s overtaking the US in economic size before the mid 21st century has had much less military significance than it seems to have had at first glance. It hardly implies that China will be in a position to challenge the US globally, or even regionally, although it could bear on the very local strategic situation in the Taiwan Strait (Keidel, A., 2007: March 12), which made other Western countries suspicious of China’s strategic goals. Therefore, the United States has tried to strengthen relations with its allies in the Asia-Pacific region, especially Japan and Australia. In East Asia, the United States has stressed the importance of its interests against China as a potential threat, and enhanced the establishment of US military force in the region. This is beneficial to overcome the distance, the negative factors in the military deployment, and in order to maintain the advantages of regional power structure.

3. Use of power: In the current international environment, China and the United States would recognize the importance of effective crisis management mechanisms to avoid situations like the Cuban missile crisis staged, this time in the Asia Pacific region. Today, the region does not want to see a growing rivalry between China and the United States, but if pressed most will not side with the United States over China (Bisley, N., 2007: 55). The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed
a distinct shift in which the growth in power and influence of China, coupled with normalized policy to its regional neighbors, has encouraged many, especially ASEAN states, to move slightly away from their previous position favoring an American-brokered status quo. The annual reports by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission to Congress since 2002 have recommended the use of economic sanctions to force China to comply with WTO rules. However, the opponents believe that China’s growing economic strength is increasingly influencing the contemporary international political and economic order. China and US economic interests around the world are closely linked. Any sanctions against China would be detrimental to the interests of the United States and its allies. Today, it is difficult for the US to find ways to impose sanctions against China, the second largest trading power in the world. The United States has not only emphasized the importance of international mechanisms and international norms in Sino-US strategic dialogue, but has also tried to use political and economic influence to balance China in the Asia Pacific region competition. The term of “co-binding” in international order is the notion of the liberalist. American scholars believe that the establishment of a “co-binding” mechanism has positive significance. Both the League of Nations after World War I and the United Nations after World War II embody the function of “co-binding” mechanisms of great powers (Ikenberry, G., 2006: 92). China and the United States can reach an agreement through negotiations to maintain peace and security across the Taiwan Straits, and take binding action to prevent Taiwan from declaring independence.
4. Conflict Management: China and the United States have common security interests in the post-Cold War era, including counterterrorism cooperation, economic cooperation; the North Korean nuclear issue; they need to jointly address global issues, such as climate change, energy; transnational crime; nuclear non-proliferation and so on. However, foreign policies are determined not only by state-centric assessments of strategic/economic interests and relative power capabilities, but also by the constraints of domestic groups on the negotiating positions of states. Chinese nationalist attitudes toward US hegemony or imperialism put the Chinese government in a dilemma because the top priority for China is national reunification. One of the most crucial determinants of a sustainable negotiated regional order may therefore be the US abandonment of the intervention in China’s Taiwan issues. If this goal can be realized, Western scholars argue that the factor for changing the “status quo” will be completely eliminated. Sino-US negotiations to establish a “hierarchical duet power” structure are conducive to stabilizing the Asia-Pacific international order. First, Sino-US policymaking elites have the capacity for tight executive decisions that will aid the process of building up a significant level of confidence and trust. The early 1970s of the 20th century, Mao- Zhou and Nixon-Kissinger days of strategic clarity when Sino-US rapprochement triangulated against the Soviet Union provides today’s Sino-US strategic dialogue mechanism, the basis for reconciling their bilateral disputes. Secondly, there are significant common interests between China and the United States. The threat from non-traditional security
factors has promoted bilateral cooperation, such as food security, climate change, extreme natural disaster, rising sea levels, spread of disease, and the energy crisis.

Internationally, the environment of states’ action, or the structure of their system, is set by the fact that “some states prefer survival over other ends obtainable in the short run and act with relative efficiency to achieve that end.” (Waltz, K., 1979: 93). And help build repression, and sometimes reverse the external causes of a community than the fate of their impact on the internal causes of infinite uncertainty, more ambiguous, but also more difficult to grasp.” (Letters on a Regicide Peace, 1842: 275). For China and the United States, the “hierarchical duet” structure would comply with China’s national interests, and China’s welcome to the US participation in Asia-Pacific regional affairs illustrates this point. Chinese leaders have repeatedly said to the United States: First, China will not challenge the US presence in the Asia Pacific region because it contributes to the United States to take action to contain the attempts of Japan to become a military power. Second, China will not exert pressure on neighboring countries and force them to abandon cooperation with the US interests. Third, China’s active participation in the Asia-Pacific regional security forum and economic cooperation mechanism is not against the United States in the Asia-Pacific region to establish a “hierarchical duet” power structure.

The transition of the Asia-Pacific region in the geopolitical order depends largely on the strategic objectives of the future, depending on the US role in the Asia-Pacific region. Once the behavior of America’s
global hegemony is constrained, the United States will take an attitude of cooperation with its allies and would like to consult with China. The power transition of Sino-US negotiations will achieve a much greater likelihood in the Asia-Pacific region. If the Sino-US strategic dialogue mechanism acts to maintain stability, the US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region stable strategy is bound to be affected. China has played an active role in the entire international political and economic security dialogues globally. Especially, China has constructed the Asia-Pacific regional security cooperation mechanisms with other Asian countries, such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum, ASEAN 10 plus 3, the East Asia Summit, the SCO and so on. China has used the multilateral cooperation mechanism “as the basis for building the Asia-Pacific security strategy.” China’s development is a predictable element of stability (Yuan, J., 2001: 263-294).

The best strategic option for the United States in Asia Pacific is to work together with the Asia-Pacific countries to establish the mechanisms of multilateral cooperation towards a regional “security community”. The so-called “security community” is characterized by “core values of the consistency of member states and common reaction.” Scholars working on security communities are probing how and in what circumstances states are able to develop stable expectations of peaceful change. Although the power influence of the

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① According to Kupchan, “although peaceful transition can occur in the absence of a security community, the process through which zones of stable peace is one clear pathway through which systemic change can take place without change.” See Kupchan, Adler, et., Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order, p7.
two great powers in the Asia-Pacific region shares various degrees, and the order of regional collective security structure is difficult to define, the ASEAN model has a huge impact in the Asia Pacific region, and the regional security dialogue mechanism has already begun. China and the United States have already largely agreed on issuea, such as Taiwan and the DPRK nuclear program. The future Asia-Pacific region of “security community” may be moving in the direction of the EU model. Of course, the process for Sino-US negotiations on building the Asia-Pacific order which we call “hierarchical duet” structure may cause deadlock due to the crisis of the Taiwan Strait issue, the Korean nuclear issue etc. while with the emergence of other countries, such as India and Japan, the Sino-US conflict may lead to negotiations deadlock, if so, the power structure of international order in the Asia Pacific region will follow the third model.

V. Strategic Alternative III: Power Transition

Power transition logic has made the United States, the existing hegemonic power, China and also India, the emerging power in the security dilemma, which is the major source in leading power rivalry, even confrontation in the power structure and the environment of Asia-Pacific area. The existing power will tend to emphasize system preservation, while the rising challenger will tend to change the status quo, and to reform the irrational international political and economic
order. A kind of influential view from Western scholars is that the contender does not only challenge the status of hegemonic power, but also change the existing international rules and norms, so that the ultimate aim of the challengers would be to usurp the dominant position of the incumbent (Organski, A., 1958; 1980; Kennedy, P., 1987).

In the views of Western scholars, the power transition may lead to three kinds of outcome. First, China may successfully challenge the US hegemony in the region, and there will be a power transition to Chinese dominance. Second, the failure of power transition will lead to crisis and conflict, in which the United States will have strengthened its hegemonic position, and China is likely to lose. Third, a transition to a new bipolar balance of power system in which China and the United States stake out separate spheres of influence and exercise mutual deterrence and containment, with occasional contained conflicts (Goh, E., 2009: 79).

Realist and Neorealists are pessimistic about the prospects for peaceful transition of power. Robert Gilpin’s hegemonic instability theory argues that “incongruity between a rising power’s capabilities and its continued subordinate position in an international system dominated by an erstwhile hegemon triggers a security dilemma that can be resolved by major war.” (Kupchan, A., 2001: 7). Although scholars disagree about whether bipolar or multipolar systems are stable, most agree that both are less stable than a unipolar system (Waltz, K., 1964; Mearsheimer, J., 1993: 141-192). The process of historical development of international relations actually shows that
most power transitions are accompanied by wars and changes in the international order by military confrontation to determine the winning side.

In theory, peaceful transition depends not just on the ability of the hegemon and the rising contender to forge agreement on order, but also on their ability to legitimate that order. Powers emphasizing the role of the use of security measures is self-evident. For countries which are defined as a major target of interest can be achieved only through military means. This issue of security confusion between goals and means is inevitable.

But the history of power transition comes with the rise of great power and with outbreak of war between major powers. Power transition has led from the Cold War confrontation to the disintegration of one contender, peaceful change of power, and the emergence of new post-Cold War international order. The peaceful transition that took place between the United States and Britain during the late 1800s and early 1900s is a special case. The United States emerged as a great power toward the end of the nineteenth century and threatened the British positions in the Americas as well as British naval supremacy in the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the United States and Britain did not engage in a hegemonic war. On the contrary, they resolved their differences through negotiation and forged a strategic partnership that has lasted to this day (Kupchan, A., 2001: 14).
Quantitative analysis of transition of power-- the perceived type and potential scope of the competing power, as well as the relative rates of ascendance and decline--are critical scale on which the balance of threat is calculated by fading or incumbent powers. However, the relationship between power imbalance and war remains a highly contested issue (Soysa, I. & O’Neal, J. & Park, Y., 1997: 509-528). However, it is possible that the incumbent power might decide to launch a preventive war against the competition before the challenger becomes too strong, although there is historical evidence that rising dissatisfied powers have tended to challenge hegemons before they have attained the latter’s level of power (Levy, J., 1987: 82-107; Organski, A. & Kugler, 1980: 13-43).

In view of the current status of Sino-US relations, power transition theory can not predict who will launch a pre-emptive war. According to the theory of power transition, the incumbent power usually simultaneously declines in parallel to the emerging power. In the situation of current Sino-US relations, it is far from this case. The incumbent power still enjoys a preponderance of capabilities and rising power needs to take several decades to catch up. The situation of a challenger overtaking an incumbent hegemony does not match today’s Sino-US bilateral relations, unless there is an immediate collapse of the US economy. The transition of power is not so simple. The process of power in transition often involves more than just the rising and fading powers; there are often multiple rising contenders and simultaneous power challenges, and their involvement in the
wars that characterized periods of transition is not clear-cut (Goh, E., 2001: 81). The cost for competition between the direct challenger and the incumbent hegemon is very high. In the power transition in the Asia-Pacific region, a third power’s rise could be crucial. In the case of Japan, the US would actively use it to achieve balance China’s rise. India is likely to become an emerging power in this region that could benefit from a potentially destructive Sino-US conflict.

VI. Sino-US Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations and the Middle East

The Arab world is a significant part of the international order. Compared with other regional issues, the Arab countries in the Middle East hold a more important strategic position and play a vital role in world affairs. Some of significant issues in the contemporary world are centered in the Middle East, which are also China and the United States involved.

China’s Middle East policy does not take only Arab countries and people into account, but also affects China’s relatively stable relations with other great powers. In other words, it is an important part of China’s diplomatic efforts to strive for a peaceful and stable international environment.

Although China always maintains good traditional relations with Arab countries, and its Middle East diplomacy has experienced great changes since 1980s. Today, China has continued to be open-minded
and tolerant; it promotes dialogue among civilizations and works to make the international order more just and equitable (People’s Daily, 2006: March 6).

Based on general guidelines, China has proposed the specific rules to develop relations with the Arab countries. In January 2004, at the headquarters of the Arab League, the visiting President Hu Jintao proposed four principles of developing new Sino-Arab partnership in the new area, i.e., “promoting political relations on the basis of mutual respect, keeping close economic and trade contacts for the sake of common development, expanding cultural exchanges in order to learn from each other, and strengthening cooperation in international affairs in the spirit of safeguarding world peace and promoting common development.”

Chinese leaders also stated that China and the Arab countries should become friendly partners promoting mutual confidence, common development, the harmonious coexistence of various cultures, and safeguarding world peace, security and stability.

China admitted that there are some differences of cultural traditions, social systems, values and development modes among different countries. But this cannot be used as a pretext to give irresponsible remarks on other countries’ domestic affairs. We cannot

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even attribute the problems and contradictions existing in the current world to a certain civilization, a certain nation or religion. We should spare no efforts to make all civilizations and nations cooperate in harmony and promote the lofty cause of world peace and development (People’s Daily, 2006: April 23; Yao, K., 2007).

Arab-China relations, especially the cooperation of the two sides in the fields of politics, economy, energy, culture and environmental protection, have been greatly strengthened. The two sides signed “the Communiqué of Second Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum,” “China-Arab Cooperation Forum Action Plan of 2006-2008,” and documents on establishing an entrepreneur conference mechanism and environmental cooperation (Wen, W., 2006: May 31). China has already built a permanent mechanism and can use it as a platform to conduct in-depth and comprehensive cooperation with this rising region in the current international political and economic arena. The consolidation of Sino-Arab cooperation not only can help address various regional issues, but can also change the global balance of power (Xinhua News, 2006: June 20; Yao, K., 2007).

The United States’ global strategy also focused on the Middle East and the Arab countries and regarded it as an important arena of international politics and power diplomacy. Consequently, its evolving situation is not regional, but has an overall impact on the practical implementation of US global strategy, on big power relations’ interactions and adjustments, and on world peace, stability and prosperity.
In effect, the Obama Administration has transferred the brunt of US foreign/military policy away from the Middle East and the war on terrorism toward Asia to better manipulate the conditions of China’s inevitable return to big power status. The process Washington began two years ago to contain China’s influence — the “pivot” to Asia, now termed the “Asia Pacific rebalancing strategy” — can now be accelerated. Simply put, the pivot is meant to be a strategic “re-balancing” of US interests from Europe and the Middle East toward East Asia. The switch makes practical sense. The main geopolitical prize for the US government obviously is in East and South Asia, not the Middle East, which has transfixed Washington’s attention since September 11, 2001, at a huge cost in prestige and treasure — probably $5 trillion or more when it is finally paid off over several decades.

Both are liberal war hawks and staunch advocates of so-called “humanitarian intervention.” They may push for a tougher line on Syria and elsewhere (Smith, J., 2013: June 20). American military and diplomatic strategists are acutely aware of the dangers of a more integrated Eurasian landmass, particularly if it is fashioned to suit China’s economic and political preferences (Bianchi, R., 2013: 103-118) President Obama is quick to assure that his re-engagement of Asia is not aimed at containing China’s rise. Indeed, he often notes that the United States has no choice but to engage Beijing in compromise and collaboration because China’s achievements have placed it far beyond containment.

Contrary to popular belief, the US has not left the Middle East following the withdrawal of its armed forces from Iraq in December
2011. In reality, the level of American commitment to the region is not dwindling but quite significantly increasing. Ironically, the US is stuck in the Middle East, where it struggles to define a regional strategy while it aims at pivoting to Asia where it has a strategy. In the Pacific, US policies aim more or less at implementing a posture of “strategic hedging” vis-à-vis China. This approach has obviously its shortcomings, but at least it gives a sense of wide-ranging purpose to US engagement in Asia. There is no such thing at the moment for the US in the Middle East.

Not all these critics are grounded in facts — and they sometimes contradict themselves — but they reflect the huge demands for a much more aspiring US leadership in the Middle East. In a period of strategic fatigue, despite the understanding that the US will not easily leave the Middle East, there does not seem to be big appetite for a new US grand strategy for the region.\(^1\)

The Obama administration has shifted the focus of US military planning to the Asia-Pacific. To give itself a chance to successfully implement its global strategy, the United States must reshape its military presence and recalibrate its level of engagement in the Middle East. The United States understands that bolstering the defense and security capabilities of its Gulf allies, a vital mission emphasized in the 2006 and 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review reports, will allow it to execute its strategic pivot to the Asia-Pacific. But current uncertainty

in US relations with its Gulf allies is making increased security cooperation difficult to achieve (Saab, B., 2013: June 20).

**Conclusion**

Power transition in international order is a complex process, and there is disharmony between theory of international relations and diplomatic practice which shows “unpredictable security objectives or actions within the rules of conduct.” Fundamentally speaking, whether China can become the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific’s international order depends on two variables. First, potential power parity between China and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region will maintain an international order based on peaceful power transition. Second, it would appear that outright confrontation between China and the United States is unlikely in the short to medium term simply because of the existing power differential (Li, N., 2006: June). Without question, the central element in any evaluation of the region is the question of Sino-American relations. Some feel that the military modernization program will radically shift the strategic balance and that China will actively seek to challenge American strategic predominance (Bisley, N., 2007: 52). However, the existing international political and economic order has undergone a gradual process of adaptation to recognition, and China is acting as an active defender of current international rules.
The Neorealist theory contends that American power could lead to power transition in the international order of the Asia-Pacific region. There are still hot issues, such as the Taiwan issue and the DPRK nuclear issue, which are the causes of Sino-US confrontation or a limited conflict. A major concern for the United States and its allies in the Asia-Pacific region is the status of Taiwan and the possibility of a Sino-US conflict over Taiwan’s issues. Policymakers and military officials in some East Asian countries are highly reticent about how they would respond in such a situation, although Japan has at least hinted publicly that it would, under some circumstances, support US operations, given the numerous uncertainties regarding the initiation of such a conflict (Medeiro, E., 2008: 243). On the other hand, some Asian countries have viewed China’s rise as inevitable and generally positive, given its contributions to economic development. Accordingly, they seek to engage China and to expand bilateral relations with China. American technological advantage by targeting critical high-tech information, intelligence, command, and other logistics systems in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, has accelerated the pace of China’s military modernization process since 9/11 terrorist attacks. China could speed up the development of highly sophisticated weapons to ensure the modernization initiatives of information, command, and logistics support systems. When China’s medium-range ballistic missile was launched to destroy an old Chinese weather satellite, it was especially alarming to Washington. Meanwhile, China’s rise will result in its neighboring countries, such
as: Russia, Japan, ROK, ASEAN countries and some Arab countries to seek to thwart it.

In order to achieve long-term stability in the Asia-Pacific region, China-US cooperation mechanism should be established through dialogue relations framework. The two sides should seek areas of common interest and possible cooperation and coordination, and design the mechanism for crisis management procedures. First, maintaining the stable Asia-Pacific and the Middle East political and economic order is not only conducive to regional peace and tranquillity, but also conducive to the establishment of security environment for China’s peaceful rise. Secondly, setting aside ideological considerations, limiting disagreements and focusing on shared interests and concerns, the aim for China is to promote trade and economic cooperation with the United States and other major powers and to establish regular dialogue and build trust in order to create more effective cooperative mechanism and eliminate barriers to the growth of Sino-US bilateral relations.

Finally, China’s emergence as a new international power is bound to give rise to tension and strains in its relations with other powers. The partnership pattern aims to involve both potential adversaries as well as non-adversaries with the long-term purpose of providing a workable framework within which to handle differences and to manage often difficult relations, in order to address and resolve disputes and potential conflicts in difficult circumstances through
dialogue. Today’s China is universally recognized by the international community to follow the rules and norms, which will help ease Sino-US security dilemma in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East region, and help China secure a favorable international environment in the steady realization of its peaceful rise.

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