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OVER THE course of the next several decades there is a good chance that the United States will find itself engaged in an open and intense geopolitical rivalry with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Such an outcome is not inevitable; few things in international politics are. But there are strong reasons to believe that it is at the very least plausible, and even quite likely. Indeed, there are reasons to believe it is already under way.

In what follows, my aim is to consider what such a Sino-American rivalry might look like, and how it could unfold. In doing so, I make three basic assumptions. The first is that, as a nation-state, China will continue to hang together—that, however dramatically its economy and political system may change over the next several decades, they will not collapse. My second assumption is that, in the words of a recent U.S. Defense Department report, China "wants to become the preeminent Asian power," which necessarily means that it will seek ultimately to displace the United States as the preponderant power in the region. Third, I assume that the United States, while seeking to satisfy China's ambitions by at least to some degree acceding to its wishes, will not be willing to abandon its own present position of preponderance in Asia or to surrender pride of place to China. To permit a potentially hostile power to dominate East Asia would not only be out of line with current U.S. policy, it would also mark a deviation from the fundamental pattern of American grand strategy since at least the latter part of the 19th century.

The combination of growing Chinese power, China's effort to expand its influence, and the unwillingness of the United States entirely to give way before it are the necessary preconditions of a "struggle for mastery" in Asia (to adopt a phrase from the British historian A.J.P. Taylor). How, then, might that struggle arise?

The Sino-American relationship today contains a mix of cooperative and competitive elements. The two countries trade with each other, American businesses invest considerable sums in China, and many Chinese students come to study in the United States. Beijing and Washington engage in sporadic military-to-military dialogues and ongoing discussions of various regional and global issues, including the future of the Korean peninsula and the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, however, the U.S. and China have strong disagreements on a variety of matters, human rights and the Taiwan question being foremost among them. And in recent years the two sides have begun to regard each other as potential military rivals, although both are reluctant to acknowledge this openly.

It is precisely this mix of cooperative and com-

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petitive elements that may shift sharply in the competitive direction. In the new configuration of things, China and the United States would most likely continue some form of economic relationship, they would not be openly at war with one another, and they would maintain diplomatic ties. But flows of trade and investment would increasingly be distorted by strategic considerations, the two powers would be engaged in a much more open military competition—designing, deploying, and training their forces with an eye toward possible conflict—and this military rivalry would be accompanied by a political contest waged throughout the Asia-Pacific region and perhaps beyond.

Any number of pathways could lead from the present to this imagined future. Thus, a single catalytic event, such as a showdown over Taiwan, especially if it entailed a significant loss of life on either side, could transform the U.S.-China relationship virtually overnight. Whichever side prevailed, the loser would look for ways to exact revenge, and each power would likely redouble its efforts to strengthen its military and diplomatic postures in Asia and undermine those of its rival. Or there could be a gradual deterioration in relations, an accumulation of lesser disputes and failed efforts to resolve them that would lead the United States and China to become increasingly suspicious and hostile. Or there might be some combination of these trends—say, a period of gradual deterioration punctuated by one or a series of crises (like the one that followed the accidental American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999), no one of which might seem in itself to be of overwhelming importance but which, taken together, could culminate in a much more contentious relationship.

Regardless of how it arose, an intensified Sino-American rivalry would likely manifest itself in different spheres and along different dimensions. Let me take these in order, beginning with the economic.

II

EVER SINCE it began market reforms in the late 1970's, the PRC has become heavily dependent for its continued well-being on the outside world, and, in particular, on the United States. Without heavy inflows of American capital and technology, and without access to the huge U.S. market, China would not have been able to progress as far and as fast as it has. Whether or not the United States could have used its position of relative economic advantage for strategic purposes during this period, the fact is that, for the most part, it did not try. Despite some efforts in the late 1980's and early 1990's to punish China for violations of human rights and arms proliferation, U.S. economic pressure was half-hearted and largely ineffectual. By the mid-1990's, the United States was lifting most sanctions, loosening or abandoning most controls on dual-use technology exports to China, and moving to grant it status as a normal trading partner.

It did so based largely on the belief that trade leads to peace. Mutual economic exchange is assumed to forge a shared interest in good relations, and a powerful disincentive to conflict. According to advocates of "engagement" with the PRC, international trade and investment will fuel economic growth, economic growth will speed democratization, and a democratic China will be far less likely to use force or threats against other democracies, including the United States.

It is certainly possible that, if it continues to grow richer, China will also become, from the American perspective, more benign. But it is also conceivable that this may not happen. If it does not, the United States will be faced with a challenge with which it has not had to cope in over a century: a strategic rival that is economically and technologically dynamic, deeply engaged in the world economy, and whose total output may come eventually to approach America's own.

Will an era of more openly competitive relations be marked by renewed U.S. efforts to exert economic leverage on China? The answer will depend a great deal on how such an era begins. A sudden, severe crisis could galvanize American domestic opinion, overwhelm the objections of business groups and others with a strong vested interest in continued commercial contacts, and lead to the imposition of near-total restrictions on imports, exports, and capital and technology flows. But if the deterioration is gradual, a sufficient political consensus may not exist in the United States to support even limited sanctions. To the contrary, it is precisely when relations falter that arguments for keeping trade on an even keel will be advanced most strenuously.

As time passes, China will probably become even less susceptible to American economic pressure than it is today. Chinese exports to the United States may be large, but even now they are greatly overshadowed by China's exports to its Asian neighbors. And as important as the U.S. is as a source of capital, it now comes in only third among

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the five largest providers of direct foreign investment to China; the other four (Hong Kong, which serves as a conduit for Taiwanese investment on the mainland, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea) are all Asian players. In the future, the Chinese government will have a strong strategic incentive to encourage and expand such diversification, above all in order to lessen excessive dependence on the United States.

In the long run, China will become relatively less reliant not only on the United States but on the outside world generally. Rising incomes will mean a growing pool of domestic savings and a declining reliance on foreign investment. In time, the technological advance of Chinese industry will be fueled more by indigenous developments and less by ideas, techniques, and machinery imported from abroad. The maturing of its vast domestic market will probably also mean that trade will diminish as a share of GNP and that China will become less dependent on exports and imports than it is today (though at least in the medium term it is likely to depend *more* heavily on certain critical imports, especially of food and fuel).

AS CHINA develops and becomes more deeply integrated into the global economy, it will not only be less susceptible to economic pressure from others but more capable of exerting economic pressure of its own. This pressure need not even be deliberate to be felt: as the experience of the United States in the Western hemisphere suggests, a big, dynamic economy can exert an almost gravitational pull on the smaller units that surround it. The analyst Ross Munro has noted in *Orbis* that the rapid growth of China's economy has produced a significant expansion in its influence all along its interior land frontier, as its mostly poor neighbors in South, Southeast, and Central Asia have begun to look to it increasingly as a source of markets, aid, and business deals.

Beyond its immediate neighborhood, the sheer size of the potential Chinese market has also helped to create powerful business lobbies favoring good relations with the PRC. In the major industrial powers, these groups can be expected to pressure their own governments in favor of policies that happen also to be in Beijing's interest: easing restrictions on exports of capital and technology, avoiding sanctions, tariffs, or other market-closing measures that might provoke Chinese retaliation, and, in general, doing whatever is possible to maintain good bilateral relations and a "positive business climate."

The activities of pro-PRC lobbying groups may be perfectly legitimate and predictable; but in democratic societies they have nevertheless had the effect of dulling the reactions and limiting the strategic repertory of governments. These effects have been especially pronounced in the United States. Barring some truly severe crisis, trade with China will continue to exercise its muffling influence on American strategy.

Even if the United States should, at some point, adopt a more openly competitive stance, it would have great difficulty getting others to go along. This is not only because of genuine differences of perspective over how best to cope with China's increasing power and assertiveness, but also because each of the members of a potential coalition will be subject to its own domestic pressures. To get some sense of this, imagine, during the cold war, the debates on strategic policy that would have gone on within NATO if the members of the alliance had also been, to varying degrees, deeply engaged in economic exchange with the Soviet Union. As Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross conclude in their book *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress* (1997), "It is almost unthinkable that the rest of the world would unite to isolate China as the West did in the era of containment."

In addition to what it gains passively, as it were, simply by engaging with the rest of the world, China has also been actively deploying its growing economic weight to shape the strategic behavior of others. First, and most obviously, Beijing uses access to the Chinese market as a means of rewarding or punishing foreign firms and, through them, influencing their home governments. Ross Munro and Richard Bernstein relate in *The Coming Conflict with China* (1997) that PRC officials promoted an unusual array of business deals with American companies in the spring of 1994, just as the Clinton administration was considering revoking China's most-favored-nation status over human-rights violations. Two years later, having headed off this threat, Prime Minister Li Peng announced that China would buy $1.5-billion-worth of aircraft from Airbus Industrie rather than Boeing because, in his words, the Europeans did not "attach political strings to cooperation with China, unlike the Americans who arbitrarily resort to the threat of sanctions or the use of sanctions."

China has been especially assertive in attempting to exert direct economic influence over Taiwan. Following the election of Chen Shui-bian in the spring of 2000, the Beijing government began to warn Taiwanese companies with investments on

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the mainland that (according to a report in the *New York Times*) "they would be subject to unspecified sanctions if they advocated independence for Taiwan." To drive home the point, the PRC has evidently begun to make examples of companies whose chief executives are associated with the cause of independence. (In one case, a large petrochemical concern whose chairman supported Chen found its facilities on the mainland subjected to numerous inspections.) Even more visible is the case of Ah-mei, a Taiwanese singer popular on the mainland who performed the national anthem at Chen's inauguration. Her music and videos have since been banned from Chinese state-controlled media; in response to official pressure, Coca-Cola withdrew TV, radio, and billboard advertisements featuring her image.

BEIJING CLEARLY hopes to use economic threats and inducements, then, to discourage the United States from ever pursuing a more confrontational policy toward it. The same economic instruments could also prove extremely important in efforts to affect American interests in Asia, discouraging Japan and Korea from participating in the development of theater missile-defense systems, for example, or persuading Singapore to abandon its present policy of permitting U.S. naval vessels to dock at its ports. The PRC could also do more than in the past to separate the U.S. from its European allies by shifting business from American firms to their EU competitors.

The PRC has begun to get into the financial-diplomacy game as well, if so far on a rather modest scale. In 1994, China stole a march on India by financing, building, and equipping a $200-million coal mine in Bangladesh. And during the summer of 1997, as the Asian financial crisis was reaching its depths, China joined the IMF and a group of much wealthier Asian countries in extending a financial bailout package to Thailand—the first time that it had ever participated in such an effort. Eighteen months later, at the beginning of 1999, Thailand surprised the United States, its nominal ally, by signing a "Plan of Action for the 21st Century" with China—an agreement described by one Thai observer as "a strategic move by China to seek an alliance to counter the influence of the United States." If the Thai example is any indication, economic assistance in various forms will probably become an increasingly significant means for China of winning friends and influencing people.

There are also other, more subtle financial instruments at its disposal. During the Asian crisis, China extracted the maximum diplomatic benefit from its (self-interested) decision not to devalue its currency despite sharp drops in the currencies of many of its smaller neighbors. It thereby earned plaudits as a responsible regional "citizen," an upholder of stability, and, in contrast to Japan, a country able to take tough economic decisions. But China's much-vaunted restraint may also have carried with it an implicit and more menacing message: the PRC is now, as one senior official of the People's Bank put it at the time, "a big player," and what it does or fails to do in the economic realm can have large and potentially devastating effects on the well-being of other, lesser players.

One final possibility: because China promotes exports while restricting imports, it has run substantial trade surpluses in recent years and accumulated large foreign-exchange reserves. In 1998, for example, the PRC's reserves stood at over $140 billion, second only to Japan's. If China continues to amass large reserves and if, as seems likely, the bulk of these are held in dollar-denominated assets, they could provide Beijing with an economic weapon against the United States. By dumping its reserves at the right moment, China might hope to trigger a run on the dollar, an increase in U.S interest rates, and perhaps a stock-market crash. It is true that such an attack, if it produced the intended immediate results, could also do serious damage to China's economy; the mutually destructive effects of attempts at currency manipulation and financial coercion have caused some analysts to compare them with nuclear weapons. But the prospect of mutual devastation does not necessarily provide an ironclad guarantee that a weapon will never be used.

The bottom line is simple: one way or another, China's economic growth will provide it with an increasing array of instruments with which to try to exert influence on other countries and, if it chooses, to carry forward a strategic competition with the United States.

III

THE SECOND dimension of a possible struggle for mastery in Asia will be military. From the early 1970's until (at the latest) the early 1990's, the United States and the PRC pursued what might be described as parallel rather than convergent military programs. While both countries were augmenting their capabilities and planning for future warfare, neither was explicitly or overtly focusing its activities on the other. Rather, for almost two decades, American and Chinese defense planners shared a

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common adversary: the Soviet Union. The weakening and subsequent collapse of the USSR removed the basis for this tacit Sino-American alliance, and also freed the two countries to devote more of their military resources to other potential rivals. Over the course of the 1990's, they came increasingly to regard each other in just this light.

Starting in 1985, China's armed forces, at the direction of their top political leaders, downgraded preparations for an "early, major, and nuclear war" with the Soviet Union and began to focus on the possibility of local, limited wars on China's periphery. This change had the general effect of directing the attention of the Chinese military outward—away from the need to absorb a massive enemy nuclear attack and subsequent invasion and toward the problem of projecting power at least some distance from China's frontiers. Then, the 1991 Gulf war heightened Chinese awareness of the military impact of new technologies and, partly as a result, caused Chinese planners to concentrate with new intensity on the possibility of a future conflict with the United States. According to Allen Whiting, writing in the *China Quarterly*, "war games played against the American 'enemy' have been standard since 1991."

For a variety of reasons, the United States has been slower to focus similar attention on China. During the early post-cold-war years, American armed forces were preoccupied first with fighting the Gulf war, then with managing reductions in their size and budget, and finally with carrying out a variety of operations, from peacekeeping missions of varying scale to a sizable air war in Kosovo. Throughout the 1990's and down to the present there was also a strong political inhibition against considering China a future military rival.

The turning point probably came in 1995-96, when China fired ballistic missiles in the Taiwan Strait. Since then, as the *Washington Post* correspondent Thomas Ricks has reported, U.S. military planners have been devoting greater energy to potential Asian contingencies and, however reluctantly, thinking about a possible confrontation with China. If present trends continue, over the next several years the United States and China will move toward an increasingly obvious military competition, with several facets.

Offense vs. Defense

CHINA HAS placed heavy emphasis on the development and deployment of missiles: short-, intermediate-, and long-range, nuclear and conventional, cruise and ballistic.

Since the mid-1990's, the PRC has added substantially to its arsenal of short-range conventional ballistic missiles (the DF-11's and DF-15's), and by 2005 it is expected to have roughly 600 of these weapons within range of Taiwan.* Older, liquid-fueled, intermediate-range missiles capable of striking targets throughout East and South Asia with nuclear weapons (DF-3A's) are being supplemented with newer, more accurate, solid-fueled missiles (DF-21A's). Finally, China's small force of fixed, liquid-fueled intercontinental-range rockets (DF-5's and DF-5A's) is expected to be upgraded over the course of the next decade to include two new types of land-based mobile missile (the DF-31 and DF-41, both of which may be capable of carrying multiple warheads) and one submarine-launched ballistic missile (the JL-2). If, as is widely assumed, some of these weapons are equipped with multiple warheads, the number of weapons deliverable against the United States will rise into the low hundreds. If the number of new launchers deployed is larger than expected, that total could grow to as many as 1,000.

China's interest in missiles may be due in part to the fact that, as opposed to manned long-range aircraft, submarines, or surface naval vessels, they are relatively cheap, comparatively simple, and potentially very effective. While the Chinese air force and navy continue to work at acquiring and improving more traditional kinds of military systems, missiles, as the analyst Mark Stokes observes, "are rapidly becoming the sole credible long-range firepower projection asset which the [military] has in its inventory, and this will remain likely true for the foreseeable future."

At the same time that China has been augmenting its missile forces, the United States has been developing and moving toward the deployment of both national and theater ballistic-missile defense systems. Our intensified interest in defense was not driven initially by concern over China, but rather by the threat from "rogue" states like North Korea and Iran. Nevertheless, at least since the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis, the question of the possible utility of defenses against Chinese missiles has inevitably arisen. For their part, and whatever American decision-makers may say or believe, Chinese strategists probably *assume* that our missile-defense programs are directed in large measure at blunting their offensive forces.

For the moment, PRC planners have reason to

* In the aftermath of the Gulf war, the Chinese military also reportedly intensified its efforts to develop long-range land-attack cruise missiles.

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hope that American defensive deployments will be delayed by some combination of technical problems, budgetary concerns, domestic political developments, and diplomatic pressure. But they are unlikely to be so imprudent as to ignore the possibility that, sooner or later, some kinds of defenses will be deployed. Even a limited national missile-defense system could well be capable of intercepting all of the PRC's present ICBM force. If they cannot derail the U.S. National Missile Defense (NMD) program through diplomatic means, the Chinese will therefore want to be in a position to defeat it militarily, probably by deploying larger numbers of missiles, at least some of which will be capable of carrying either decoys or multiple warheads. (Another form of insurance might be submarines carrying long-range cruise missiles, or ballistic missiles that could be fired at depressed trajectories.)

Then there is the prospect that the United States may deploy *theater* missile defenses (TMD), either alone or in conjunction with its regional friends and allies. A working TMD system would decrease China's confidence in its ability to intimidate other Asian countries by threatening to attack them with nuclear weapons; it might also seriously complicate Chinese hopes of disrupting American military operations in the western Pacific by quickly disabling a handful of fixed bases and facilities. A Japan able to shelter behind a defensive shield might also feel freer to develop its own offensive capabilities, perhaps even including nuclear weapons. Last but not least, a TMD system deployed on or around Taiwan could blunt what is now China's most potent threat against the island, perhaps opening the way for moves toward formal independence.

China's options for responding to these possibilities are similar to those it has in dealing with NMD, although, because of the shorter distances involved, some countermeasures may be easier and less expensive to implement. Preventing deployment in the first place through diplomacy and intimidation would be an obvious first choice. Preparing to swamp a TMD system with ever-larger numbers of warheads would be another. Circumventing defenses by developing long-range cruise missiles or other means of attack would be a third. Finally, if the United States and its allies seemed to be developing defenses sufficiently capable to blunt a *conventional* missile attack, the Chinese might seek to up the ante by adding to their force of short- and intermediate-range missiles equipped with nuclear warheads. A defensive system able to shoot down 75 percent of the missiles fired against it might look very impressive against an all-conventional attack, but much less so against one that could contain a mix of more and less destructive warheads.

Projecting Power

THE UNITED States is today able to project conventional air and naval power virtually unimpeded anywhere in the western Pacific, including all along China's eastern seaboard and, conceivably, hundreds of miles inland. American forces, brought to bear at long distances, and with the help of a handful of local friends and allies, pose the single greatest obstacle to any Chinese effort to establish itself as the dominant power in East Asia. Chinese planners must fear that, in a crisis or future conflict, the U.S. could close China's ports, unleash precision conventional attacks with cruise missiles and stealthy manned aircraft against targets on the Chinese mainland, and, by sinking Chinese submarines and surface ships, break an attempted blockade of Taiwan. If they are to displace the United States as East Asia's dominant military power, Chinese strategists must come up with ways of countering American forces.

I have already mentioned one such way: the possible use of missiles against U.S. regional bases. At present and for the foreseeable future, the ability of the United States to sustain air and naval operations in the western Pacific depends heavily on access to a small number of facilities in Japan and South Korea. If these (plus a handful of others in Singapore, Australia, and perhaps in the Philippines and Guam) can be destroyed or rendered unusable, America's ability to project power will fall precipitously.

Next in order of technical difficulty for China would be acquiring weapons with which to sink American surface ships, and especially the aircraft carriers on which the United States now relies so heavily. In most conflicts involving U.S. and Chinese forces, these vessels would have to operate at the far western edge of the Pacific and might therefore be especially vulnerable to attacks by cruise missiles, torpedoes, and intelligent mines. Such weapons could be unleashed in large numbers from swarms of relatively inexpensive platforms, including small submarines and surface ships, and remotely-piloted aerial vehicles. Anticarrier attacks by land-based ballistic missiles are another possibility.

More challenging than sinking carriers but of potentially even greater benefit would be the capacity to disable American intelligence, communi-

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cations, and navigation satellites and to disrupt U.S. information systems, both in the region and beyond. In contrast to China, which in conflicts close to home would enjoy the benefits of interior lines of communication, the United States would have to control its forces at great distances from home and across a vast theater of operations. Even temporary disruptions could have devastating and potentially disastrous consequences. This is something that has not escaped the attention of Chinese observers. According to Mark Stokes, "Chinese strategists and engineers perceive U.S. reliance on communications, reconnaissance, and navigation satellites as a potential 'Achilles' heel,'" and they are looking for ways to attack it, including by means of ground-based lasers, jammers, and kinetic kill vehicles.

Defeating American power projection will also require defending Chinese territory against airborne attack. Toward this end China has apparently been devoting considerable resources to developing a nationwide air-defense system capable of locating, tracking, and intercepting aircraft and cruise missiles, including those with stealthy characteristics. Improved coastal defenses, perhaps including antisubmarine-warfare ships, attack submarines, and aircraft, could also force U.S. cruise-missile-launching submarines to operate at greater distances from China's shores, thereby reducing the array of targets they could cover.

In this regard, and more generally, the thrust of Chinese programs will be to push American forces back and, at the very least, seriously complicate their efforts to operate in the western Pacific.

Deterrence

For decades we have promised, explicitly or otherwise, to defend our Asian allies if they were attacked by China. Until very recently we have done so from a position of virtual immunity to direct Chinese attack on our own soil. The development of Chinese long-range strike capabilities and, in particular, a visible and substantial increase in China's ability to hit the continental United States with nuclear weapons could raise profound questions in Asia about the continuing utility of the American nuclear "umbrella."

Assuming for the moment that the United States does *not* go forward with a national missile-defense system, the deployment by China of a fairly limited number of sea- and land-based mobile missiles will effectively guarantee it a secure second-strike capability. As things now stand, the small Chinese ICBM force would take hours to make ready for launch, and it could conceivably be destroyed in a preemptive American attack, perhaps one involving only the use of precision conventional weapons. A larger, more diverse, and more mobile force of solid-fueled rockets will be far less vulnerable. Such a force could conceivably also be used to conduct limited attacks on U.S. military targets rather than simply lobbing a few large and inaccurate warheads at a handful of American cities.

In certain respects, the next ten to fifteen years may thus come to resemble the early stages of the cold war. In the late 1940's and well into the 1950's, the United States enjoyed a huge advantage in its nuclear competition with the Soviet Union. American forces operating from bases around the Eurasian periphery (and, with the introduction of the B-52 bomber, from American soil) were poised to deliver nuclear weapons virtually anywhere in the USSR; for a long time, the Soviets had no comparable capability. Yet even the *anticipated* Soviet development of intercontinental bombers and ballistic missiles triggered major worries within the Western alliance. American policy-makers were long preoccupied with convincing their NATO allies, the Soviets, and perhaps themselves that the United States would, indeed, intervene in a European war even if in doing so it risked nuclear attack on its own soil.

Much of what the United States did in Europe—maintaining and augmenting ground forces, deploying large numbers of tactical nuclear weapons, tolerating (and even encouraging) the acquisition of national nuclear forces by at least two key allies, and increasing the flexibility of American strategic nuclear forces—was motivated by the desire to strengthen deterrence in the face of increasing Soviet intercontinental-strike capabilities. Until nearly the final moments of the cold war, the Soviets, for their part, tried to raise doubts about American resolve as a way of weakening the Western alliance. There is already some evidence that China may try to use similar tactics to undermine the U.S. position in Asia.

In 1995, a high-ranking Chinese official was widely quoted as having told a visitor that the United States would not come to Taiwan's rescue because, in the end, Americans cared more about Los Angeles than Taipei. More recently, during the run-up to the March 2000 Taiwanese presidential election, China's official armed-forces newspaper warned that, unlike Iraq or Yugoslavia, China is "a country that has certain abilities of launching strategic counterattack and the capacity of launching a

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long-distance strike.... It is not a wise move to be at war with a country such as China, a point which the U.S. policy-makers know fairly well also."

These threats were evidently intended to give pause to anyone contemplating possible conventional strikes on Chinese forces or territory in the context of a fight over Taiwan. In the future, Chinese strategists may issue more generalized warnings, perhaps suggesting that the growth in their striking power means that the United States will have to contemplate sacrificing Washington to save Tokyo, or Seoul, or Sidney, or Manila, or Singapore. Such comments would be directed more at Asian than at American audiences, and their aim would be not so much to deter the United States as to raise questions about the ability of the United States to deter China. The ultimate aim would be to raise doubts in the minds of Asian observers as to the continuing value of American security commitments.

IV

ANY INTENSIFIED military rivalry between the United States and China will be accompanied by a stepped-up competition in the political or diplomatic realm, which is the third dimension of a possible future struggle in Asia. The central issue of this particular contest would be the making and breaking of alliances.

As in the military arena, the United States starts with a number of very considerable advantages: it enjoys good relations with most countries in East Asia and has alliance ties or other security connections with many of them, including most of the wealthiest and most powerful. China, on the other hand, has problematic relationships with a number of major players in both East and South Asia and its closest collaborators (North Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Russia) suffer from profound domestic liabilities.

The United States also benefits from what is, for the moment at least, a major geopolitical advantage: the possible threat posed by the sheer magnitude of its material power is offset to a degree by its remoteness from the heart of Asia. Because it is far away, the U.S. is less menacing than China, which is nearby and thus potentially overwhelming. Indeed, as China's capabilities grow, there may be a strong tendency on the part of the other Asian states to draw closer to one another, and to the United States, in order to counterbalance Chinese power and preserve their own independence.

If power-balancing were automatic and inevitable, the United States could afford to sit back and let nature take its course. But the societies of Northeast and Southeast Asia also have long historical experience with Chinese preponderance, and they could choose to live with it again in the future, especially if the only alternative appeared to be a period of protracted and dangerous rivalry between China and the United States. Moreover, if the United States appears weak and vacillating, or if its withdrawal from the region begins to seem inevitable, these countries may conclude that they have little choice but to cut the best deal they can.

The aim of Chinese diplomatic strategy, therefore, will be to turn America's geographical remoteness from an advantage to a disadvantage, weakening existing American relationships and preventing the formation of new ones, feeding doubts about U.S. resolve and staying power, and making China's rise seem both as inevitable, and as unthreatening, as possible.

How might this be done?

First, Chinese leaders could transform their country's longstanding but largely rhetorical opposition to bilateral military alliances into a central feature of their foreign policy. In the 1970's and 1980's, the Chinese were willing to accept that America's Asian alliances served the useful purpose of countering Soviet "hegemonism." During the 1990's, China preferred that Japan continue under American tutelage rather than being left free to expand its power and pursue its own objectives. But, as has already begun to happen, deteriorating U.S.-PRC relations and stepped-up efforts at U.S.-Japan security cooperation will cause Chinese strategists to reexamine their permissive position and ultimately to take a much tougher, anti-alliance stance.

Accompanying this shift could be the amplification of another persistent theme in Chinese diplomacy. As it works to displace the United States from Asia, China will intensify its campaign against "hegemony" by criticizing America's cultural and economic "imperialism" and attacking its arrogance and intrusiveness. China will seek friends among those in Asia (and beyond) who feel they have suffered at the hands of U.S. corporations, American-led international institutions, and/or American efforts to enforce conformity with U.S. views on political liberties and human rights. At the same time that it seeks to gain the benefits of greater integration into the world economy, China could also emerge as a leading critic of the ills of globalization and a leading proponent of various kinds of regional (as opposed to global and hence American-dominated) institutions. Chinese policy may even take on

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a racial aspect, perhaps appealing to those who share ethnic and cultural characteristics across East Asia or, more generally, making the case against "the West" and for "Asia for the Asians."

AS IT has done in recent years, China will no doubt become an even more enthusiastic participant in multilateral security dialogues and other forums in Asia, using them to convey the image of a good international citizen and an open, unthreatening power. Active Chinese participation will also ensure that multilateral mechanisms cannot be used against the PRC's interests. As relations with the United States degenerate, China may also begin to advocate *new* institutions that will exclude "non-Asian" powers and seek "local" solutions to regional economic, environmental, and security problems.

Its strictures against bilateral alliances notwithstanding, China will also attempt to develop its own "strategic partnerships," both in Asia and beyond. In some cases (as in its current dealings with Russia, Israel, and a number of European countries), China's goal will be to obtain military hardware and advanced technology. In others (as, most likely, with Pakistan) the PRC will be supporting the enemy of an enemy (India).

Next, in order to circumvent U.S. efforts to apply economic sanctions or technology controls, China may hope to cultivate a much closer relationship with a more independent and perhaps openly anti-American European Union. In the Persian Gulf region, it may align itself more openly with Iran as a way of deflecting American attention and scarce military resources from East Asia, and in order to ensure its own access to oil. In continental Southeast Asia (especially Myanmar and Thailand), it may use threats and inducements to gain access to facilities for its own military forces or to deny access to the forces of its rivals. In Central Asia, it may work to establish client regimes that will protect oil pipelines and control Islamist groups that might otherwise foment discontent among China's own non-Han minorities.

Finally, while China will probably continue to shun any pretension to global power, it may provide assistance to states or nonstate actors around the world that see themselves as being opposed to the United States. Like the Soviet Union before it, albeit more for geopolitical than for ideological reasons, China could become a low-key but important supporter of rebel movements, "rogue states," and terrorist groups throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Central and Latin America.

BUT IT is in East Asia, their main sphere of activity, that Chinese strategists will most want to focus attention. In order to do this, they will probably aim first to secure their continental "rear areas." Toward this end, China will work hard to maintain a good relationship with Russia and to avoid being drawn into debilitating conflicts in Central Asia. In South Asia, although China will probably opt to continue its present policy of supporting Pakistan to distract India, it could also try to take India out of the larger strategic equation by offering a spheres-of-influence arrangement that would leave India dominant on the subcontinent in exchange for its continued nonalignment.

In East Asia itself, China may seek to execute the diplomatic equivalent of a pincer movement, applying pressure from the north (the Korean peninsula) and the south (the South China Sea) in order to gain its primary objectives at the center: the acquisition of Taiwan and the neutralization of Japan. Following the success of an initial gambit this past spring, the Chinese will probably continue to press North Korea to negotiate with the South, while at the same time attempting to build themselves up as the indispensable intermediary. In return for its continued help in delivering North Korea, China may hope to gain some assurances from South Korea about the role of the United States on the peninsula. Even if Chinese strategists cannot extract much in the way of concrete promises, they may nevertheless come to believe that progress toward reunification will unleash popular forces in the South that will lead irresistibly to an American withdrawal. Continued improvement in North-South relations would also help to lull Japan and undermine U.S. efforts to build support for theater missile defenses.

While these events are unfolding, the PRC will use a variety of tactics to aid the further extension of its influence in Southeast Asia. Here, in contrast to its role as peacemaker in Korea, it may show a harder, tougher face. An increase in piracy (perhaps supported covertly by China) could provide the justification for an expansion of naval activities in the South China Sea, enabling the PRC to assert its territorial claims in the area. China may also seek to encourage the activities of ethnic and religious separatist movements in Indonesia and the Philippines in the hope that, if these countries become wracked by civil unrest, they will be much less capable of acting to oppose the growth in Chinese power. After years of tolerating Singapore's military cooperation with the United States, China may also begin to press that country to choose sides or, at the very

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least, abandon its tilt toward the U.S. And if Chinese leaders feel the need to flex their muscles, and perhaps also to demonstrate the limits of American power and commitment, they may pick a fight they think they can win, most likely by provoking and then pummeling Vietnam in what their military planners have called a quick "local war with high-tech characteristics."

The consolidation of China's position to its north and south will set the stage for the final resolution of the core strategic issues of Japan and Taiwan. With regard to the former, China's goal must be to detach it from the United States without at the same time stimulating a resurgence of Japanese assertiveness and militarism. Despite their oft-expressed fears, Chinese strategists may become less worried about Japan as that country's population ages, its political system continues to founder, and its economy fails to regain its former luster. A Korean settlement that results in a greatly reduced U.S. role on the peninsula could yield a corresponding increase in Japanese discomfort at being the last major remaining outpost of American military power in Asia. If so, the moment may have arrived for China to offer Japan some kind of "grand bargain," perhaps involving a mutual non-aggression pact and a pledge to maintain freedom of navigation in the South China Sea in exchange for a sharp curtailment or outright abrogation of the U.S.-Japan alliance. At this point, if not before, Taiwan would have little choice but to accept the PRC's terms for reunification.

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THESE, THEN, are the main elements of the possible struggle to come in Asia. Of course, it is one thing for Chinese strategists to fantasize about easing the U.S. out of East Asia without firing a shot; actually doing so is another matter altogether. For one thing, if the PRC is impatient, if it underestimates the impact of its actions on its opponents, if it is excessively high-handed or overly brutal, it could well wind up stimulating precisely the kind of determined, unified response that could foil its plans and block its ambitions. For another thing, it is conceivable that China will mellow with the passage of time, or suffer from domestic weaknesses that will prevent it from pursuing its objectives in a consistent and effective way. And most important of all, the United States could either adjust its current policies so as to make an open Sino-American confrontation less likely or, if conflict cannot be avoided, prepare for its eventuality while simultaneously preserving America's own position in Asia.

If I have purposely refrained from dwelling on American strategic options in the coming decades, it is hardly because we are without them—whether economic, military, or political. Rather, it is because the first order of business is to see the situation plain—namely, that in several important respects a U.S.-PRC strategic competition is already under way, and there is a good chance that it is only going to become more intense and open. In recognizing these realities, the Chinese are well ahead of the United States.

Militarily, the PRC will continue to do what it is already doing: working to offset or neutralize current U.S. advantages, increasing its ability to target U.S. forces, facilities, and command-and-communications systems in, around, and over the western Pacific while improving its capacity to deter or defend against American attacks on its own forces and territory. These military activities will likely be accompanied by an effort to break up the American-led alliance system in Asia and ultimately to detach the United States from most of its present partners and to push it as far back across the Pacific as possible. To this end, the PRC will use every instrument at its disposal, including especially its growing economic clout.

In this respect, what one needs to bear in mind is that China will be a very different kind of strategic competitor from the Soviet Union. The PRC's size, dynamism, and relative openness confer a much greater ability to shape the behavior of other countries, thus helping to dissuade the United States from confrontation, diminishing the effectiveness of any unilateral American attempt to use economic instruments against it, driving a wedge between the U.S. and the other advanced industrial nations, and enhancing China's own capacity to exert influence over the countries in its region. The threat all this holds out to American interests can be countered, but first it must be acknowledged.

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