

Asia-Pacific Security Dynamics in the Obama Era

This book examines the critical changes to the Asia-Pacific security architecture emerging in the context of shifts in the global order as the Obama Administration's major strategic innovation and likely legacy unfold. The author reviews the state of the international security system during the Obama presidency, recording the Administration's Asia-Pacific inheritance, and tracing its efforts to chart a collaborative course aimed at retaining US primacy amidst strategic turbulence. While security discourses are coloured by relative US 'decline' and China's 'rise,' the book points out the competitive-cooperative complexity of interactions, with symbiotic economic ties moderating rivalry. Focusing on the military-security cutting edge of Sino-US dynamics, the narrative outlines the dangers posed by extreme nationalist dialectics in an interdependent milieu. It examines the policies of Japan, Australia, India and Russia towards the evolving Sino-US diarchy, while recording Washington's and Beijing's contrasting approaches to these allies and possible adversaries. The book concludes with observations on the loss of definition and clarity as the system evolves with multiple actors bidding for influence, and the need for statesmanship as the systemic fulcrum moves from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of International Politics, Asian Politics, American Politics, International Security and International Relations.

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A new world emerging

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Acronyms/Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABM	Anti-ballistic missile
AD	Air defence
ADMM+	ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meeting Plus
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AFPC	American Foreign Policy Council
AFPS	American Forces Press Service
AJIA	Australian Journal of International Affairs
AJISS	Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies
AOR	Area of Responsibility
AP	Associated Press
ASAT	Anti-satellite
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
A2/AD	Anti-access/Area-denial
AWC	Army War College
BMD	Ballistic missile defence
BMDA	Ballistic Missile Defence Agency
BMDR	Ballistic Missile Defence Review Report
CAS	Chinese Academy of Sciences
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CD	China Daily
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CICIR	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CIS	China International Studies
CISAC	Centre for International Security and Cooperation
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CJIP	The Chinese Journal of Political Science
CLAWS	Centre for Land Warfare Studies
CLM	China Leadership Monitor
CMC	Central Military Commission

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CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COIN	Counter-insurgency
CPC	Chinese Communist Party
CRI	China Radio International
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSBA	Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments
CSM	The Christian Science Monitor
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies
CVBG	Carrier Battle Groups
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DOD	Department of Defence
DOE	Department of Energy
DPCT	Defence Policy Coordination Talks
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EAS	East Asia Summit
EIA	Energy Information Administration
EW	Electronic warfare
FAS	Federation of American Scientists
FEER	The far Eastern Economic Review
FMPRC	Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China
FT	The Financial Times
FY	Financial Year
GT	Global Times
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	Inter-Continental ballistic missile
ICE	The Inventory of Conflict and Environment
IDSA	Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis
IHT	The International Herald Tribune
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
INSS	Institute for National Strategic Studies
IPCS	Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies
ISEAS	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
ISR	Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
JDF	Japan Defence Focus
JDI	Jane's Defence Industry
JDS	Jane's Defence Spending
JDW	Jane's Defence Weekly
JFQ	Joint Forces Quarterly
JIIA	Japan Institute of International Affairs
JIW	Jane's Intelligence Weekly
JMSDF	Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force
JNI	Jane's Navy International
JRL	Johnson's Russia List
JSDF	Japanese Self-Defence Forces

LAT	The Los Angeles Times
MDA	Missile Defence Agency
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MRBM	Medium-range ballistic missile
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDU	National Defence University
NIC	National Intelligence Council
NIDS	National Institute of Defence Studies
NMF	National Maritime Foundation
NPC	National People's Congress
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review Report
NYT	The New York Times
ONA	Office of Net Assessments
ONI	Office of Naval Intelligence
OTH	Over the horizon
PD	People's Daily
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAD	PLA Daily
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PTI	Press Trust of India
QDR	Quadrennial Defence Review Report
RIIA	Royal Institute of International Affairs
ROK	Republic of Korea
RSATA	Reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition
RSIS	Rajaratnam School of International Studies
SAC	Second Artillery Corps
SCMP	The South China Morning Post
SIIS	Shanghai Institute for International Studies
SSI	Strategic Studies Institute
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TOI	The Times of India
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicles
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USCC	US–China Economic and Security Review Commission
USFJ	US Forces, Japan
WPTO	Western Pacific Theatre of Operations
WSJ	The Wall Street Journal
WTO	World Trade Organization
WUC	World Uighur Congress
VOA	Voice of America

Preface

Hillary Clinton's decision to break with tradition and travel to Asia on her first foreign trip as the US Secretary of State in February 2009 suggested President Barack Obama's administration was focusing on trans-Pacific relations as its top strategic priority. The near-simultaneity of Clinton's arrival in Tokyo before going on to Jakarta, Seoul and Beijing, and the visit to Kabul, Islamabad and Delhi by Richard Holbrooke, Obama's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, stressed the importance Washington now attached to the wider Asia-Pacific region. So, after eight years of alleged neglect, was Asia being restored to pre-eminence in the US-led global security order? Clinton's comment that while the vexed issues of human rights, democracy and Tibet would not be neglected in exchanges with her Chinese hosts, these would not detract from the substance of a Sino-US partnership in meeting global challenges, pointed to a significant shift in emphasis.

However, shortly after Clinton's trip to Beijing, several Chinese vessels harassed the *USNS Impeccable*, a US naval surveillance ship, 75 miles south of China's Hainan Island, in the worst such encounter since a collision between a US electronic warfare (EW) aircraft and a Chinese fighter in April 2001.¹ Despite angry exchanges and fears of serious miscalculations,² both sides swiftly defused tensions. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi called on President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and other US leaders, setting out Beijing's response to Washington's initiative. Then, on the sidelines of a Group of 20 (G20) summit in London in early April 2009, Presidents Barack Obama and Hu Jintao appeared, at their very first bilateral encounter, to formalize the partnership Clinton had broached in Beijing.

Clearly, some things had changed in Sino-US relations. The question was – what did this shift entail in policy terms, and how would it manifest itself? How would it affect US relations with key regional allies – especially Japan, Australia and India? What would be the consequence for the post-1960s regional security architecture framed, fashioned and led by Washington? And how would that alter the global security order and the way it was managed? This volume seeks answers to these questions, drawing largely on primary documents from ministries of foreign affairs and defence in Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, Canberra, Delhi and Moscow – to establish what changes in

perception, policy and prescription were underway, and what their practical implications were, as the Obama Administration embarked on an era of managed transition. The work describes what promised to be a major transformation of the international security system, and an analysis of the processes which practitioners and students of international security diplomacy – political elites, officials, military commanders with strategic responsibilities, and academic scholars active in the field – should find of interest at a time of change.

While acknowledging the variegated nature of diplomacy and a multiplicity of elements shaping major-power engagements, this work focuses on the narrowly defined security and military realms of interactions. This specificity serves two purposes: it avoids the complexity of myriad dynamics, enabling a manageable approach to international relations, and it allows an examination of the evidence on the status of the security milieu informing strategic characteristics of the Asia-Pacific subordinate system at a time of fluidity which may engender systemic consequences. Security interactions exist within a spectrum with extremities marked by alliance and hostility. Visible as the cutting edge of ties, they reflect the nature and substance of relationships defining the security order.

For several years, the world's focus has been on the global economic and financial crises and efforts to overcome their worst effects. While almost nobody was watching, the global security architecture began undergoing profound changes. Since the emergence of a super-power bipolarity in 1945, systemic transformation of this scale had only been noted twice – first, in 1971–72, when America and China transmogrified their relationship, establishing a covert coalition against the Soviet Union and, then, in 1989–91, when bipolarity gave way to virtual unipolarity. Now, the system was entering another period of transitional turbulence from which would emerge a new security architecture whose outlines were as yet unformed. Some questioned if China's economic growth trajectory – the fundamental driver of regional and global change – would continue in its upward direction given the destructive potency of the economic and financial crises which gripped the world in 2008–9. But the timescales of the two categories – global economic crises and China's economic growth – differed.

The former, however deep, was likely to last no longer than years after which the broad framework of production, distribution and consumption would revive. 'The deeper forces driving China's rise will most probably persist long after the present crisis is over'.³ The long-term impact of the crises could, in fact, reinforce rather than negate 'the long-term shift of economic, political and strategic power towards China'.⁴ It is this presumed shift which probably constituted one of 'the great transformations of history'. As China's economic weight grew to challenge America's, and the concomitant power to shape the environment flowed from one to the other, perhaps for an extended period no major decision of global import could be effected without a consensus between the two. This formative if inadvertent duopoly would

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end the five-century-long era of Western domination of world affairs which began with Portuguese innovations in maritime navigation, commerce and dominance.⁵ This change, whose early glimmers were visible, portended a 'new world' – nowhere more apparent than across the Asia-Pacific theatre.

Uncertainty born of strategic fluidity, and the anxiety it generated, created a sharp edge to Sino-US competition, evident in Washington's roll-out in May 2010 of 'AirSea Battle', a new operational concept for the US Navy and Air Force to discard traditional patterns of operations and adopt a joint-service approach specifically to deter, and should deterrence fail, defeat in battle the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). Talks of architecture may be premature in a transitional era of systemic turbulence, but to deny the fluidity would suggest blindness to changing reality. If the Obama Administration offered any guide, it demonstrated recognition of the erosion of the post-Cold War paradigm of a Western liberal order undergirded by US primacy. Rhetoric of the maintenance of American 'leadership' and 'pre-eminence' was not surprising; in fact, anything else would be. But the nature of US leadership and the manner in which it is exercised would underscore the changes that were in train.

Unipolarity may not give way to multipolarity as smoothly as Chinese strategists began predicting in the 1990s, but the order struggling to emerge from the current flux is likely to be a function of the will and capacity of more than one 'hyperpower'. This work attempts to shine a light on this process of systemic transformation with the help of analyses conducted by official bodies, diplomats, and ministries and departments of defence whose organization, tasks, equipment, training, funding, purpose and *raison d'être* are likely to be shaped by the outcome, and by specialists and analysts within national security establishments in key Asia-Pacific countries. Other work, such as from security think-tanks and the media, has been used to fill gaps in the official narrative.

The book highlights the forces and processes drawing the contours of the emergent new paradigm. Trans-Pacific relations are evolving at the core of the international security, economic and commercial architecture. US interactions with key regional players – China, Japan, Australia, India, Russia and ASEAN – will define the as yet undefined regional security framework. The book unveils the trends which will inform the emergent system. This matters because what happens in this region will affect what happens globally, especially in the realm of twenty-first-century great-power relations. The dynamic of interactions among the above players, revolving round their relations with the US, will be a crucial component of this developing narrative. The book attempts a forensic examination of this dynamic.

This work concludes my series on the evolution of US–Chinese security interactions since 1949,⁶ taking up the narrative where the previous volume, *US-China Relations in the "Asia-Pacific" Century*, ended. That itself was a sequel to *US-China Cold War Collaboration, 1971–1989*, which had followed on from *Cold War in the High Himalayas*. The present volume updates the

account of the evolution of Great Power security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region, examining changes to the regional security architecture. The shifts are occurring in the context of the Obama Administration's strategic innovations and its likely legacy. The future often is another country; this volume introduces readers to this new, somewhat unfamiliar, country which this and the next generation will inhabit. It should help practitioners and observers to intellectually acclimatize in and prepare for this emergent environment.

The book is organized in six chapters. The prologue, 'Shifting tectonic plates' records the changes across the Pacific, best reflected in the political demise of leaders who had forged with President George W. Bush a 'democratic alliance' in Asia – Prime Ministers John Howard of Australia, Junichiro Koizumi of Japan and Atal Behari Vajpayee of India⁷ – before Bush himself receded from the scene. The final blow fell when America, rejecting the conservative framework put in place by the Bush Administration, elected Barack Obama as the 44th president. Political changes at the core of all four ruling elites underscored the fragility of the foundations on which the partnership's tacit anti-Chinese thrust had been fashioned.

The election of Barack Obama marked a radical shift in US political alignments after eight years of the Bush presidency. In foreign and national security policy, though, changes were modest. Federal agencies continued to discern grave challenges to US primacy in the Asia-Pacific region emanating from China's military modernization. The sharp end of America's regional power, the Pacific Command, insisted on maintaining America's hegemony across the theatre. However, even before Obama took office, some US analysts had noted the dynamic nature of power relations as Asian, especially Chinese, capability grew while Japan, India and Russia, too, began asserting their interests. At the heart of the new fluidity churned Sino-US interactions as Beijing's growing economic prowess gave it the tools, and the inclination, to defend its 'core interests'. Opinion varied as to the path China should, and would, take. As makers and shapers of opinion in Washington and Beijing debated the future, transitional fluidity became all too apparent. This was Obama's strategic inheritance.

The second chapter – 'Obama's early initiatives and Beijing's response' – examines the nature of the initial Sino-US dynamic in the Obama era. First hints indicated the abandonment of a hegemonic-unilateralist perspective for a more multilateralist view of the security system. This was reflected in Secretary Clinton's exchanges during her 2009 Asian trip. The erosion of primacy and America's struggle against it informed Obama's initial approaches to China. The pursuit of a collaborative 'partnership' in the context of a collegial management style at the systemic level produced some results. The global economic and financial crises underscored the semi-symbiotic linkages between America and China, but expectations diverged. America sought a China which would conform to the systemic regime enforced with US power; China saw the alliance-based security architecture as 'Cold War-orientated', iniquitous, ineffective and inappropriate. Beijing would not overturn an

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arrangement it had profited from but wished to reform it. Rejecting US demands for military transparency, Beijing built up the capacity to challenge US primacy, and began to do so in proximate waters. The US military, having identified China as the most likely peer-rival, readied contingency plans. The balance between strategic competition and economic interdependence waxed and waned. By the end of 2009, as seen in Copenhagen, competition appeared to have regained prominence. This dynamic interaction shaped the Obama Administration's early stance toward China.

The third chapter – 'The Japan–Australia–India strategic triangle' – examines the fluidity of security interactions among regional great powers. While the competitive-cooperative Sino-US dynamics reshaped the systemic core, the named secondary powers assumed increasing prominence. With Japan and Australia formally allied to America and India increasingly so aligned, these actors developed security inter-relationships parallel to their alliance with Washington. The resulting 'Quad', a strategic innovation, emerged as a countervailing front against China's growing power, although none admitted to such thinking. The fact that all four allies were formally liberal democracies gave them a 'value-based' ideational platform on which to fashion their joint endeavours against unnamed foes. With Quad members intensifying naval collaboration in the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the various Straits linking these maritime domains, China felt increasingly hemmed in. America's tacit acknowledgement of India as a nuclear power, India's growing defence links with Japan and Australia, and a steady coalescence of an undeclared 'democratic coalition' around China reinforced the region's strategic polarization. Against this incendiary backdrop, maritime territorial disputes acquired escalatory potential.

The fourth chapter – 'The Kremlin's gamesmanship' – explores the dynamics reshaping US–Russian interactions. The Obama Administration's efforts to 'reset' relations with Russia notched up several successes. The critical gains were an agreement to place their Cold War legacy behind them, treat each other with respect, and cooperate in areas of shared interest. This led to agreements on further reductions of strategic nuclear weapons and delivery systems, and on collaboration on a range of other issues. The most visible turn-around came in an exercise by US, Canadian and Russian air forces under the auspices of NORAD, a Cold-War framework devised to defend North America from Soviet missiles and aircraft. Moscow's grant of free air-passage for lethal US military flights into Afghanistan, unprecedented joint counter-narcotics operations in that tortured land, and coordination of policies vis-a-vis North Korea and Iran underscored a shift. However, Russian anger over US support for Georgia, threats to reject America's Euro-BMD project, and a flexing of military-diplomatic muscles across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans hinted at residual mistrust.

The fifth chapter – 'ASEAN's security nightmares' – examines regional implications of changing Sino-US dynamics in a sensitive patch of the western Pacific. America's determination to maintain its regional primacy by

expanding and reinvigorating alliance relations cultivated strong multilateral and bilateral ties to ASEAN member-states. During visits, cabinet officials and Obama himself asserted America's leadership, promising aid and offering defence-diplomatic support to actors with territorial disputes with China. As ASEAN sought to establish its 'centrality' in the emergent regional security architecture while maintaining its cohesion in the face of contrary pressures from America, China and India, overlapping maritime claims in the South China Sea took on a sharper profile in the security discourse. The congruence of US 'national interests' with those of Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore reinforced the coalescence of a containment-coalition around China. Beijing's robust reaction threatened to inflict severe disruptions and damage on the foundational economic-commercial links on which East Asia had grown prosperous.

The epilogue, 'A new Cold War?' examines the forces driving systemic shifts in the Asia-Pacific region, and their likely outcome. The Obama Administration realized a determination to maintain US primacy amidst systemic fluidity generating transitional uncertainties with efforts to fashion a global network of alliances. Diplomacy strengthened trans-Pacific partnerships while the military prong devised a new operational concept, 'AirSea Battle', to defeat Chinese anti-access/area-denial capabilities and secure America's hegemonic dominance. This reliance on coercion as the cutting edge of American power at a time of global economic and financial crises triggered debates over the sustainability of the US-led order. With the system-manager's influence eroded at home and abroad, and secondary powers were increasingly assertive in their efforts to establish their locus, the security system betrayed potential volatility.

The combination of cooperative and competitive trends made for an occasionally confusing strategic milieu. How the Obama Administration helped America and the world make the transition to this new, largely indeterminate era, would be fundamental to our collective future. Efforts to impose structure and definition using twentieth-century tools in a globalized, interdependent, environment promised few gains, but the statesmanship necessary to overcome that fundamental conundrum remained less than obvious. The quest for clarity persisted as the defining feature of the world Obama's America helped to create and confronted. That is the narrative at the heart of this account.



Map 1.1 The Asia-Pacific strategic security theatre.

Prologue

Shifting tectonic plates

Something old, something new

Similarities between the collision between a US EP-3 electronic warfare (EW) aircraft and a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) J-8II fighter near Hainan Island on 1 April 2001, and the 'harassment' of a surveillance ship, the *USNS Impeccable*, by Chinese 'Fisheries Administration' vessels and trawlers near Hainan in March 2009 may have been coincidental. The EP-3 and the J-8II collided about 100 km south-east of Hainan; the *Impeccable* met its tormentors about 120 km south of the island.¹ Both incidents followed a novice president's assumption of office in Washington, neither of whose campaign comments had exuded much warmth for China. Both had promised to break with their predecessor in key policy areas. Fluid bilateral relations and fresh perspectives on US primacy in the global security order increased uncertainties over the likely direction of effort in the new dispensation. Against this backdrop, a hint of Chinese muscularity might not have been unexpected.

The outcomes in the two instances were similar: public expression of angst, insistence that each side's own aircraft or vessels were operating within international law, and a warning that such behaviour by the other side could only hurt relations. Quiet diplomacy resulted in mutual adjustments being made; and eventual efforts to prevent recurrence led to greater security cooperation.

With a belief propounded by Secretary of State Alexander Haig in the early 1980s that 'In terms of the strategic interests of the United States and the West in the last quarter of the twentieth century, China may be the most important country in the world',² vying for prominence at the centrist core of America's national security establishment,³ Sino-US tensions alternated with amity. However, the context varied. In September 2001, a catastrophic assault by *al-Qaeda* on Washington and New York shook America's confidence in its ability to defend itself, not to speak of maintaining its primacy. It required a collaborative enterprise of global proportions. Past cooperation with China in ridding Afghanistan of Soviet forces, an exercise which had spawned *al-Qaeda*, now required accessing Chinese

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intelligence records.⁴ Cooperation was necessary. Radical Islamist violence had not been extirpated in 2009, but Muslim militancy did not appear to pose as acute a threat to Western interests than as it had in 2001. Also, by 2008, neo-conservative thinking, which emerged strongly when the Soviet Union approached its collapse, informing American national security discourse,⁵ had lost appeal.

These views, represented by Vice President Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, and officials like Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, John Bolton and Richard Perle,⁶ soon suffered reverses. With the invasion of Iraq turning out to be an intractable war of choice, a major drain on the country's blood and treasure, an assault on its moral authority, and one based on false assumptions, voices critical of the neo-conservative strain regained favour. By the middle of Bush's second term, all of these officials except Cheney had left office. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defence Robert Gates redefined diplomacy, replacing combative aspects of American leadership with a more multilateralist approach, most visibly on Iran and North Korea. But it made little difference. Sceptics began raising fundamental questions, not about America's global leadership, which was a given⁷ – but about how it could be sustained over the long-term. Some sought ways of ensuring US dominance into the indefinite future; others, asking if this was a realistic proposition, urged a review of 'core' US security interests which could be advanced collectively. Many critics questioned the Bush Administration's grand strategy; some asked if it had one. One veteran practitioner noted:

America's long term interests are to integrate emerging and reemerging powers, like China, India and Russia into the broader, rule based international system our country has done so much to shape over the past sixty years ... China will not be a peer-competitor of the United States in the area of hard security for several decades, if ever. Nor will India, over the same time span, be able to compete with, or counterbalance, China.⁸

This was a subtle critique of the Bush Administration's failure to comprehend this reality, Washington's treatment of China as a peer-competitor, and its pursuit of a countervailing semi-tacit alliance with India. The author pointed to the consequence of policy failures – 'there is no doubt that America's ability to shape the international environment, influence foreign governments and lead international opinion has been very negatively affected by this loss of prestige and respect'.⁹ Barack Obama inherited a major challenge.

Analysts noted the significance of 'the rise of China and India and the return of Russia's aspirations to great power status ... especially the growing challenges but also opportunities posed by the rise of China and the reemergence of Russia'.¹⁰ The need for particular military capabilities would, in the long term, depend on how America was able to shape relations with Beijing and Moscow, and

how much we decide there is a need for a high-end military ‘hedge’ against negative developments in relations with China, in particular; the course of arms control, including efforts to prevent the weaponization of space and to work out new arrangements with Russia on strategic and other nuclear weapons; the relative priority to be assigned to (relatively inexpensive) missile defences; and the specific strategies required to meet US interests in preserving access to the seas and, where need be, sea control.¹¹

The costs of defending America’s global interests could not be significantly lowered, yet. If diplomacy with China and Russia failed, perhaps for its eventual success, substantial ‘hedging’ would be needed. But before influencing the world outside, America needed to ensure the education and health of its citizens, renewal of infrastructure, investments in the future of the economy, stability in the US financial system, reduction of dependence on imported oil, productive trade policies, and ‘the confidence of our people in our political and social system and the leadership of our nation’.¹² In short, a full agenda for Bush’s successor.

At the operational level, though, more prosaic explanations of US security interests persisted. Several former officials and advisers, discerning failings in Washington’s attempts to advance US strategic goals, offered advice to the 44th president. Most rejected the neo-conservative ideas which had informed Bush’s muscular approach to the world.¹³ One conservative contributor urged Bush’s successor to work harder to implement his predecessor’s hegemonic agenda because he thought it contained the essential kernel of America’s destiny of global leadership.¹⁴ These and similar works offered insights into the broad canvas on which America’s national security establishment drew the outlines of US policy in the post-Bush era.

China’s ‘rise’ featured prominently in the milieu in which Bush’s successor would have to steer the American enterprise, but US Sinologists were divided on what it actually meant, where a ‘risen’ China was headed and what responses would best serve America’s aims. Some saw China as an indispensable potential partner whose help was vital to addressing myriad transnational challenges. Others discerned in China’s authoritarian statist political system an essential challenge to the US-led liberal order which America and its allies must robustly counter and against which they must prevail.¹⁵ US armed services and their civilian leaders preferred the latter stance.¹⁶

The US Department of Defence (DOD) viewed China as a source of potential challenges, and a likely rival for regional dominance. It noted that America was encouraging China to participate as a ‘responsible international stakeholder’ by taking on a greater share of responsibility for the stability, resilience and growth of the global system. However, much uncertainty surrounded China’s future course, ‘in particular in the area of its expanding military power and how that power might be used’.¹⁷ US commanders fretted that they had ‘limited knowledge of the motivations, decision-making, and

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key capabilities' behind China's military modernization, and that Beijing had not explained 'the purposes and objectives of the PLA's modernizing military capabilities'. They feared this opacity posed 'risks to stability by increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation'. They warned, 'This situation will naturally and understandably lead to hedging against the unknown'.¹⁸ This endorsed the Bush Administration's view of China which had underpinned the DOD's Posture Review, leading to the redeployment of US expeditionary forces to the Pacific, with expanded and reorganized basing facilities in Guam, Okinawa and elsewhere.¹⁹

Just days into the Obama presidency, the DOD restated its concerns over the PLA's modernization vis-à-vis Taiwan, including increased deployments of short-range missiles across the Taiwan Strait. Chinese efforts to deter Taipei's pursuit of independence using coercion could, 'in the future be used to pressure Taiwan' towards a settlement on Beijing's terms, 'while simultaneously attempting to deter, delay, or deny any possible US support for the island in case of conflict'. The election of President Ma Ying-jeou and subsequent improvement in cross-Strait relations did not arrest the PLA's growth.

Washington also worried that the PLA's capabilities had 'implications beyond Taiwan'. While China used some of its new assets in peacekeeping, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, 'some of these capabilities, as well as other, more disruptive ones, could allow China to project power to ensure access to resources or enforce claims to disputed territories'.²⁰ The DOD was troubled by a combination of Beijing's issuance of 'incomplete defense expenditure figures', its engagement 'in actions that appear inconsistent with declaratory policies', its 'new phase of military development', and its articulation of 'roles and missions for the PLA that go beyond China's immediate territorial interests', but which left unclear 'the purposes and objectives of the PLA's evolving doctrine and capabilities'.

Washington did not accept Beijing's claims that its publication of military data and other national defence-related information demonstrated greater transparency, and that its intentions were strategically defensive. The DOD asserted:

The limited transparency in China's military and security affairs poses risks to stability by creating uncertainty and increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation. The United States continues to work with our allies and friends in the region to monitor these developments and adjust our policies accordingly.²¹

Viewing Beijing's actions with discomfiture, Washington continued to 'hedge'. At the interface between America's anxiety and Beijing's muscularity sat the two navies. For decades, the US Navy had dominated the Pacific Ocean without a rival to worry about. A substantial all-service military presence deployed across the Pacific at bases along America's West Coast, in Hawaii, Guam and Okinawa, and at other Japanese, South Korean, Singaporean,

Australian and Filipino sites, provided both a deterrent and combat capability. With carrier battle groups and other expeditionary forces forward deployed on foreign shores and military alliances underpinning war-fighting collaboration, America's trans-Pacific dominance had been unquestioned. The deployment of two CVBGs off Taiwan in 1996 in response to PLA drills had demonstrated US resolve and capability.

That sobering experience reinforced Beijing's interest in developing the naval power needed to defend strategic interests.²² As dialectics went, this was a key trigger. Beijing began a substantial naval modernization programme with domestic and foreign acquisitions expanding the PLAN's surface, submarine and naval-air components. That elicited its own responses. Several of the US Navy's most expensive acquisition programmes, and its initiatives for homeporting ships and for training sailors, were for developing or maintaining capabilities that could be 'useful or critical in countering improved Chinese maritime military capabilities'.²³ Sino-centricity was writ large in US assessments of its Asia-Pacific interests, strategy and operational requirements. Whether for preparing for a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, or for maintaining its military presence and influence in the Western Pacific, or for countering Chinese ballistic missile submarines, China's naval modernizations carried implications for US naval capabilities:

Preparing for a conflict in the Taiwan Strait area could place a premium on the following: on-station or early-arriving Navy forces, capabilities for defeating China's maritime anti-access forces, and capabilities for operating in an environment that could be characterized by information warfare and possibly electromagnetic pulse (EMP) and the use of nuclear weapons.²⁴

Congress was briefed on threatening aspects of China's naval modernization programme. The most worrying development was China's deployment of numerous 'theatre-range ballistic missiles (TBMs)' opposite Taiwan, and the development of anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) – TBMs armed with manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles capable of hitting moving ships. ASBMs threatened aircraft carriers, the heart of America's expeditionary capability.²⁵ PLAN was also modernizing its anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) which could attack other US platforms, such as carrier-escorts; land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) which could target US bases, especially in Guam, Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan; surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) with longer ranges and possibly an ability to hit aircraft with stealthy characteristics; and mines which could be used to blockade hostile countries and counter enemy submarines.²⁶ These analyses suggested an urgent review of US deployment of surface combatants, submarines, aircraft, BMD assets, combat personnel and support staff in the Asia-Pacific theatre.

In fact, the 2004 Global Posture Review had increased force deployments there. US naval basing underscored this shift. Although absolute hull numbers in

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Table 1.1 US major naval combat platform deployments 2001–07

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total naval vessels</i>	<i>PACOM warships</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
2001	315	141	44.8
2002	313	145	46.3
2003	297	139	46.8
2004	291	138	47.4
2005	282	133	47.2
2006	281	132	47.0
2007	279	151	54.0

service declined during the Bush presidency, the proportion of deployments to the Pacific increased. In FY 2001, the US Navy had 315 ships in service – 141 or 44.8 per cent were in the Pacific Fleet. In FY 2002, the figures were 313, and 145 or 46.3 per cent; in FY 2003, the numbers were 297, and 139 or 46.8 per cent; the FY 2004 figures were 291, and 138 vessels or 47.4 per cent; in FY 2005, 282, and 133 or 47.2 per cent; in FY 2006, 281, and 132 or 47 per cent; in FY 2007, the inventory fell to 279 ships, but 151 ships, or 54 per cent, were deployed to the Pacific.²⁷ These included six of the Navy’s 11 carriers, almost all of its 18 Aegis cruisers and destroyers modified for BMD operations, and 26 of the 57 nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs). Eight of the 14 ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs), too, were stationed in the Pacific.²⁸

By February 2008, all three of the SSN-21 *Seawolf*-class attack submarines were in the Pacific.²⁹ The Hawaii-based Pacific Command (PACOM) represented US determination to maintain its dominance. Its Area of Responsibility stretched across nearly half the planet’s surface area, comprising 43 states, with over 100 languages and 1,000 dialects spoken by nearly 60 per cent of the world’s population, including the four most populous lands, and five of the 10 largest economies.³⁰ This was where America geared up to deter or defeat its presumed peer-rival. PACOM’s operational framework offered insights into its mission and vision. First, the assumptions underpinning predictions of the future:

- US security interests will ‘remain coupled to the security of the broader interests’ in the region.
- USPACOM will retain at least the current level of ‘force presence and posture,’ both ‘essential to stability in the Asia-Pacific region’.
- US alliances will ‘remain strong and will promote increased regional and global security’.
- Multilateral cooperation will ‘continue to depend on US leadership and commitment of resources’.
- Violent organizations will continue to threaten security and stability.
- China will continue ‘to improve its military capabilities and its economic and political influence will continue to grow’.
- Demographic, trade and resource trends will pose key challenges.

- India ‘will remain a strategic partner,’ becoming an increasingly important actor.
- Russia will ‘reestablish its presence’ in the region.³¹

The most critical factor in this vast AOR was China’s military growth. The PLAN was now operating in parts of the Pacific where they had not until now, and China was building systems and platforms which, while not at the same level of capability as America’s, were not insignificant in their sophistication and numbers.

So we’re watching very carefully the Chinese military’s tactics, techniques, and procedures ... we make sure they are absolutely clear on our capabilities ... we’re going to let them know how good we are. We’re not going to disguise anything. We have a significant technological and capabilities advantage, and we’re not going to forfeit that.³²

There would be no question of ceding any strategic advantages to any putative peer-competitor.³³ To that end, PACOM worked on these ‘unconditional requirements’:

- PACOM was ‘first and foremost a warfighting command, committed to maintaining military superiority across the full spectrum of operations’.
- PACOM ‘profoundly appreciates the importance of bilateral and multilateral approaches to overcoming security challenges and maintaining regional stability’.
- PACOM ‘will not permit conditions which impede’ freedom of movement in and ‘secure access to all domains’; nor would it ‘tolerate disruptions to global supply chains or threats to lines of communications and commerce’.
- PACOM’s success in this ‘complex security environment’ demanded a high degree of coordination, integration and unity of effort within the DOD and across the government, allowing PACOM to ‘effectively leverage all instruments of national power’.³⁴

PACOM’s objectives were: Protect the Homeland, maintain a robust military capability, develop security cooperation, strengthen relations with allies and partners, reduce violent extremism, deter military aggression, and deter adversaries from using weapons of mass destruction (WMD).³⁵ What for America and its allies were benign objectives, enforced with PACOM’s unrivalled war-fighting capabilities must have engendered deep anxiety in others. Anyone who questioned the US-led order faced an insuperable coercive power deployed thousands of miles from American shores. This necessary tool for maintaining order and stability would have appeared as an existential threat to players who disagreed with the US-led dispensation. This had been the regional security environment since the Soviet Union’s demise, but now,

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with economic, political and military changes stirring, new forces and alignments appeared to be crystallizing.

So, what of the vision that should guide America as it strove to restore its status of the unquestioned world leader, international security system-manager, and core of the global order? Most strategists suggested that unquestioned leadership was no longer tenable. One noted that ‘A new grand strategy for the United States should be compatible with the nation’s fundamental values and capable of achieving American goals in the world order that will emerge in the decades ahead’.³⁶ He recommended acknowledgement of the loss of America’s primacy, the erosion of dominance, and the passing of the ‘unipolar moment’. America ought to ‘prepare itself for a multipolar world in which it is not a solitary hegemon but rather one of several great powers, even if it is the most powerful for decades to come’. America must ‘cooperate in the interest of security with other major powers either as a member of a great-power concert or as a participant in an alliance against one or more powerful aggressors’.³⁷ America could no longer act as a hegemon, and unilateral ‘missions of dissuasion and reassurance, critical to the hegemonic strategy’, must be replaced with more realistic and affordable core missions – ‘deterrence, homeland defense, securing the global commons, power projection, and expeditionary intervention’.³⁸

Some analysts asserted that the Asia-Pacific region was more important to the USA now than ever before. ‘A geopolitical shift toward Asia is underway which could easily be accelerated as a result of the ongoing global economic crisis. The region is reemerging as a central political and economic player and is already an engine of the global economy’. Fretting that while ‘Asia’s importance has grown, Washington has been focused elsewhere’, they urged the incoming Administration to fashion ‘a clear strategy to guide US policy, one that will signal US objectives and intent to allies, friends, and potential adversaries’.³⁹ They posited that America’s Asia-Pacific strategy must advance these US national security interests:

- Defence of the US homeland, territories, citizens, allies, and interests.
- Regional stability and the absence of any dominant power or coalition that would threaten or impede US access or interests.
- Regional prosperity and the promotion of free trade and market access.
- A stable, secure, proliferation-free global nuclear order.
- Promotion of global norms and values, such as good governance, democracy, and individual human rights and religious freedom.
- Ensuring freedom of navigation, an essential prerequisite for stability and the protection of American interests.⁴⁰ In short, a status-quo-oriented perspective.

Maintaining the alliance structure was central to sustaining America’s stature, if not its leadership: ‘Our allies may be frustrating at times, but we must give them precedence until China becomes ... a “responsible stakeholder” – or ...

a democracy'.⁴¹ However, China, the core of America's concerns, faced likely discontinuities. While many observers assumed China's economic growth, power potential and political clout would continue on their upward trajectory, pitfalls abounded: 'its looming demographic troubles are very real, the potential for resource or environmental crises is already evident, and a sudden unravelling of the brittle, authoritarian, and increasingly corrupt political system is hardly beyond the realm of possibility'. So, Obama should 'devote some attention to what such seemingly low-probability alternatives for China's future might portend'.⁴²

Peace and stability demanded heightened American standing. Washington ought to raise its political, economic, and diplomatic profile in South-East Asia 'while sustaining USPACOM bilateral and multilateral exercises, training programs, and civic action cooperation with regional militaries and governments'.⁴³ This would allow a degree of flexibility that America would need under changed circumstances.

Washington can play the role of a balancer and stabilizer in Asia where the interests of several rising great powers could easily clash with one another. Although the United States cannot be the predominant great power in Asia, it can work with different Asian nations to make sure that no other nation does so either.⁴⁴

A key role, then, but no longer a hegemonic one. Making such a shift was not, however, just a matter of executive fiat; it needed a thorough assessment of America's interests, and an evaluation of means and ends. A break with the past was crucial. The Bush era's 'unilateralism of the last eight years' must be reversed. Washington must attend to the region's economic rather than just the security concerns, and work with a 'revitalized APEC' (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and such Asian bodies such as ASEAN+3, the Chiang Mai Initiative and the East Asia Summit. This would signal to Asia that 'the United States respects its collective efforts at cooperation and is willing to partner with the region'.⁴⁵ How would this transition from the unquestionable leader to a collaborative partner be effected? Well, the semantics would have to change. Obama would have to 'scrub much of the long-used rhetoric, which is out of date and sends hegemonic and condescending signals' to Asian societies. 'Asians do not wish to be "led" by the United States, and it is paternalistic to assume so. It is better to pursue egalitarian "partnerships," both rhetorical and real'.⁴⁶

Talk of 'sustaining American primacy' and 'strategic hedging' could be counterproductive, as it indicated 'a certain degree of hostility toward Beijing' while placing many US allies and partners 'in an awkward position, as many do not wish to join in such a "soft containment" cabal'.⁴⁷ A nuanced adaptation to the status of a *primus inter pares*, in this view, was the realistic way to manage the unipolar-to-multipolar transition, and retain influence. As the

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Obama presidency dawned, these were the dominant strands of the Asia-Pacific-focused non-military US strategic discourse.

The view from Beijing

Given the pre-eminence assigned to China's 'rise' in this emerging 'new' world, a look at Chinese thinking would be apposite. Since 2002, Chinese analysts had debated the nature and consequences of the growth of China's 'comprehensive national power', reaching a consensus that the first two decades of the twenty-first century offered a 'strategic opportunity' to China.⁴⁸ Some thought a conciliatory approach to America would allow Beijing the time and space it needed to pursue its developmental goals; others maintained that Beijing 'must fully recognize fundamental clashes arising out of changes in relative China-US power levels during the post-Cold War era, (and) most notably that strategic conciliation policies will not attain US cooperation'.⁴⁹

This needed to be remembered while implementing the long-term economic aims enunciated since 1978-79. Leaders from Deng Xiaoping through Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao articulated and refined the strategic developmental goals presented at the 13th Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress in 1987 to raise China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the level of a 'medium developed country' by 2050.⁵⁰ Security challenges had constrained China's capacity to pursue this objective. Still, consistent devotion to this end, occasional turbulence notwithstanding, succeeded to the extent that by the turn of the century, China's spectacular growth had emerged as the most significant development in reshaping world politics in the post-Cold War world.⁵¹

The Soviet Empire's largely unanticipated collapse, and China's own domestic difficulties in 1989-91, triggered substantial analyses by official bureaus, Party-run think-tanks and scholars of the turbulence afflicting the international system, and China's changing locus within it. Socialism's dramatic 'defeat' across most of Eurasia, America's overwhelming military-technological victory in the 1991 Gulf War, and the advent of a 'China threat' theory circulating in American political circles in the 1990s generated Chinese insecurity.⁵² While many factors contributed to Sino-US tensions, few affected these as acutely as differences over Taiwan's status.

Assertions of Taiwanese autonomy and a worsening of Sino-US relations over Washington's support for Taipei culminating in Chinese military drills and missile tests in 1995-96, and America's deployment of two carrier battle groups off Taiwanese waters, had triggered a crisis.⁵³ Fears of a possible attack by proponents of the 'China threat theory'⁵⁴ led Chinese analysts to devise a framework for 'measuring' the power of states and assessing their 'power-status' vis-à-vis other major powers. They formulated 'comprehensive national power' combining the cumulative and inter-active effects of economic, political/diplomatic and military elements. Different schools used varying categories and indices of power components. Beijing's Tsinghua University used eight categories comprising 23 indices of power factors; scholars at the

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) used eight categories with 64 indices; those at the PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS) had a framework of seven categories made up of 29 secondary indices and over 100 tertiary ones; the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) utilized a seven-category framework consisting of 115 indices.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, their calculations produced varied outcomes.

The AMS announced in 1996 that the global power hierarchy, in descending order, consisted of the USA, Japan, Germany, Russia, France, Britain and China. Two years later, CICIR analysts ranked America, Japan, France, Britain Germany, Russia and China in that order. Tsinghua University's contemporaneous ranking of the top five powers was: the USA, China, Japan, India and Russia.⁵⁶ While these strategists had developed general views of the global power-hierarchy, the only consistent element in their analyses was America's position of an unchallenged solitary superpower in it. However, even this common assessment of America's systemic dominance, according to one school of Chinese thinking, had 'not been obtained through any consistent, objective measuring effort, but instead is based merely on subjective judgements made prior to any measurement'.⁵⁷ This school held that these Chinese efforts to assess the global power hierarchy and China's status in it offered little accuracy in objective evaluation.

Universal acknowledgement of America's insuperable stature created no consensus on China's relative position, however. Was China going to become the second-greatest power in the ranking? Was it already there? Even if China became no. 2 in the systemic hierarchy, would it ever become a second superpower in a bipolar system similar to the Cold War-era Soviet Union, or was China destined to remain a subsidiary actor? Were Sino-US relations bound to be competitive, even zero-sum, or could China 'rise' without threatening the status quo, and avoid conflict? There was no agreement on these questions. China's leaders, however, could not endlessly debate these points before formulating policy. They had to relate China to its dynamic security milieu, pursuing diplomacy supportive of their strategic objectives, priorities and preferences while operating within the parameters shaped by China's political, economic and military constraints. Hu Jintao initiated the rhetoric of non-threatening growth. In 2003, he used 'peaceful rise' to describe China's emergence as a major actor.⁵⁸ This caused much Western consternation because 'rise' hinted of a challenge to the US-led order by a possibly revisionist China.⁵⁹ Beijing denied harbouring revisionist designs but one Chinese scholar noted:

There will be no win-win situation in conflicts among international political entities accompanying the rise of China. Power status and international politics share the same zero-sum characteristics. The rise of a state's power status indicates an expansion of its political power. This in turn causes the fall of other states' power status and political power.⁶⁰

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So, China's rise would be tantamount to a relative decline in others' status and power. In April 2004, Hu replaced 'peaceful rise' with 'peaceful development' in a public affirmation of Beijing's domestically focused non-disruptive growth and pacific intent.⁶¹ However, as a major power, China could not avoid affecting its peers' relative status. As it grew absolutely and relatively, the latter would experience significant relative losses:

If the dominant world power belongs to a single state, then this hegemony holds 100 percent of the power. When the power status of another state increases to the same level, there are two states sharing this world dominant power. That means, among those with dominant power, the former hegemony will be diminished to half, or only 50 percent.⁶²

The impact of this change on the erstwhile lone hegemon would be dramatic. Since a change in a major power's power status may result in the restructuring of international relations, causing a rearrangement of world resources, 'studies on the comprehensive national strength and power status are of the utmost importance only for those few major powers.'⁶³ Belief in the zero-sum impact of China's rise on America's hegemony was not universal. Some analysts challenged this adversarial framework, asserting that the reality of Sino-US relations disproved the likelihood of a threat-based bipolarity. China's challenge, if at all, would not be in power relations. China's growth was, in this view, a facet of the economic progress of Asia, and of the developing world more generally.

The USA had historically provided the 'dominant development paradigm' to the rest of the world, but now, China offered alternative developmental paradigms 'different from that of any other nation-state in history and (ones that) are a consequence of the global migration of industry along comparative advantage lines'.⁶⁴ This school noted the migration of light and consumer manufacturing to China was almost complete, but 'heavy industry' was only starting to move now. This transfer, when completed, would deepen developed countries' dependence on China. This school acknowledged America's contribution to China's successes:

Chinese development is a result of successful US policies to bring China into the world market ... Chinese reform and liberalization was (sic) conducted in an international system supported by US hegemony. Objectively, then, the United States is aiding Chinese development and helping China achieve a new position of significant power.⁶⁵

Optimists expected both parties to recognize their semi-symbiotic linkages. They suggested that if Beijing helped Washington to avoid rapid decline, then America would not only give up 'its illusions of global grandeur', but would see China as an important player in the world order, and 'one that can best guarantee the United States' hold on power'. What of the future? 'The United

States' ultimate strategy should be one of cooperation with China in order to ensure that they both become strong regional powers'.⁶⁶ That aspiration reflected recognition that post-Cold War, 'the forces driving China–USA cooperation against Soviet expansion gradually lost momentum. The divergence of Chinese and American strategy has become increasingly apparent, and China's posture towards the US has adapted to changes in the strategic environment'.⁶⁷

One aspect of the unipolar transition was that while Beijing's collaboration was no longer essential to advancing US objectives, with China growing faster than any other power, Washington had 'exploited opportunities to contain China'.⁶⁸ To Beijing, the clearest evidence of this US policy was the continued transfer of sophisticated arms and technology to Taiwan. Most Chinese strategists saw these transfers as reflecting America's apparent determination to prevent China's 'national reunification'. They believed such American policy forced Beijing to devote excessive resources to the national defence, diluting its 'peaceful development'.⁶⁹ What could be more symbolic of America's inimical stance short of open hostility? A minority of Chinese analysts argued that more benign goals drove America's arms sales to Taiwan,⁷⁰ but their influence on the discourse was modest.

China's strategic studies community appeared fearful of systemic turbulence, and America's 'neo-containment' stance, but positive aspirations, too, were heard. A year-long study of China's regional goals, and ways of pursuing these, ended at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS). Its recommendations were instructive. The project was triggered by the imminence of the passing of the Bush presidency, the need for a fresh approach to its successor, and to underscore the importance of the Asia-Pacific region in Beijing's strategic calculus. Its context, however, was domestic. Building on the legacy of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, Beijing had announced the grand goal of building a 'moderately prosperous society in all respects in China by 2020'.⁷¹ The scale of this ambition demanded serious work on priorities and policy pathways. The SIIS study offered a framework for pursuing that ambitious goal.

Building a 'new Asia' around a 'new China'

So, how did China envision its Asian neighbourhood over the coming decade? The report's authors were confident that the region would experience stability and economic dynamism. Still, they did discern several worrying tendencies:

- Relative stability and balance among major Asian actors would persist, but a coordinating mechanism among them remained missing.
- 'Non-occidental development models' were taking shape, but their sustainability was uncertain.
- Most 'regional mechanisms will play a more important role, while continuing to develop in a parallel and overlapping way'.

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- Consensus on regional peace and harmony would grow, but ‘local conflicts and skirmishes continue to threaten Asia’s peace and stability’.
- A ‘spirit of self-determined development is arising, but a common identity of the Region is yet to be established’.⁷²

China’s Asian objective was to ‘build up a cooperative and co-progressive new Asia’ which would, working with all the relevant parties, create a favourable environment for China’s modernization, ‘construct effective mechanisms for the common progress of various regional interests, enhance comprehensive regional security, foster common values with the characteristics of the times, and develop a more just and equitable regional order’.⁷³ This last point suggested the current order was less than ‘just and equitable’. China supported ‘an Asian model’ for deepening cooperation, urged neighbours to jointly manage regional affairs in ‘an independent yet open manner, that all members of the international society participate in international affairs on equal footing, and that developed countries or regions respect Asia’s will and legitimate rights’.⁷⁴

The study subtly encouraged Beijing to assume the ‘moral’ leadership of an Asian enterprise precipitating an Asian identity, while offering an equal status to its neighbours. Beijing should assume the moral high ground without claiming regional leadership although the study did not spell out the necessarily complex balancing act. As regards ‘relevant great powers’, Beijing’s ‘chief objective is to develop a mutually beneficial relationship on equal footing with their joint efforts to ensure regional stability’. China should ‘strengthen its constructive and cooperative relationship’ with America, boost its ‘strategic partnership of coordination’ with Russia, and reinforce the ‘strategic and mutually beneficial relations’ with Japan. Beijing should enhance its ‘strategic relations’ with Delhi and Islamabad, too.⁷⁵ Recommendations, too, were non-competitive:

China should stick to the path of peaceful development and advocate the ‘New Concept of Security’ based on mutual trust, reciprocity, equality and coordination. China should try its best to settle territorial disputes, old and new, by peaceful means, and play an active role in peace-maintaining and humanitarian relief missions. Besides, China should go on with its dedication to constructing regional security cooperation framework (sic) and to keeping it compatible with the existing military alliances in the region.⁷⁶

This made it difficult to challenge China’s Asian strategy, or question its motives. By suggesting that any new regional security framework be compatible with existing military alliances, the SIIS acknowledged the failure of China’s critique of US-led alliances. There may even be a tacit recognition of the alliances’ stabilizing benefits. Other Chinese analysts explained the perceptual context in which Beijing constructed its security universe. They identified three paradigms within which China must survive and flourish. While

pursuing Chinese and Asian paths to the future, Beijing adopted Western political–philosophical frameworks:

Under a ‘Hobbesian’ system, states view each other as ‘enemies,’ and interaction between them is normally characterized by warfare; under a ‘Lockean’ system, states view each other as ‘opponents,’ so warfare is a possible course of action ... but not the norm; under a ‘Kantian’ system, states view each other as ‘friends,’ and warfare is not the method of resolving conflict.⁷⁷

China would prefer a Kantian world, but reality often straddled the Hobbesian and Lockean models. In such a milieu, China’s elites betrayed defensive insecurity. A critical drive behind their moderation lay in the recognition that ‘a lack of hard and soft powers will remain the biggest challenge for China, coupled with serious threats to its national security and pressure from the West on ideological issues’.⁷⁸

In late 2008, PLA commanders began showing confidence that ‘factors conducive to maintaining peace and containing war’ were ‘on the rise’, and that China’s security situation had ‘improved steadily’. However, the international system combined fluidity and uncertainty over the systemic order, threatening the equilibrium necessary for predictability. The day after Barack Obama took office, China’s military leaders wrote:

The rise and decline of international strategic forces is quickening, major powers are stepping up their efforts to cooperate with each other and draw on each other’s strengths. They continue to compete with and hold each other in check, and groups of new emerging developing powers are arising. Therefore, a profound readjustment is brewing in the international system.⁷⁹

They noted positive developments in East- and South-East Asian sub-regions which had erected collaborative institutions to reduce the risks of conflict. However, military competition was being driven by a competing rise in national strength and growing scientific–technological sophistication. The ‘worldwide revolution in military affairs (RMA) is reaching a new stage of development’. Some major powers were realigning their security and military strategies, increasing their defence investment, ‘speeding up the transformation of armed forces, and developing advanced military technology, weapons and equipment’.⁸⁰ China’s Central Military Commission (CMC) pointed to the top priority given by other great powers to the modernization of their strategic nuclear forces, military astronautics, missile defence systems, and global and battlefield reconnaissance and surveillance gear. The CMC discerned several sources of concern in China’s neighbourhood.

‘Drastic fluctuations in the world economy’ threatened regional economic development with possible political turbulence in some states experiencing

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socio-economic transition. Ethnic and religious discord, and conflicting territorial and maritime claims complicated the security milieu in a region of 'hotspots'. But China's deepest fears were from the USA:

The US has increased its strategic attention to and input in the Asia-Pacific region, further consolidating its military alliances, adjusting its military deployment and enhancing its military capabilities ... The mechanisms for security cooperation between countries and regions are yet to be enhanced, and the capability for coping with regional security threats in a coordinated way has to be improved.⁸¹

While the US DOD worried about Chinese military modernization and its impact on the freedom of American action in the region, the CMC worried about US military activities, capabilities and alliance-boosting efforts. China and the USA appeared bound in a dialectic spiral, each fearing and preparing for the worst. Defensive insecurity explained Chinese rhetoric, forming the backdrop against which Beijing formulated its security policies. The dialectic raised questions about the trans-Pacific resonance of the 'China threat' theory which had, since the turn of the century, driven countervailing steps taken by America and its allies. Had the region inadvertently become a stage for a dangerous dialogue of the deaf? How responsive have Beijing's interlocutors in Washington been?

A 'multipolar' architecture?

America's intelligence community, reviewing assessments made by social scientists from around the world, agreed that unprecedented developments were transforming the international system so that by 2025, it would become a 'global multipolar one'. While Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) would collectively match the original G-7's (the USA, Japan, Germany, the UK, France, Italy and Canada) 'global GDP' by 2040–50, China would 'have more impact on the world over the next 20 years than any other country'.⁸² The intelligence community thus ceded twenty-first-century pre-eminence to China.

It predicted that if current trends persisted, by 2025, China would have the second largest economy and would be 'a leading military power'. As the largest importer of natural resources and 'the biggest polluter', China's economic–ecological footprint would cast a global shadow. Beijing could then choose its own systemic role, shaping parts of the system. Having grown rapidly for three decades, China challenged the monopoly of the US-led liberal democratic market-capitalist order and paradigm. Its refinements of a state-capitalist template, given the size of China's economy, would impact on how other countries charted their own paths to development. While G-7 economies would stay ahead of China in per capita wealth, because of a decline in the size and ratio of their working-age population, they would 'struggle to maintain robust growth rates'.⁸³

By 2025, the eight largest economies would be the USA, China, India, Japan, Germany, Britain, France and Russia.⁸⁴ This hierarchy would generate a new political order although its characteristics could not confidently be predicted. US intelligence leaders believed that *US security and economic interests could face new challenges if China becomes a peer competitor that is militarily strong as well as economically dynamic and energy hungry*.⁸⁵ This discomfiture over threats to America's stature had been compounded since the mid-1990s by Beijing's subtle challenge to the US-led order with its 'New Security Concept' advancing a reasonable proposition that the post-bipolar world needed a security paradigm defined with 'mutual trust, mutual equality, and cooperation'.⁸⁶

American China-watchers disagreed on Beijing's ultimate policy goals and their impact on US interests. They remained unsure whether China's engagement diplomacy reflected an overarching strategy with specific long-term objectives or if it was a series of unconnected tactical moves seeking marginal gains. 'Is Beijing interested in supplanting the United States as a global power or focused mainly on fostering its own national development? Does the PRC feel strong and confident internationally or weak and uncertain?' These questions, central to fashioning a meaningful response, 'remain unanswered'.⁸⁷ The fact that these questions were being asked, despite repeated assurances from President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao that China would stay focused on domestic development until 2050, exposed a refusal to accept Beijing's pledges at face value.

Anxiety about possible Chinese attempts to weaken America's regional stature without giving a pretext for countermeasures had informed some US actions.⁸⁸ But many Americans now suggested that a dialectic sequence shaped by China's action and US reaction would be unhelpful. The US National Intelligence Community concluded early in the Obama presidency that East Asia and South Asia were poised to become the long-term global power centres. China and India were restoring the positions they held in the eighteenth century when China produced approximately 30 per cent and India, 15 per cent, of the world's wealth. These two countries were likely to surpass the GDP of all other economies except the USA and Japan by 2025. With Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, too, thriving, the 'rise of Asia' would be a 'defining characteristic' of the twenty-first century. 'China's reemergence as a major power with global impact' would particularly affect the Asia-Pacific balance of power.⁸⁹ The growth of China's power and influence was a key concern shaping US priorities as the Obama Administration assumed office.

Whether Beijing's sharper profile, increasing clout and growing capacity to shape its strategic environment concealed an anti-American kernel and, if so, how Washington could respond, was less straightforward. The intelligence community judged that Beijing's conduct was driven 'by a combination of domestic priorities, primarily maintaining economic prosperity and domestic stability, and a longstanding ambition to see China play the role of a great

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power in East Asia and globally'.⁹⁰ It assessed that Beijing saw preservation of domestic stability as one of its 'most important internal security challenges'. Preventing disruptions flowing from demands for fundamental political reforms and separatist threats was a critically important leadership priority.

The centrality of the domestic was reflected in China's diplomatic emphases on securing access to commodities, energy supplies and markets for sustaining economic growth. But China was 'also seeking to build its global image and influence' and 'advance its broader interests and to resist what it perceives as external challenges to those interests or to China's security and territorial integrity'. To this end, China sought to maintain especially 'favorable relations' with America, which Beijing saw as 'vital to China's economic success and to achieving its other strategic objectives'.⁹¹

While discounting an immediately hostile intent on Beijing's part, US intelligence noted that rapid military modernization, implemented with double-digit growth in defence allocations made over a decade, had begun to offer China options for policy goals beyond thwarting Taiwanese independence. US support for Taiwan's *de facto* independence – notwithstanding American acknowledgement of the 'one China' principle – had driven the PLA's modernization for decades. More recently, Beijing had articulated 'roles and missions for the PLA that go well beyond China's immediate territorial interests'.⁹² The examples offered by US intelligence, however, appeared benign. For instance, Beijing could deploy troops on UN peacekeeping missions, expanding from its limited support and logistical contributions; China could extend its naval reach beyond the South China Sea, as seen in its deployment in early 2009 of an anti-piracy force to the Gulf of Aden.⁹³

Although China was improving its missile forces, disruptive counter-space systems and nuclear warheads, there was no evidence of goals other than deterrent or defensive ones. While Beijing was building capabilities to deter threats to its 'core' interests across an expanding temporal-spatial spectrum, nothing indicated that it sought to exploit these assets to overturn a beneficial security order. Its socio-economic goals gave China no reason to challenge the systemic status quo⁹⁴; indeed, Beijing should strive to ensure a pacific milieu essential to those pursuits. China's growing stature and comprehensive national power would guarantee it could not be taken for granted, but there was no evidence that it posed a direct or immediate challenge to either America or the US-led order. This was the strategic backdrop against which President Obama assumed office.

1 Obama's early initiatives and Beijing's response

A modest shift

Candidate Barack Obama did not articulate a clear stance toward China. His campaign comments suggested a focus on domestic economic concerns. Strategic continuity was reflected in his request to the outgoing Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, to stay on. Just days after Obama took office, Gates told Congress:

China is modernizing across the whole of its armed forces. The areas of greatest concern are Chinese investments and growing capabilities in cyber- and anti-satellite warfare, anti-air and anti-ship weaponry, submarines, and ballistic missiles. Modernization in these areas could threaten America's primary means of projecting power and helping allies in the Pacific: our bases, air, and sea assets, and the networks that support them.¹

Gates called for 'more assets for the Foreign Service, US Agency for International Development (USAID), Departments of Agriculture, Justice, and Commerce, and other nonuniformed implements of power and influence'.² He noted, 'the most likely catastrophic threats to our homeland – for example, an American city poisoned or reduced to rubble by a terrorist attack – are more likely to emanate from failing states than from aggressor states'.³ He urged emphasis on non-kinetic diplomacy. Still, neither he nor his colleagues acknowledged that although America had maintained extensive nuclear strike plans against Chinese targets for nearly six decades, Beijing did not build large retaliatory strategic offensive forces in response. Instead, China maintained a small arsenal of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) for a minimal deterrent.⁴

Although China's ICBM arsenal remained relatively modest in size, its conventional military capability was growing. Perhaps in recognition of this shift in relative strength Gates hinted at a more flexible approach towards the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Chinese had broken off military contacts in October 2008 when Washington authorized arms sales worth \$6.5 billion to Taiwan; now, Gates noted that 'a new administration here,

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a fresh start, perhaps creates opportunities to reopen the aperture on military-to-military contacts'.⁵ Beijing agreed. Two exchanges followed: China agreed to join American allies in sending observers to the 'Cobra Gold' annual exercises in northern Thailand; Beijing also invited a US team to the first formal 'Defence Policy Coordination Talks (DPCT)' in Beijing in February.

In the PLA's view, the US role in China's security environment had been mixed. The impact of the global economic crisis, political turbulence, ethno-religious confrontations and conflicting claims over territorial or maritime rights rendered the situation 'serious'. Besides, 'the US has increased its strategic attention to and input in the Asia-Pacific region, further consolidating its military alliances, adjusting its military deployment and enhancing its military capabilities'. China's situation had improved but it still faced 'long-term, complicated, and diverse security threats and challenges'. The 'superiority of the developed countries in economy, science and technology, as well as military affairs', compounded the complexity.

In particular, the United States continues to sell arms to Taiwan in violation of the principles established in the three Sino-US joint communiqués, causing serious harm to Sino-US relations as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits.⁶

China would 'never seek hegemony or engage in military expansion now or in the future, no matter how developed it becomes'. It would encourage 'the advancement of security dialogues and cooperation with other countries, oppose the enlargement of military alliances, and acts of aggression and expansion'.⁷ Beijing would, however, defend its 'core national interests'.

Shortly after Obama's election, Beijing announced plans to deploy a flotilla to the Gulf of Aden to protect Chinese-flagged vessels from Somali pirates⁸ after the UN Security Council had approved Resolution-1846 urging appropriate measures, and the interim Somali Government issued a similar request. Resolution-1851 authorized foreign navies to pursue pirates up to the Somali coast and, if necessary, 'in Somalia' itself. While announcing PLAN's first operational deployment – of two destroyers and a supply vessel – beyond Chinese waters in December 2009,⁹ officers also revealed that China would shortly start building aircraft carriers. The PLAN would lay down two aircraft carriers in 2009 for launch in 2015. Both would be built in Shanghai, displace 50–60,000 tons and carry Su-33 fighters. Fifty of these had reportedly been ordered from Russia although later reports suggested the deal fell through, and 50 pilots had begun a four-year training programme in Dalian. Already, the Ukrainian carrier, *Varyag*, purchased years ago and repainted in PLAN livery, was being refurbished. Eventually, four to six carriers along with escort- and support vessels in carrier battle groups would be commissioned.¹⁰

In early March 2009, Admiral Hu Yanlin, former PLAN commissar, said, 'Building aircraft carriers is a symbol of an important nation. It is very

necessary ... China has the capability to build aircraft carriers, and should do so'.¹¹ During a visit to Beijing by Japan's Defence Minister, Yasukazu Hamada, aimed at defusing tensions, his host, General Liang Guanglie, noted, 'Among the big nations only China does not have an aircraft carrier. China cannot be without an aircraft carrier forever ... China's navy is currently rather weak; we need to develop an aircraft carrier'.¹² Ahead of presiding over the PLAN's 60th founding anniversary celebrations in April 2009, PLAN Commander Admiral Wu Shingli announced plans to build sophisticated hardware including 'large warships, stealth submarines capable of travelling further than current boats, supersonic-cruise aircraft, more accurate long-range missiles, deep-sea torpedoes' and improved information technological (IT) capabilities – 'The navy will establish maritime defence systems corresponding with the need to protect China's maritime security and economic development'.¹³ Chinese media quoted other commanders explaining that Wu's phrase 'large warships' indicated aircraft carriers and other substantial platforms.¹⁴

The US reaction was mixed. Some China-watchers saw the PLAN's first operational deployment off Somali waters as a worrying portent of Chinese power-projection potential; others from the Navy or DOD viewed it as a sign of Beijing's willingness to join America and others in addressing major global security concerns whose resolution demanded collaboration.¹⁵ Admiral Keating welcomed the anti-piracy deployment,¹⁶ but Chinese hints of a carrier-building programme stirred a debate. The potential of Beijing's power-projection capability challenging rivals troubled proximate maritime powers. US carriers had ploughed these waters for decades. However, a re-emergent China asserting itself so visibly was seen to threaten regional stability. Fresh military exchanges moderated those anxieties with a more benign appreciation of Beijing's strategic intent. David Sedney, leading the US delegation to the February 2009 DPCT, noted:

As China emerges as a power with global ambitions, it is natural, indeed expected that its military and security activities abroad will expand consistent with its capacities and strategic aims ... The United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China, and continues to encourage China to participate responsibly in the international system by supporting, strengthening the global security architecture that it has benefited from during its economic rise.¹⁷

Officials noted that China's overseas activities were driven by motivations behind similar US action. Both needed access to natural resources and secure trade routes, supplemented diplomacy with military trade and exchanges, sought to mitigate others' dominance, and needed to satisfy a popular desire that their government protect their citizens and interests abroad, and enhance national prestige.¹⁸ Interpreting Beijing's action in this benign framework suggested America, having accepted China's inevitable 'rise', now sought to collaborate synergistically for positive-sum outcomes.

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Incidents underscoring contrary perceptions of interest and interpretations of international maritime law challenged that understanding. On the day of Sedney's testimony, a Chinese patrol boat shone a spotlight onto the *USNS Victorious*, an unarmed surveillance vessel, operating in China's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Yellow Sea. The next day, a Chinese aircraft flew over it a dozen times. Almost simultaneously, another aircraft flew over the *USNS Impeccable*, another surveillance ship, in the South China Sea, where it was monitoring PLAN submarines based on Hainan Island. Next, a PLAN frigate sailed to within 100 metres of the *Impeccable*.¹⁹ Two days later, a Chinese ship issued radio warnings that the *Impeccable* was 'conducting illegal operations and had to leave the area'.²⁰

As the *Impeccable* continued undeterred, on 8 March 2009, five Chinese vessels confronted it. Washington complained that 'the Chinese ships maneuvered in front of the *Impeccable*, dropped wood in its path, forced it to make an emergency stop, and at one point tried to grab the ship's sonar array'.²¹ *Impeccable* sailors sprayed jets from a water cannon at an approaching Chinese boat, but the latter's crew stripped down to their underpants, keeping up their pursuit. Eventually, the US ship was forced to retreat. Washington ordered destroyers in the area to escort these surveillance ships while insisting it would continue with these missions.

Washington and Beijing accused each other of violating international maritime norms and practice. Rejecting as 'flatly inaccurate and unacceptable' American claims that its vessels were operating in international waters under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which China had signed but the USA had not, Beijing insisted:

Engaging in activities in China's exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea without China's permission, US navy surveillance ship *Impeccable* broke relevant international law as well as Chinese laws and regulations. China has lodged solemn representations to the US. We urge the US to take effective measures to prevent similar incidents occurring in the future.²²

Admiral Keating noted, 'the relationship (with the PLA) certainly isn't where we want it to be ... a mature, constructive mil-to-mil relationship is hardly the reality of the day'.²³ The release of the DOD's annual report to Congress on 'the Military Power of the People's Republic of China' did not ease tensions. The report claimed that while Beijing's published 2008 defence budget was around \$60 billion, US estimates of China's defence expenditure ranged between \$105 billion and \$150 billion.²⁴ The DOD stressed the danger of alleged Chinese opacity 'increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation'.²⁵ Beijing's response was acerbic, but once both sides had made their points, officials downplayed differences. Obama, receiving Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi at the White House on 12 March, stressed 'the importance of raising the level and frequency of the US-China military-to-military dialogue in

order to avoid future incidents'.²⁶ Whether they had reconciled their views of China's jurisdiction over its EEZ, and America's rights in what it considered 'international waters', remained unclear. Chinese analysts noted:

While the US regards the EEZs of other countries as international waters, it requires other countries to abide by its procedures and designated routes when flying in its 'Air Defense Identification Zone' (ADIZ), which extends 434 nautical miles off its coast. The ADIZ is unilaterally set by the US and its extent greatly exceeds that of the EEZ, though there is no provision for this in international law.²⁷

Beijing held that Article 58 of UNCLOS granted states the freedom of navigation, overflight, the laying of submarine cables and pipelines in other countries' EEZs but stipulated that user 'States shall have due regard to the rights and duties of the coastal State and shall comply with the laws and regulations adopted by the coastal State'. Beijing insisted this meant that while America enjoyed 'the freedom of overflight and navigation in China's EEZ', the freedom was 'not unrestricted, and the US aircraft and vessels must observe the relevant Chinese laws'.²⁸ Beijing's most serious point was that freedom of navigation was valid only for 'peaceful uses of the sea'; the *Impeccable*, by US admission, sought to 'detect activities of the Chinese submarines deployed at the Sanya Submarine Base'.²⁹ This was considered inimical to China's national security and, therefore, not covered under 'innocent passage' and 'peaceful uses of the sea'.

The debate failed to resolve the issue which revolved around mutually exclusive views of rights and obligations compounded by China's growing maritime interests and capabilities clashing with America's hitherto unchallenged privileges. With the two navies competing for strategic autonomy within the same physical space, similar incidents were likely to recur. Admiral Keating, pointing to the PLA's anti-access and area-denial weapons, characterized relations as 'uneven and a cause of some concern, but not worry'.

When he complained about Chinese weapons being aimed at Taiwan, Beijing pointed to US arms sales to Taipei. Keating noted, 'We try to extract ourselves from the tactical discussion and just tell them we are interested in peace and stability'.³⁰ Although DOD officials played down the '*Impeccable* incident',³¹ the question was if the two navies would operate within benign parameters, or if they would play a zero-sum game, escalating tensions to see which side blinked first.³² Neither appeared ready to budge.

Pressure points and counterpoints

As leaders of the G-20 countries and others, charged with managing the global financial crisis, arrived at their London summit in April 2009, the damage done to the global power structure became apparent. Asian treasuries holding 'two-thirds of the world's foreign exchange reserves, the majority of it

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denominated in dollars', now had 'a large financial and commercial stake in the health of the American economy'. In contrast, 'huge trade and budget deficits, heavy dependence on imported oil, record-high consumer debt, and rising levels of protectionism undermine US influence abroad. Sustained economic power is at the root of sustainable military power'.³³ Detailed analyses of the complex tectonic shifts recasting the international order came from the US military's academic mentors. Several analysts challenged suggestions of even a gradual American decline,³⁴ but the balance of weight seemed to have shifted in favour of those who saw changes ahead.

By the time Barack Obama met Hu Jintao in London, Beijing had become Washington's largest creditor. China had lent around \$400 billion to America in 2008. By April 2009, Beijing held \$1.5 trillion in US assets out of its total foreign holdings worth \$2.3 trillion – around \$760 billion in US Treasury bonds, another \$489 billion in bonds issued by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Ginnie Mae, and the Federal Home Loan Bank, \$121 billion in American corporate bonds, \$104 billion in US equities, and \$41 billion in deposits.³⁵ With this level of mutual involvement, America and China had become intertwined in possibly symbiotic ties. Neither could abandon or hurt the other without risking grievous, even suicidal, damage to itself.³⁶ This was the context in which the 'G-2' leaders met. Around then, the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) at the US National Defence University (NDU) launched 'Global Strategic Assessment 2009: America's Security Role in a Changing World'. Its editor noted:

There is nothing permanent about the US global security role, and there are no guarantees in international security, but no other nation has America's unique attributes: a global zeal to make the world a better place; potent expeditionary forces to project power on all continents and oceans; a large and open economy; and a melting-pot society built on freedom and the rule of law.³⁷

Still, America faced a transformed security milieu:

- A redistribution of global economic power from the West to the 'rest'.
- The partial emergence of a multipolar world.
- An information revolution leaving modern societies vulnerable.
- The acceleration of an energy-and-environmental-security tipping point.
- Mounting challenges emanating from fragile states and ungoverned areas.
- An increasingly transnational dimension of terrorism.
- The changing character of warfare from conventional to irregular/hybrid types.
- Potential further proliferation of nuclear and biological weapons.³⁸

Consequently, 'As China continues to rise, the United States will become more vulnerable and will need to determine how to mitigate threats by

managing a relationship that is simultaneously complex, important, and ambiguous'. The likely continuation of an authoritarian Chinese political system and uncertainties surrounding how great a military power China will be in the future posed possibly the most serious difficulties for America.³⁹ The INSS expected Sino-US rivalry to build in the nuclear, space, counter-space, cyber warfare, and communications arenas.⁴⁰ In spite of this competitive edge, realists in America may have come round to the inevitability of China's growing maritime power.⁴¹

Still, America would fight any erosion of its primacy. Robert Gates told Congress, 'The United States must not take its current dominance for granted and needs to invest in programs, platforms, and personnel to ensure that dominance in the future'.⁴² Explaining the DOD's FY2010 outlay, Gates said, that budget demonstrated 'a serious commitment to maintaining US air supremacy, the *sine qua non* of American military strength for more than six decades'. He insisted that ending the super-sophisticated and super-expensive F-22 fighter programme at 187 aircraft was essential to buying more than 2,400 F-35 *Lightning* fighters instead. 'Russia is probably six years away from Initial Operating Capability of a fifth-generation fighter and the Chinese are 10 to 12 years away. By then we expect to have more than 1,000 fifth-generation fighters in our inventory'.⁴³

But hard power was just one issue. Premier Wen Jiabao's anxiety over Washington's ability to maintain the dollar's worth, affecting the value of Beijing's dollar-denominated reserves, and Washington's prompt reassurance in this regard, indicated the depth of economic links. Just before Hu Jintao left Beijing, the Governor of China's central bank noted an interest in an international medium of exchange other than the dollar.⁴⁴

Judging by official commentaries, the Hu–Obama mini-summit went well. A joint statement announced that they had 'agreed to work together to build a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive US–China relationship in the 21st century' and to strengthen 'exchanges at all levels'.⁴⁵ The two leaders ordered a resumption of regular high-level 'strategic and economic dialogues', one strand to be co-chaired by Clinton and State Councillor Dai Bingguo, and the other, by Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan. They agreed to boost cooperation in 'a wide range of areas, including economy and trade, counterterrorism, law enforcement, science and technology, education, culture and health'. Defence and security cooperation too featured:

Both sides share a commitment to military-to-military relations and will work for their continued improvement and development. The two sides agreed that Admiral Gary Roughead, US Chief of Naval Operations, will visit China upon invitation in April to attend events marking the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Navy of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. The US looks forward to visits by senior Chinese military leaders this year. The two sides agreed to maintain close communication and

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coordination and to work together for the settlement of conflicts and reduction of tensions that contribute to global and regional instability, including the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the Iranian nuclear issue, Sudan humanitarian issues, and the situation in South Asia.⁴⁶

Observers acknowledged that something significant had transpired.⁴⁷ While US observers noted Hu Jintao's low-profile presence in London, Hu himself praised Obama's efforts to improve relations.⁴⁸ Chinese commentaries were fulsome, praising Obama's initiative and the two leaders' 'political courage and wisdom' in boosting relations.⁴⁹ They believed that this meeting would 'become a turning point for China to influence the world to a great extent'.⁵⁰ While few complained that America and China were fashioning 'a global condominium', the crystallization of significant convergence appeared difficult to deny. US concerns over 'peer-rivals' rising or China's quest for a multipolar order were absent.

Days later, as the PLAN celebrated its 60th anniversary, Admiral Roughead led a US naval delegation on a formal visit while a US Navy warship participated in the international fleet review for Hu in Qingdao. The PLAN showed off its SSNs, SSBNs and new surface platforms, with the Americans taking this display in their stride. Both perceptions and reality of Sino-US interactions suggested some movement.

US intelligence services had few doubts about China's role in America's security milieu. DNI Dennis Blair's staff wrote to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), 'The Counterintelligence Community considers the People's Republic of China to be one of the most aggressive countries targeting US military, political, and economic secrets as well as sensitive US trade secrets'. The response to questions raised by SSCI members on a key intelligence report published in February, added, 'we believe China poses a significantly greater foreign intelligence threat today than it did during most of the Cold War era'.⁵¹ The DNI did not mention that in the 1970s and 1980s, as a tacit ally in America's confrontation with the Soviet Union, China received military technology from the USA, its European allies, and Israel⁵²; covert collection was unnecessary.

Peninsular histrionics

On 5 April 2009, Pyongyang announced the launch of *Unha-2*, a communications satellite, atop a three-stage launch vehicle (SLV). The USA, Japan and South Korea alleged this was the test-flight of an IRBM, prohibited under a UNSC resolution. Pyongyang insisted its peaceful space activities violated no UN injunctions. Although re-entry vehicle parameters in the two cases are different, launch vehicles in ballistic missile and SLV configurations are not. North Korea's critics believed this was a missile test to prove Pyongyang's offensive capabilities following the failure of its July 2006 test of a *Taepo-dong-2* missile.⁵³ In April 2009, the first-stage booster fell into the Sea of Japan; the

second-stage carried the third-stage over northern Honshu and then, above the Pacific, where US–Japanese tracking ended 2,100 km east of Japan. The third-stage failed to ignite but Pyongyang insisted the satellite had gone into orbit.⁵⁴ *Unha-2*'s 3,200 km flight underscored significant improvement in North Korea's ballistic missile technology.

Satellite imagery had warned of Pyongyang's launch preparations. America, Japan and South Korea had deployed warships to the Sea of Japan to monitor the launch. Complaining that US U-2 aircraft were overflying its territory, North Korea threatened to shoot these down. Tokyo deployed Patriot missile interceptors and ballistic missile defence (BMD) ships to shoot down 'any wayward rocket parts' which might hit Japan.⁵⁵ None did. Condemnation aside, analysts differed on whether Pyongyang was being driven by domestic political uncertainties following Kim Jong-il's stroke, or the need to demonstrate a deterrent in the face of worsening international circumstances.⁵⁶

Barack Obama, having initially offered to negotiate with unfriendly governments, urged tough UN action. Insisting that this had been a missile test proscribed by UNSCR-1718, he consulted Tokyo, Seoul, other UNSC members, and brought it up before the Security Council. Urging Pyongyang to 'refrain from further provocative action', Obama said, 'Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery is a high priority for my administration. The United States is fully committed to maintaining security and stability in northeast Asia'.⁵⁷ Obama vowed to drive 'the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six-Party Talks'. Washington sought to mediate between Seoul and Tokyo on the one hand and Beijing and Moscow on the other, preserving a show of unity despite differences.

After much debate with the USA, Japan and South Korea demanding tougher sanctions, and China and Russia urging caution, the UNSC issued a presidential statement, reiterating Obama's comments while diluting any new sanctions. Still, the UN Sanctions Committee acted against three DPRK arms exporters.⁵⁸ Critics keen on punitive steps called it a meaningless gesture, but Pyongyang was outraged. Citing this as an unacceptable violation of its right to peacefully explore space under the Outer Space Treaty, it withdrew from the Six-Party process, demanding an apology from the UNSC for its presidential statement and tightened sanctions. The DPRK Foreign Ministry warned that Pyongyang would 'be compelled to take additional measures for self-defense, including nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests' unless it received 'an immediate apology'.⁵⁹ None was forthcoming.

On 25 May 2009, North Korea reported its second nuclear test had been 'successfully conducted ... as part of measures to enhance the Republic's self-defensive nuclear deterrence in all directions'. Claiming 'a new high level in terms of explosive power and control technology', Pyongyang said the test would 'contribute to safeguard the sovereignty of the country and the nation and socialism'.⁶⁰ The test-site was not revealed but the ROK had detected

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seismic tremors near Kilju – close to the 2006 epicentre. The US Geological Survey detected a quake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale 10 km underground in north-eastern DPRK. US and ROK monitors agreed this was most likely a nuclear explosion.⁶¹ Russian experts estimated the yield at 10–20 kilotons, many times more powerful than the 2006 test's 1–2 kilotons – and approximating the US bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁶² Seoul and Tokyo insisted the test was 'unacceptable', demanding the 'international community' and the UN take severe steps. Washington's response, while more measured, threatened tough action.

Obama said North Korea's nuclear test was 'in violation of international law', describing it as 'a matter of grave concern to all nations', and 'a threat to international peace and security'. He warned, 'By acting in blatant defiance of the United Nations Security Council, North Korea is directly and recklessly challenging the international community ... The danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities warrants action by the international community'.⁶³ Although outsiders appeared unable to influence North Korean behaviour, Washington sounded determined to pursue an assertive stance. The DPRK view was consistent:

The acute phase of confrontation between the DPRK and US was created by the racket for sanctions and pressure on the DPRK by the present US Administration, which continued the Bush Administration's hostile policy against the DPRK. Second, tensions are the result of all kinds of military exercises and arms reinforcement conducted by the US on the Korean peninsula. No sooner had the US Administration taken power than it conducted the unprecedented large-scale joint military exercises 'Key Resolve' and 'Foal Eagle' in and around South Korea in March and thus severely threatened the security of the DPRK. These were nuclear war exercises for the preemptive attack on the DPRK entirely in its scale as well as its contents.⁶⁴

While Western commentary was universally critical of North Korean action, Exercises 'Key Resolve' and 'Foal Eagle' lent an edge to the military situation. ROK and US forces trained to defend South Korea from aggression. Drilling units included 13,100 US Special Operations, armoured, and other forces flown in to join thousands already there.⁶⁵ However, these exercises mirrored other US-South Korean drills designed to test rapid response, joint action, inter-operability, and swift reinforcement in the face of any Northern attack. As a trigger for the second nuclear test, they appeared insufficient.⁶⁶

Having supported Pyongyang with little to show for it, Beijing may have decided to cut its strategic losses. Chinese leaders, until then remarkably tolerant of North Korea's *sui generis* approach to diplomacy, changed tack. The test, an apparent sign of Pyongyang's determination to ignore Beijing's pleas, tested Chinese patience. A nuclear-armed North Korea could challenge Beijing's

management of its immediate security environs, threatening significant volatility. From Beijing's perspective, a line had been crossed. On 27 May, Defence Minister Liang Guanglie issued a stern critique of the test.⁶⁷

If one item on the international security agenda demanded Sino-US collaboration, it was peninsular tension, underscored by Pyongyang's missile- and nuclear alerts. These stirred the region, but they were a part of north-east Asia's insecurity dynamic building over decades between the two Koreas, America and Japan, and China and Russia. After the 1994 crisis over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme,⁶⁸ Washington had forged strong ties to Beijing, signing the 'Agreed Framework' with Pyongyang. North Korea sought direct bilateral engagement with the USA; Washington wanted collective efforts.

The Bush Administration's labours, with Chinese help, led, in August 2003, to the Six-Party Talks bringing together the two Koreas, the USA, China, Russia and Japan – key regional security stakeholders. China initiated and chaired the gathering, periodically urging America to engage North Korea bilaterally. The parties pursued denuclearization, that is, removal of US strategic forces from the peninsula and termination of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme. They reached consensus on several occasions, recording gains while also leaving major gaps.

- 13 February 2007: Agreement on freezing and disabling North Korea's nuclear facilities, with energy and diplomatic rewards for Pyongyang; stalemated when North Korea demanded that its frozen deposit of \$24 million held with the Banco Delta Asia in Macao be reimbursed first.
- 25 June 2007: Washington, with Russian help, returned Pyongyang's money.
- 18 July 2007: IAEA confirmed that North Korea had shut down Yongbyon nuclear facilities as agreed.
- 3 October 2007: Agreement to disable Yongbyon facilities, a North Korean declaration providing nuclear-programme details and a US pledge to lift economic sanctions and remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.
- 8 April 2008: Following secret talks in Berlin, Beijing and New York, America and North Korea defined limits of information Pyongyang must provide regarding its nuclear programme.⁶⁹
- 26 June 2008: Pyongyang handed nuclear programme details to Beijing; America lifted economic sanctions, notifying intention to remove North Korea from list of state sponsors of terrorism by 11 August 2008.
- 11 August 2008: Washington refused to honour its pledge because Pyongyang had rejected a newly proposed intrusive verification regime.
- 3 October 2008: US and DPRK envoys negotiated a limited verification accord; later, Washington rejected this agreement.
- 14 April 2008: Following a UNSC Presidential Statement critical of North Korea's missile test, Pyongyang withdrew from the Six-Party process.

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America viewed Pyongyang's actions from Japanese and South Korean perspectives. Seoul and Tokyo consistently urged tougher responses to North Korea's misdemeanours than their Six-Party partners. Washington supported the South Korean–Japanese line, but eventually, endorsed the cautious approach urged by Beijing and Moscow. Most South Korean analysts, however outraged, acknowledged the absence of a military option which, they insisted, would be far too risky:

- An effective attack must eliminate Pyongyang's military capabilities, but 'North Korea's sudden collapse would create a dangerous power vacuum' leading to fierce great-power rivalries in the area.
- Uncontrolled North Korean nuclear warheads or stockpiles could engender proliferation among 'other states or rogue groups'.
- Massive refugee movements from North Korea would place enormous strains on China which had ruled out any attack for precisely this reason.
- Stabilizing and rebuilding a collapsed North Korea would require massive but uncertain donor assistance.⁷⁰

Still, Beijing's response to the second nuclear test was swift:

On 25 May 2009, the DPRK conducted another nuclear test in disregard for the common opposition of the international community. The Chinese Government is firmly opposed to this act ... To bring about denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, oppose nuclear proliferation and safeguard peace and stability in Northeast Asia is the firm and consistent stand of the Chinese Government. China strongly urges the DPRK to honor its commitment to denuclearization, stop relevant moves that may further worsen the situation and return to the Six-Party Talks.⁷¹

Beijing accused Pyongyang of violating its commitments while urging the six parties to resume negotiations.⁷² China's participation in UNSC discussions following North Korea's tests underscored a hardening vis-à-vis Pyongyang. But Beijing also insisted that 'the sovereignty, territorial integrity, legitimate security concerns, and development interests of the DPRK as a sovereign country and UN member should be respected'. Noting that UNSCR-1874 'is not just about sanctions', China stated, 'political and diplomatic means are the only way to resolving the relevant issues on the Korean peninsula', insisting that 'the DPRK should enjoy the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy after it returns to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons'.⁷³ Beijing pursued two imperatives – North Korea should not be a nuclear weapons state (NWS); North Korea's security motivations driving its nuclear policy should be addressed. Also, North Korea must not be allowed to collapse.⁷⁴ Beijing might tolerate Washington's contingency plans for a dramatic shift, but its participation could suggest China's acquiescence in

regime change. That would threaten China's regional security interests.⁷⁵ So, Beijing insisted on status quo-oriented talks towards an agreement.

At Obama's June 2009 summit with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, both restated their peaceful intent, reiterating their aspiration for the peninsula's 'peaceful reunification'. They voiced anxiety over Pyongyang's activities, stressing a determination to counter any threats. However, some Americans acknowledged that short of regime change in Pyongyang, practical means to denuclearize North Korea were scarce. While rhetoric demanded Pyongyang's return to the Six-Party Talks, knowledgeable analysts unhappily outlined a future with a nuclear-armed DPRK.⁷⁶ Obama's non-proliferation czar, Gary Samore, conceded that Pyongyang was unlikely to give up its nuclear arms.⁷⁷

On 4 August 2009, dramatic hints that Washington might explore Beijing's suggestions arrived. Former President Bill Clinton flew into Pyongyang with a small entourage of former officials and, after hours of discussions with Kim Jong-il, returned home with two American journalists, sentenced to 12 years of hard labour for illegally crossing the border from China. Euna Lee and Laura Ling, reporters for the media outlet, Current TV, had been detained in March by DPRK troops near the border while covering the flight of North Korean refugees into China. Convicted of a 'grave crime' and trespassing, they were sentenced in June. Secret exchanges between the State Department and North Korea's UN mission followed.⁷⁸ Officials discussed the possibility of a senior US envoy flying to Pyongyang for talks designed to secure the women's release. Hillary Clinton approved several names, including former Vice President Al Gore, a founder of Current TV, and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson who kept contacts with North Korea.

Lee and Ling, held at a Pyongyang guesthouse, were encouraged to phone their families that ex-President Clinton would be welcomed as a special envoy. The families advised Gore who approached Clinton. Clinton said he would go if the White House approved. Gore then contacted the White House. Obama's National Security Adviser, General James Jones, asked North Korea's UN diplomats whether the reporters would indeed be freed if Clinton went. Behind-the-scenes exchanges among the White House, State Department, the Clintons, Gore and North Koreans led to Bill Clinton's arrival in Pyongyang, a 75-minute meeting with Kim Jong-il, a two-hour banquet hosted by the National Defence Commission chaired by Kim, and his return with the two Americans.

Obama, Hillary Clinton, and senior officials insisted this had been a private, humanitarian, visit by the former president to secure two US citizens' freedom, that Bill Clinton carried no official messages, and that his discussions in Pyongyang focused on the two journalists. Shortly after Clinton's return, Obama again called on Pyongyang to rejoin the Six-Party process:

We have said to the North Koreans, there is a path for improved relations, and it involves them no longer developing nuclear weapons and not

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engaging in the provocative behavior that they have been engaging in. We just want to make sure that the government in North Korea is operating within the basic rules of the international community that they know is expected of them.⁷⁹

Clinton's talks with Kim Jong-il, Kang Sok Joo, architect of the 1994 US–DPRK nuclear accord, Kim Kye Gwan, Washington's interlocutor on nuclear matters, Kim Yang Gun, who handled Pyongyang's relations with Seoul and the US military presence, and Yang Hyong Sop, the DPRK's second-ranking bureaucrat, suggested issues beyond the reporters' release were discussed.⁸⁰ Pyongyang's statement on the visit⁸¹ noted:

- Kim Jong-il issued orders to grant a special pardon to the two American journalists and to release them.
- Bill Clinton expressed sincere apology to Kim for 'hostile acts' committed by the two reporters.⁸²
- Clinton and Kim agreed their two countries should settle pending bilateral issues through negotiations.
- Clinton conveyed a verbal message from US President Barack Obama to Kim on ways to improve bilateral relations.⁸³
- North Korea believed Clinton's visit would help to build bilateral confidence.

Few noticed the arrival in Pyongyang, almost at the same time as Bill Clinton's, of a Chinese delegation, a visit announced cryptically, and unreported thereafter. Having urged US–DPRK bilateral exchanges, Beijing appeared delighted with the prospect for addressing US–DPRK tensions lying at the heart of Pyongyang's conduct.⁸⁴ Chinese commentary stressed the positive in Clinton's visit, noting that the reporters' release was a happy development, but possible improvements in US–DPRK relations were the real prize. Chinese notables said this would 'help contribute to regional stability, which definitely would win China's support'.⁸⁵ Outside China, there was some optimism that the visit could revive the process of North Korea's denuclearization.⁸⁶

That optimism was, however, moderated in most other analyses. The White House announced that Washington was prepared for a dialogue with Pyongyang if North Korea returned to the Six-Party process. General Jones noted Bill Clinton had told Kim Jong-il that Pyongyang 'must stop producing nuclear armaments' and rejoin the Six-Party Talks 'if it really wanted to rejoin the international community'.⁸⁷ This suggested Clinton had carried an official message, that America's demand was that North Korea freeze its nuclear arsenal and rejoin the talks. It also suggested an acknowledgement of the inability to 'roll back' Pyongyang's nuclear programme, and a tacit acceptance of the status quo.

Jones did not say that and North Korea's denuclearization remained the stated goal of American policy. But in Seoul, fears of US acceptance of the status quo reflected anxieties over an unravelling of the strategic framework

underpinning South Korean security. 'The core of Korea's anxiety in the mid-to long-term is the prospect of change in the status of US and China'. Specifically, Seoul worried that 'while US leadership is in relative decline, China is rapidly rising. Thus the US ability to maintain international order is limited due to the "rise of the rest," and China in particular'. A short-term concern was 'the fierce competition between the US and China for taking the initiative'.⁸⁸

Washington and Seoul diverged here on North Korea's nuclear arms. While South Korea sought the North's 'total and real' denuclearization, the USA might accept the DPRK 'as a *de facto* nuclear power, thereby not providing the level of security guarantee South Korea wants'. Seoul also feared possible withdrawal of US Forces from Korea after operational control (OPCON) of ROK forces was transferred to Seoul⁸⁹ and the Combined Forces Command was deactivated. South Korea had similar concerns when it came to China.⁹⁰

Pyongyang hinted at some softening. A Hyundai worker held at a North-South industrial joint venture for allegedly criticizing the North's political system was freed; Kim Jong-il sent condolence messages after former President Kim Dae Jung, who won the Nobel Peace Prize following his summit with Kim Jong-il, died, despatching a delegation to attend the funeral. The delegation met President Lee Myung-bak but Seoul denied media reports that Kim had proposed an inter-Korean summit. South Korea insisted that Kim's message had been about improving relations.⁹¹ Pyongyang's earlier description of Lee as a 'traitor' made the contact significant. Given Pyongyang's recent experience, Seoul postponed the launch of its first satellite. Its eventual launch effort, however, failed.

North Koreans visited Bill Richardson, offering to hold bilateral talks with Washington.⁹² When Washington insisted on Pyongyang's return to the Six-Party forum, North Korea announced it was reprocessing plutonium from Yongbyon's used fuel rods, and that its uranium enrichment programme was progressing. This may have added pressures on Washington to respond to North Korean action. While Bill Clinton's trip received much accolade, it may have marked an evolution of America's regional strategy. A tacit accommodation of Chinese preferences in Washington's stance towards Northeast Asia could ease Sino-US strategic friction and peninsular tensions. But upsetting existing assurances could pose new problems. The key question was, would America adapt to the tectonic shifts redesigning the Asia-Pacific security milieu, or resist the trend?

Scales of ambition

Changes in China's ego-perception partly reflected the shifting balance of influence in the CMC among the PLA's branches. The PLAN, PLAAF and the Second Artillery Corps (SAC) assumed greater prominence than the army. Strategic nuclear weaponry emerged as a key backstop to China's global stature. SAC's commander, General Jing Zhiyuan, and its commissar, General

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Peng Xiaofeng, stressed the need to build 'an elite and effective nuclear missile force that is on par with China's position as a major power'.⁹³ Evidence of SAC's improvement came from data that 78.2 per cent of its cadres held a baccalaureate or above.⁹⁴ Studies of the nature and role of deterrence in national defence had already laid the theoretical bases of SAC's development.⁹⁵ Recent writings reflected a debate on the 'use' of nuclear weapons – such as in defending China's territorial integrity – hinting at a break with the 'no first use' principle.⁹⁶ This showed Chinese willingness, under exceptional circumstances, to launch nuclear weapons without being similarly attacked first. Beijing, however, denied such a shift.

The PLA's solid-fuelled, road-mobile DF-31 and DF-31A ICBMs, and the 8,000-km-range JL-2 SLBM, along with several Jin-class SSBNs, gave China a second-strike capability.⁹⁷ Conventionally armed DF-21 MRBMs able to threaten American carriers in the western Pacific,⁹⁸ increasing Chinese confidence in deploying naval and air forces in peripheral regions, and repeated 'joint' exercises stressed the PLA's ability to defend Chinese interests with greater efficacy. But budget increases alone were not enough to maintain production- and maintenance support necessary to service a modern arsenal. China's Assets Supervision and Administration Commission pressed defence firms to grow bigger by merger and acquisition initiatives by the end of 2010.⁹⁹

If the quality and quantity of the PLA's *materiel* improved, serious problems demanded attention. The PLA had failed to protect its own installations. In May 2009, Hu Jintao ordered 'continual improvement in laws, regulations, and work mechanisms for the protection of military facilities'.¹⁰⁰ The CMC was also troubled over the impact of socio-economic changes on the PLA's leadership. In an interdependent world with a fluid security order and China's own views changing, national defence tasks grew more complex. Large organizations equipped with lethal hardware facing indeterminate challenges needed high personnel standards. Inducting university graduates into technical services helped operationally. Arresting faltering leadership qualities at command levels demanded tough action.¹⁰¹ New guidelines announced 'strict punishment in cases of breach of duty' and annual inspections of units from regiment to corps levels. With socialist ideals on the wane and 'in the face of a complicated ideological situation', serious disciplinary cases became frequent. The CMC ordered that 'senior military officers must stick to their faith and keep a firm political stance'.¹⁰²

Sino-US security interactions remained complex. In May 2009, the surrender by a Pentagon official to federal counter-espionage agents on charges of China-related 'espionage conspiracy', and revelations that he was the last member of a Chinese intelligence cell, stirred excitement. James Fondren, a retired USAF Lt. Colonel who, as a deputy director of PACOM's Washington liaison office, had a 'top secret' clearance, was accused of 'unlawfully and knowingly' conspiring to 'communicate classified information' to a foreign agent. Fondren had handed several classified DOD reports to Tai Shen Kuo,

a naturalized Taiwanese, for \$350–\$800 each, between November 2004 and 11 February 2008 when he was given administrative leave.¹⁰³ Most documents related to Sino-US relations, especially reports on military meetings. Fondren apparently believed he was helping Taiwanese intelligence.

On 11 February 2008, former DOD employee, Gregg Bergerson, Kuo, and an accomplice, Yang Xin Kang, were arrested on espionage charges. At the time, Kuo was staying at the Fondren home and had in his possession a DOD document titled 'The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2008'. Fondren told the FBI he had given Kuo the draft and was placed on administrative leave. In March and May 2009, Bergerson, Kuo and Kang pleaded guilty, receiving prison sentences. When Kuo pleaded guilty, Fondren surrendered and was charged with conspiracy. Despite the excitement, one US counterintelligence official noted, 'All Governments have espionage operations where they're trying to turn people to give them inside information'. Security efforts usually worked, but 'it's not too hard to defeat those things if you're determined'.¹⁰⁴

Washington accepted the need for 'a more collaborative and consultative foreign policy – one committed to forging common solutions to common problems'.¹⁰⁵ Robert Gates told his Asian colleagues that America was making 'a very real shift' reflecting 'new thinking in US defense strategy overall'. Washington would fulfil its alliance commitments 'to the permanent presence of, and direct action by, US forces in the region'. But strategy now placed 'ever greater emphasis on building the capacity of partners to better defend themselves'. Focus shifted from a reliance on lethal force to 'a re-balanced mix' of 'hard' and 'soft' power integrating military, diplomatic, economic, cultural and humanitarian capabilities. Gates pledged the USA would continue to be assertive in protecting its allies and interests. America was 'an indispensable power – but we are also one that is aware of our own limitations, aware that the world and nearly all the challenges we face are simply too complex to go it alone'.¹⁰⁶

US Treasury Secretary Geithner visited Beijing in June 2009, raising financial, economic and commercial issues with Chinese officials. He reassured Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao that America would defend the dollar, thereby protecting China's dollar-denominated assets. Geithner promised that after recovering from the recession, America would reduce its deficit and fight inflation. He noted the 'evidence of Chinese faith' in America.¹⁰⁷ A week later, the guided missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain*, exercising in the South China Sea, was shadowed by a PLAN submarine. Its proximity only became known when it snagged and damaged the *McCain's* underwater sonar array. The two vessels did not collide, and there were no injuries. America downplayed the 'inadvertent encounter'¹⁰⁸ while China called it an accident. Analysts noted such incidents reflected 'an increasingly aggressive Chinese capability, especially in what it considers its own territorial waters'.¹⁰⁹

Beijing appeared ambivalent about China's stature and the US view of China. When Admiral Mullen expressed concern over China's naval growth,

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Major General Peng Guangqian from the Ministry of National Defence (MND) complained Mullen's comments were 'irresponsible and worked to the disadvantage of the development of Sino-US military relations'; such claims were 'always used as a means to satisfy America's own needs'. Washington had a 'complex anxiety disorder on China's development and always worries that other countries will challenge its own dominance'. A Chinese naval expert, Li Jie, noting that US military spending equalled that of a dozen other powers, asked, 'How on earth can China threaten the US?'.¹¹⁰ In contrast, Beijing praised its own handling of the economic crisis and its 'independent' foreign policy.¹¹¹ China was being 'already seen as a great power, taking into consideration its economy, population, and growing influence in the international society'.¹¹²

Some commentaries cautioned against great-power hubris. An elaborate argument noted that 'The aura of China's success is, unfortunately, seriously undermined by many weaknesses and fragilities that plague the country'. Additionally, 'The misperception of China as a great power has also led many foreign countries to seek to saddle China with a great deal of responsibility in handling international issues'. The answer? 'China's focus for now must lie in maintaining its steady development'.¹¹³ To those who 'hope that China will become the leader of the world', the advice was, 'Looking forward to the collapse of the US and replacing the position of the US is not China's goal ... In the long run, we still need to firmly adopt the strategy of hiding one's capacity and biding one's time'.¹¹⁴ Efforts were made to educate Chinese 'netizens' about the folly of pursuing a 'G-2' partnership with the USA. China must develop friendly relations with all countries; 'one or two countries or a bloc of powers cannot resolve global problems'.¹¹⁵

Hu and Obama exchanged messages of goodwill when the US National Symphony Orchestra played in China marking the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations.¹¹⁶ Beijing praised America's adoption of 'smart power, 3D (diplomacy, development and defence) and soft diplomacy' in contrast to the Bush Administration's hard power and unilateral focus. Obama's style had 'softened the aggressive image of the US and to some extent repaired the US's relationship with other countries'.¹¹⁷ Soon, defence officials met in Beijing to resume the Sino-US defence dialogue. Undersecretary for Defence Policy, Michele Flournoy, sought 'a framework for US-China military-to-military relations'. Lt. General Ma Xiaotian, PLA Deputy CGS, urged Flournoy to 'take substantial measures to remove the barriers that hinder our military relations'.¹¹⁸

The two sides discussed North Korea and regional security issues. The Americans sought reassurance that the PLA would prevent collisions in international waters within China's EEZ; their hosts wanted reassurance about arms sales to Taiwan. Korea and terrorism provided shared interests but residual differences proved to be deep. Beijing acknowledged that 'Divergent security concerns and skepticism over China's military buildup remain the biggest obstacles to advancing military relations'. American

'Hawks', driven by a 'China fear', or their own self-interest, would not give up the idea of containing China. 'This has sometimes pushed the US military to be overly aggressive' in China's neighbourhood.¹¹⁹ Still, 'such open dialogue is the best way to build trust between the two militaries'. Trust was 'a must-have' if the two powers were to boost their relationship, and 'also essential to promote the smooth transition of the Asia-Pacific security system'.¹²⁰ The Chinese CGS, General Chen Bingde, made similar points to the Chief of US Army Staff, General George Casey, pointing to US arms sales to Taiwan.¹²¹

In June 2009, China reduced its US T-bills holdings from \$801.5 billion to \$776.4 billion. Beijing had offloaded \$4.4 billion in April, but bought another \$38 billion-worth in May.¹²² China appeared to be modestly diversifying its portfolio. Still, the visit by US Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Energy Secretary Steven Chu in July underscored the potential for cooperation in trade, clean energy, controlling greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change.¹²³ The visitors noted that their two countries were the world's largest energy consumers and greenhouse gas emitters; while America consumed double the energy that China did, the gap would narrow to 10 per cent by 2020. Both countries were increasing renewable energy production, but their proportion of renewables would drop below the global average by 2020. Locke and Chu offered to collaborate on a greater focus on 'green' energy. The visitors' Chinese heritage posed a dilemma for China's 'netizens' – proud that 'Chinese' men resided at the 'centre of American power', while noting they were in China to advance US national interests.¹²⁴

Washington pursued a delicate balance between asserting leadership and offering a hand of cooperation to a growing army of 'partners'. Leaving for India in July 2009, Hillary Clinton noted the ambiguity – 'some see the rise of other nations and our economic troubles here at home as signs that American power has waned'. Others simply did not trust America to lead; they viewed it as 'an unaccountable power, too quick to impose its will at the expense of their interests and our principles. But they are wrong'. The question was not whether America 'can or should lead, but how it will lead in the 21st century'.¹²⁵

She would exercise 'American leadership to build partnerships and solve problems that no nation can solve on its own, and we will pursue policies to mobilize more partners and deliver results'. Clinton asserted, 'just as no nation can meet these challenges alone, no challenge can be met without America'. Washington would 'offer a place at the table to any nation, group, or citizen willing to shoulder a fair share of the burden ... inducing greater cooperation among a greater number of actors and reducing competition'. This would tilt the balance away from a multi-polar world toward a 'multi-partner world'.¹²⁶ This revisionist view of American power was either driven by an altruistic vision, or an acknowledgement of an architecture redesigning itself.

Inaugurating the US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) in Washington in July, Obama noted that Sino-US relations 'will shape the 21st

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century, which makes it as important as any bilateral relationship in the world. That really must underpin our partnership. That is the responsibility that together we bear'. He was confident of making progress on 'the most important issues of our times' on the bases of shared interests. 'If we advance those interests through cooperation, our people will benefit and the world will be better off – because our ability to partner with each other is a prerequisite for progress on many of the most pressing global challenges'.¹²⁷ Vice Premier Wang Qishan and State Councillor Dai Bingguo talked for two days with Clinton and Geithner. Statements highlighted agreements on advancing clean energy and energy efficiency, reducing CO₂ emissions, increasing US savings and Chinese consumption, reducing Chinese savings and exports, and rebalancing economic and financial systems.¹²⁸

There were hints of discussions of strategic issues.¹²⁹ The Chinese highlighted Obama's acceptance of Hu's invitation to visit China in mid-November, and an agreement to 'expand exchanges between the two militaries at all levels', especially the fact that Robert Gates would host CMC Vice Chairman, General Xu Caihou, before the year's end.¹³⁰ Clinton said she and Dai had 'spent many hours in discussion. We've had the opportunity to meet privately and to talk very openly between ourselves to try to understand each other's point of view'.¹³¹ Everyone agreed that international financial institutions needed to reflect China's changed global economic stature.¹³² Wang noted the US pledge 'to facilitate exports of high-technology products from the United States to China',¹³³ a sensitive issue since Washington banned such exports after the June 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. Dai Bingguo underscored Beijing's concerns:

To ensure that our bilateral relationship will move forward on the track of long-term and sound development, a very important thing is that we need to support, respect, and understand each other, and to maintain our core interests. And for China, our concern is we must uphold our basic systems, our national security; and secondly, the sovereignty and territorial integrity; and thirdly, economic and social sustained development.¹³⁴

While the SE& D ended on a positive note, Beijing made clear its concerns about Washington's stance towards fundamental issues of organizing principles, China's non-democratic single-party dispensation, and its 'core interests'. While keen to boost relations with America, China would not compromise on these issues. There was some American recognition that these differences could precipitate opposing blocs across the Pacific; a more responsive and flexible formulation was needed.¹³⁵ US interest in 'Building a strong relationship with China' and forging 'a new global architecture of cooperation' retained prominence. Clinton said the focus was not just on 'current concerns. We intend to lay the groundwork for a new pattern of cooperation, a new forum for discussion, a new structure for engagement that will allow us to work together far into the future'.¹³⁶ Unofficial analyses questioned national

policy towards the external 'other'. Some Chinese noted that America's 'power' lay not in its wealth but in its capacity to consume many times more goods and services than China could; on that basis, China could not challenge American 'power'.¹³⁷ Others stated that 'soft power' was not a panacea; China needed a fungible mix of hard and soft power.¹³⁸

The PLA stressed its modernization was incomplete, and the strategic objective was national defence.¹³⁹ US military views, too, showed flexibility. Commanders noted the 'daunting, complex' challenges of systemic fluidity confronting America.¹⁴⁰ The biggest was 'managing strategic competition with China'. While leaders pursued engagement, defence analysts noted an intensification of subtle competition. Although China was no longer called a 'peer-rival', the essence of the 'Chinese challenge' was just that. A key question was how to address China's 'advancing strategic and military capabilities within the context of a broader policy emphasizing engagement and cooperation'.¹⁴¹

China's nuclear, missile defence, space, and cyber capabilities were troubling. Since China offered restraint and cooperation while building threatening capacities, America was unsure of the appropriate response. Washington would likely fail to dissuade Beijing from pursuing its goals. Competition need not trigger an all-out arms race, but Americans needed 'to think more seriously about how to deal with China'.¹⁴² Despite US technological superiority, China could develop capabilities to inflict 'significant damage' on US combatants. Both sides should, therefore, be careful not to let 'worst-case scenarios and unlikely contingencies drive the broader relationship', preventing cooperation on key issues.¹⁴³ There were some signs that this view was shared.¹⁴⁴

The vulnerability of relations to China's brittle domestic milieu emerged in July 2009. Rioting Uighur youths in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi killed nearly 200 Han Chinese, and damaged property. Hundreds were arrested. Violence exploded after police quelled Uighur students protesting against the murder of two Uighur workers at a coastal town on rumours of having raped two Han women. Once the students dispersed, gangs armed with staves, clubs, stones and bricks ripped through Urumqi, attacking Han residents, shops and businesses. Media reported that surveillance cameras had spotted 'women in long Islamic robes and head coverings issuing orders' to rioters. Urumqi police said that women so dressed were rare in the city, but a number were seen on the day, and one was seen distributing clubs.¹⁴⁵ The situation deteriorated sufficiently for Hu Jintao, in Italy for a G-8 summit, to rush to Beijing to take charge of security measures.¹⁴⁶

Thousands of People's Armed Policemen (PAP) were rushed to reinforce the garrison in the restive region. Beijing stressed 'links' between the unrest and the US-based World Uighur Congress (WUC). Beijing vilified its leader, Rebiya Kadeer, comparing her to the 'splittist' Dalai Lama. China was outraged when Japan and Australia welcomed Kadeer on visits during which she spoke of the plight of Xinjiang's Uighur people. Beijing's critique of the

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Congressionally financed National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was strong. Beijing may have been surprised to learn US taxpayers annually paid the WUC \$215,000 via the NED, a body dedicated to 'splitting the motherland' by establishing a 'free Turkistan'. Chinese commentary equated the WUC's campaign with 'terrorism' and its funding from the NED as 'flagrant, undisguised support from some Western nations'.¹⁴⁷ The latter were accused of 'double standards' in waging war against some 'terrorists' while aiding others. China complained that 'the US Government, once more acting through its "private" Non-Governmental Organization, the NED, is massively intervening into the internal politics of China'.¹⁴⁸ The NED was accused of financing the 'Crimson Revolution' in Lhasa in March 2008, the 'Saffron Revolution' in Burma in 2007, and 'virtually every regime-change destabilization in eastern Europe over the past years from Serbia to Georgia to Ukraine to Kyrgyzstan to Teheran'.¹⁴⁹

In formal exchanges, US arms sales to Taipei still topped Chinese grievances. When General Casey, the first US Army Chief to visit China since 1997, arrived in August 2009, CGS Chen Bingde, and General Ge Zhenfeng, Chen's deputy, told him that US arms sales hurt China's 'core interests'. They asked that America 'remove obstacles' to improved military ties. However, there also were signs of normality. Casey attended a seminar at the Academy of Military Science (AMS) and visited the Shenyang Military Area Command in north-eastern China. He and his hosts agreed to deepen cooperation in humanitarian, disaster relief, cultural and sports activities, and in exchanging officers to improve mutual understanding. Casey's visit coincided with the launch of the MND's website, designed to 'let the outside world have a better understanding of China's national defense policy'.¹⁵⁰

China's envoy to the Six-Party Talks, Wu Dawei, returned to Beijing after a five-day trip to Pyongyang. This broke a moratorium on high-level visits imposed since Pyongyang's nuclear test in May.¹⁵¹ It is likely that Beijing briefed Casey on Wu's gleanings in Pyongyang. Meanwhile, the PLA was conducting its largest-ever army-air force drills when Casey arrived. Four army divisions and their PLAAF units comprising 50,000 troops from the Shenyang, Lanzhou, Jinan and Guangzhou military areas were implementing the 'Stride-2009' exercise. The four divisions were transported over long distances using military and civilian assets, testing the PLA's long-distance mobility. Divisions from Shenyang and Lanzhou, and Guangzhou and Jinan areas were switched before beginning 'operations'. Troops, tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery were transported by rail; light units flew. Stride-2009 showcased the PLA's ability to deploy and fight across China.¹⁵²

While pursuing collaboration, Beijing appeared determined to extend capabilities over the coming 'decade of strategic opportunity'. In June 2009, the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) published Beijing's science-and-technology strategy to mid-twenty-first century. Hundreds of CAS fellows had spent a year studying trends and potential to forge a vision of China's future, focusing on energy, hydro-carbons, biomass, water resources, minerals,

advanced manufacturing and materials, IT, space, the oceans, ecology, agriculture, nanotechnology, regional development, human health, and state- and public security. Their reports envisaged the application of technology in advancing China's interests, demonstrating ambition for China's sci-tech future. They said by 2050, China would develop emerging industries like new energy, and new, environment-friendly, products¹⁵³:

- The world is on the verge of a new industrial revolution driven by 'green technology', artificial intelligence, and sustainable development.
- China would improve the 'autonomous navigational capability' of space vehicles, increase effective space payload, improve near-space vehicles and flight hardware.
- China would establish sustainable habitational spacecraft near 'the earth orbital space station, and space stations with long-term postings'.
- Chinese space modules would reach Mars around 2020, to explore Jupiter and planets beyond it by 2030.
- By 2030, China would send tychonauts to the Moon to set up 'space work stations', from where they would land on Mars by 2050.
- China, emerging as the world's largest economy, would reunite with Taiwan by 2050.

Diplomatic dynamics of an emerging order

In mid-2009, Beijing faced trouble in Xinjiang's 'syringe attacks' by Uighur activists on Han settlers in Urumqi. Warning that US internet attacks on Moldova's Communist Party using web-based tools like Twitter and YouTube showed Washington could attack China, too, the PLA called for 'an urgent strengthening of internet controls to avoid the internet becoming a new poisoned arrow for hostile forces'.¹⁵⁴ Around then, Myanmar unexpectedly interposed itself in Sino-US diplomacy. Senator Jim Webb's visit to Myanmar, his meeting with its military ruler, General Than Shwe, and the release of the US citizen, John Yettaw, jailed for spending two nights in Aung San Suu Kyi's compound drew media attention. Webb criticized American sanctions but failed to secure Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom. Still, a US-Myanmar thaw appeared possible.

Beijing's ire rose over another dispute. Having failed to persuade several ethnic militias operating along Myanmar's periphery to either disarm or join the national border guards, Myanmar's rulers attacked the Kokang militia near the Chinese border. Fighting led to the flight of around 35,000 Kokang to Yunnan where co-ethnic Chinese nationals offered shelter. Although over 10,000 returned to Myanmar in early September,¹⁵⁵ tensions persisted. Beijing viewed Webb's visit to Naypyitaw as signifying 'the United States is supporting the Burmese government secretly', thereby weakening Beijing's regional influence. Fearing these trends might threaten a 825 km-long \$1.68 billion pipeline being built to ship Myanmar gas to China,¹⁵⁶ Beijing deployed a

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'powerful force' along the border to 'ensure the lives, property and safety of Chinese merchants in Burma'.¹⁵⁷

In September, Obama aide, Valerie Jarrett, reached Dharamsala to meet the Dalai Lama, who had angered Beijing by visiting Taipei as the pro-independence Democratic People's Party (DPP)'s guest. He insisted he simply presided over memorial ceremonies for hundreds of Taiwanese disaster victims. Jarrett conveyed Obama's support to Tibetans 'protecting their distinct heritage and securing respect for their civil liberties', while extracting a pledge that the pontiff was 'committed to engaging China in dialogue'.¹⁵⁸ This eased the path for the Dalai's visit to America in October and Obama's to China in November. Obama would not receive the Dalai in October, but would do so later.

Still, the two sides almost went to war commercially. First, Obama authorized punitive tariffs of up to 35 per cent on Chinese-made car- and light-truck tyres to 'remedy the clear disruption to the US tyre industry'. Fearing this might cost 100,000 jobs, Beijing launched an anti-dumping probe into imports of American cars and poultry, later filing a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO).¹⁵⁹ With trade ties showing stress, Hu Jintao sent Dai Bingguo to Pyongyang to urge Kim Jong-il to unconditionally return to the Six-Party process. Kim told Dai that he was ready for North Korea to engage in exchanges 'to address the issues' of nuclear arms in the Korean Peninsula.¹⁶⁰

Indications of fundamental Sino-US friction threatened amity. DNI Blair described China, Iran, North Korea and Russia as states capable of 'challenging' US security using military force, espionage and cyber-attacks. China shared 'many interests' with America, but its 'increasing natural resource-focused diplomacy and military modernization' made it 'a complex global challenge'.¹⁶¹ Robert Gates, too, analyzed the 'Chinese threat', advising that when considering the consequences of China's military modernization,

We should be concerned less with their potential ability to challenge the US symmetrically – fighter to fighter or ship to ship – and more with their ability to disrupt our freedom of movement and narrow our strategic options. Their investment in cyber and anti-satellite warfare, anti-air and anti-ship weaponry, and ballistic missiles could threaten America's primary way to project power and help allies in the Pacific, in particular our forward air bases and carrier strike groups.¹⁶²

Gates noted this would 'degrade the effectiveness of short-range fighters and put more of a premium on being able to strike from over the horizon'. However, he also noted America's advantage. 'The US is projected to have more than 1,000 F-22s and F-35s before China fields its first fully operational fifth-generation fighter – a gap that will grow well into the 2020s'.¹⁶³ The recently commissioned Global Strike Command, amalgamating the 8th and 20th Air Forces, could launch sudden, long-distance, conventional or strategic nuclear strikes to obliterate dug-in targets.¹⁶⁴ Beijing described

Gates' comments on 'new threats' from China as 'irresponsible and groundless'. A PLA spokesman demanded that 'the US respect facts, take concrete measures to correct its wrong remarks and stop misleading the press, as well as halt the behavior that damages ties between the two nations' armies'.¹⁶⁵

Diplomacy stressed cooperation, though. In September, Obama and Hu met at the UN General Assembly and the UN's climate change summit. Later, they joined a G-20 gathering in Pittsburgh. In his UN address, Obama stressed his 'deeply held belief that in the year 2009 – more than at any point in human history, the interests of nations and peoples are shared'. He pointed to changes he had made: 'Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world's problems alone'. Obama said he had worked to build 'a new era of engagement with the world. And now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges'.¹⁶⁶

In an era when our destiny is shared, power is no longer a zero-sum game. No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation. No world order that elevates one nation or a group of people over another will succeed. No balance of power among nations will hold.¹⁶⁷

The shift Obama apparently sought emerged from his talks with Hu. They discussed the financial crisis, climate change, trade, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Iran and North Korea. Obama was 'forceful' in insisting Tehran must not acquire nuclear arms; on North Korea, Hu thought US–DPRK bilateral talks would be 'valuable' but Obama would only allow such talks if Pyongyang honoured its 2005 commitments, and returned to the Six-Party process. Hu was unhappy with the US tariffs on Chinese tyres but proposed no retaliation. Neither broached Chinese holdings of US securities – although Beijing had suggested plans to diversify its portfolio.¹⁶⁸ Both reiterated interest in boosting relations. Hu said these were 'conducive to peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large'.¹⁶⁹

The G-20 summit unveiled a new economic order. The role reserved for the G-8 industrialized countries was transferred to the G-20, bringing together the world's largest developed and emerging economies. The latter, especially China, gained greater influence in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The financial crisis shifted the 'economic gravity from the West to the East'.¹⁷⁰ Still, Beijing worried about tough new challenges. China needed not only a new engine of sustainable growth, but also 'better skills and more political wisdom'. Besides, 'it is mutual trust, equal standing, systematic coordination, and concrete joint efforts' among the G-20 that could 'propel economic recovery'.¹⁷¹ The crisis was caused by the Wall Street 'hijacking' the US financial system; unless corrective measures were effected, blaming China for excessively saving or exporting could not solve that 'root problem'.¹⁷²

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A multi-front charm offensive

Beijing described Hu's role at the 'four summits', – the UN, the climate change summit, the Hu–Obama meeting, and the G-20 conclave, 'significant and far-reaching'. Hu too had urged joint-action on global challenges, pledging China's contribution to reshaping the world vis-à-vis the financial crisis, climate change, non-proliferation and disarmament.¹⁷³ Washington responded with 'strategic reassurance' which America and China were expected to exchange. Deputy Secretary of State, James Steinberg, noted this formulation rested on a 'core, if tacit, bargain'.

Just as we and our allies must make clear that we are prepared to welcome China's 'arrival,' ... as a prosperous and successful power, China must reassure the rest of the world that its development and growing global role will not come at the expense of security and well-being of others ... Part of achieving strategic assurance comes from enhancing transparency. But if our efforts are truly to be successful, they must go beyond words to actions that reassure. We must each take specific steps to address and allay each other's concerns.¹⁷⁴

China welcomed the notion of 'strategic reassurance', but insisted America needed to offer some. Arms sales to Taiwan and force deployments near Chinese air- and maritime spaces provided none.¹⁷⁵ The Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) provided a mechanism for engagement on these issues. Rear Admirals led delegations that met in China, but differences were stark. The PLA noted,

The constant US military air and sea surveillance and survey operations in China's EEZ have led to military confrontations between the two sides. The way to resolve China–US maritime incidents is for the US to change its surveillance and survey operations policies against China, decrease and eventually stop such operations.¹⁷⁶

The Americans declined, but the importance of studying China's strategic culture and doctrinal inheritance was manifest in the US military conference on the study of Sun Zi's work at American training centres. Researchers saw four uses of Sun Zi's teachings¹⁷⁷ for the US military:

- A tool for strategic analysis.
- A source of ideas for US military operations.
- A way to understand the strategic thinking of Asian allies and facilitate cooperation.
- A way to understand the thinking of a nameless potential adversary.

Confidence was evident at the 60th anniversary parade in Beijing on 1 October. The largest display of armaments in China's history, the parade by 14

infantry, 30 mechanised and 10 airborne formations showcased '52 types of new homemade weapon systems'.¹⁷⁸ Reflecting an evolving strategic posture, the display of armour, combat aircraft, electronics and missiles demonstrated the gains of reforms and the PLA's ability to fight digital battles. Underplaying muscularity, Hu Jintao insisted China's military capability was guided by a defensive policy and that Beijing would never threaten others or initiate war. China even announced force reduction by 700,000 within three years. Analysts noted the continuing disparity between US and Chinese militaries, and the PLA's messages to domestic and foreign audiences.¹⁷⁹ However, Beijing had clearly achieved its goal of laying 'the foundations' of sound national defence capabilities by 2010.¹⁸⁰

Following the celebrations, Wen Jiabao visited Pyongyang, meeting Kim Jong-il, who had offered to hold bilateral talks with Washington and rejoin the Six-Party forum. Wen noted these conditions were unacceptable; America was willing to hold preliminary talks which must be followed by multilateral exchanges aimed at North Korea's denuclearization.¹⁸¹ Wen could not have communicated US views without close consultation. Still, America and China alternated collaboration with suspicions, most clearly in military matters. While acknowledging Beijing's growing role in global affairs, America worried about 'building rules of the road' and avoiding crises as the two forces operated in close proximity.¹⁸² Washington was particularly troubled by the PLA's cyber-warfare capacity challenging network-dependent US forces.¹⁸³ Admiral Mullen worried about the strategic intent underpinning China's military modernization.¹⁸⁴

General Xu Caihou sought to allay these fears in his talks with Gates, senior DOD officials, and Obama. Repeating Hu's reassurances, Xu said that with 40 million people still mired in poverty, economic development was China's top priority.

We will not or could not challenge or threaten any other country ... our strategic goal is to build an informatized force that is capable of winning wars in the information era (but) ... No matter how modern and developed China would be, we will never seek hegemony, military expansion or arms race.¹⁸⁵

Asked about manoeuvrable SSMs and China's defence spending, Xu insisted the SSMs were purely defensive and, while America spent 4.8 per cent of its GDP on the military, China spent 1.4 per cent.¹⁸⁶ Beijing also let the *USS George Washington* and its escorts dock at Hong Kong without fuss. Xu invited Gates, Mullen and Williard to visit China in 2010. Obama committed 'to building an active, cooperative and comprehensive relationship with China', to be reinforced during his November visit Beijing.¹⁸⁷

There, Hu pledged, 'China will unswervingly uphold a national defence policy that is defensive in nature, and will never seek military expansion and an arms race, and will never constitute military threats to any other

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country'.¹⁸⁸ But trade cast a shadow as Obama slapped 24–37 per cent tariffs on Chinese steel pipes just before his visit. His first presidential voyage to Asia showed ambitions around an APEC summit in Singapore. Trips to Japan, China and South Korea, and meetings with Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong and Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono were scheduled. Obama would also co-chair the first US–ASEAN summit. Economic, energy, commercial and security issues featured, but Obama's message was that America 'intends to deepen its engagement in this part of the world; that we intend to compete in this part of the world; and that we intend to be a leader in this part of the world'.¹⁸⁹ Only China posed a challenge:

I see China as a vital partner, as well as a competitor. The key for us is to make sure that the competition is friendly, and it's competition for customers and markets, it's within the bounds of well-defined international rules of the road. On critical issues, whether climate change, economic recovery, nuclear non-proliferation, it's very hard to see how we succeed or China succeeds in our respective goals without working together. And that is, I think, the purpose of the strategic partnership.¹⁹⁰

In Tokyo, Obama announced, 'We welcome China's efforts to play a greater role on the world stage, a role in which their growing economy is joined by greater responsibility'.¹⁹¹ This theme appeared throughout his Asian tour. In Shanghai, he said, 'The notion that we must be adversaries is not predestined ... And yet the success of engagement depends upon understanding – on sustaining an open dialogue, and learning about one another and from one another'. He noted, 'Power in the 21st century is no longer a zero-sum game; one country's success need not come at the expense of another. And that is why the United States insists we do not seek to contain China's rise'.¹⁹² Obama urged Hu, Wen and others to work with him on global challenges.¹⁹³

The major challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to nuclear proliferation to economic recovery, are challenges that touch both our nations, and challenges that neither of our nations can solve by acting alone. That's why the US welcomes China's efforts in playing a greater role on the world stage – a role in which a growing economy is joined by growing responsibilities.¹⁹⁴

Hu responded – 'given our differences in national conditions, it is only normal that our two sides may disagree on some issues. What is important is to respect and accommodate each other's core interests and major concerns'. Hu pointedly noted,

The two sides reaffirmed the fundamental principle of respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Neither side supports any

attempts by any forces to undermine this principle. We will continue to act in the spirit of equality, mutual respect, and a (sic) noninterference in each other's internal affairs, and engage in dialogue and exchanges on such issues as human rights and religion in order to enhance understanding, reduce differences, and broaden common ground.¹⁹⁵

On Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, China secured a pledge of non-interference. Obama's pleas to engage with the Dalai Lama found no mention in the Joint Statement; nor did his reference to the Taiwan Relations Act. The Joint Statement only cited the 'Three Communiqués'. The leaders agreed on energy-and-climate-change issues; officials signed protocols and memoranda of understanding on energy efficiency, renewable energy, clean uses of coal, building electric vehicles, extracting shale gas, and establishing a joint clean energy research centre. China rejected legally binding targets for cuts in CO₂ emissions but Hu agreed on the 'full, effective and sustained implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change'.¹⁹⁶ Both leaders wanted the Copenhagen climate summit in December to 'aim to reach an accord that includes all the issues being dealt with in the negotiations',¹⁹⁷ rather than issue a statement of intent.

The financial crisis, given symbiotic economic linkages, demanded much attention. By May 2009, China held roughly \$1.5 trillion in US assets representing 65 per cent of China's total foreign holdings.¹⁹⁸ Of this, \$800 billion was in T-Bills and other instruments.¹⁹⁹ US modesty was apparent in Ambassador Jon Huntsman's conclusion 'that "China expert" is kind of an oxymoron. And those who consider themselves to be China experts are kind of morons'.²⁰⁰ Obama and Hu 'reiterated that the fundamental principle of respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity is at the core of the three joint communiqués' guiding USA–China relations. Neither side supported any attempts by any force to undermine this principle. The two sides agreed that respecting each other's core interests was 'extremely important to ensure steady progress in US–China relations'.²⁰¹ The leaders commended General Xu's recent visit to the USA where Xu signed a seven-point agreement with Gates.²⁰² Noting the preparations for reciprocal visits by General Chen Bingde, Gates and Admiral Mullen, they endorsed the Xu–Gates accord, pledging deeper military-to-military contacts to 'foster greater understanding'.

The core interests which the militaries would defend remained unspecified, but hints of mutual recognition of the need to collaborate amidst systemic fluidity appeared. The Americans sensed 'for the first time ever that we're actually getting a little bit of traction on cooperation between the United States and China as it relates to reviewing a lot of issues that really do matter' in terms of regional stability and Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁰³ The Chinese discussed North Korea, especially Wen's talks with Kim, who had conditionally agreed to return to the Six-Party Talks; the Americans explained their concerns over Iran, seeking support for a tough response if Tehran failed the 'P5+1' goals. There was a broad accord but limits became apparent.

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Wen told Obama that China was a developing country with 'a long way to go' before it became modernized. So, 'We must always keep sober-minded over it'. While Sino-US cooperation promised 'a unique role in advancing the establishment of the new international political and economic order', China rejected any 'Group of Two (G2)'. Nor would Beijing align with any country or blocs.²⁰⁴ This rejection overlay a stark message:

The United States should accept China's anticipated status as a military power in the future and try to discard its long-harbored precept that another potential military power should be subdued in advance. It should also realize that China's military modernization is inevitable and that blockades, sanctions or containment would only worsen further military ties with the country.²⁰⁵

This was no idle sabre-rattling. 'For China's part, it should continue to adhere to its long-cherished defensive military strategy and closely follow its commitment that the country's sharpened military edge will not be used to seek regional and global hegemony'.²⁰⁶ That followed US intelligence reports saying China had joined 900-mile range ASBMs with an ocean surveillance system capable of spotting American ships 1,860 miles away. Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Gary Roughead said this was a reason behind cutting orders for DDG-1000 destroyers because these lacked missile-defence capabilities.²⁰⁷ US power-projection capacity being defined by the five-to-six carrier strike groups deployed to the Pacific, these missiles threatened America's primacy. PLAAF Commander, General Xu Quliang, cautioned that:

Competition between military forces is developing towards the sky and space; it is extending beyond the atmosphere and even into outer space. This development is a historical inevitability and cannot be undone ... As the air force of a peace loving country, (we) must forge a sword and a shield capable of winning peace.²⁰⁸

Consistent Chinese – and Russian – critique of America's BMD project and countermeasures appeared to hit home. The commander of the US Strategic Command, General Kevin Chilton, acknowledged, 'We have to be cautious with missile defense. Missile defense can be destabilizing depending on how you array it'. A comprehensive American BMD system 'might encourage them to in fact double, triple, quadruple their current nuclear forces (because) they would feel that their deterrent was no longer viable'.²⁰⁹ Suddenly alert to the BMD dialectic's cost-benefit calculations, instead of boosting provocative ground-based or air-borne platforms, Washington ordered six new BMD vessels, raising Aegis-capable ship numbers to 27 by 2013.²¹⁰

As the engagement element of America's 'hedge and engage' China strategy gained prominence, Washington reached out in a power-sharing initiative. Diplomatic-military, economic-security, and tactical-strategic dichotomies

would likely assume salience in a crisis, but Beijing acknowledged Obama's efforts to replace zero-sum competition with a positive-sum framework. One significant outcome of the visit was said to be 'that the two sides are willing to view Sino-US relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, which will help to upgrade this relationship to a higher level'.²¹¹ But pessimists warned that:

The basic orientation of US strategy on China is 'shaping China,' integrating China through cooperation, making China become a US-endorsed 'free and democratic' state and incorporating a rising China into the orbit of America's global strategy while also conducting defense and containment.²¹²

However, Obama's ability to forge a consensus on China proved modest. Two days after he left Beijing, a Congressional commission accused China of keeping the renminbi's exchange rate artificially low, causing America's massive trade deficit, and China's accumulation of \$2.27 trillion foreign reserves.²¹³ It blamed China and America for triggering the financial crisis. It also noted China's military power challenging US interests across the Asia-Pacific.²¹⁴ Its Congressional mandate and bipartisan composition reflected the depth of Washington's anxiety.

Obama's efforts to wrest a 'meaningful and unprecedented achievement'²¹⁵ from the Copenhagen climate summit in December framed the limits of collaboration. When the hosts failed to secure agreement on their drafts, Obama met Wen Jiabao for an hour before sitting down with Wen, Presidents Lula of Brazil and Zuma of South Africa, and Indian Prime Minister, Singh, to thrash out 'the Copenhagen Accord'.²¹⁶ It acknowledged a universal need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but imposed no mandatory targets.²¹⁷ When this draft, endorsed by many states but questioned by others, was released at the summit's end, Wen dispatched an aide to represent him. Rejecting accusations of arrogance,²¹⁸ China proved its capacity to withstand pressure and its centrality in global governance. Wen's success in forging a consensus with Singh, Lula and Zuma left Obama little room for manoeuvre, angering Washington. The warmth apparent in November dissipated in December as a muscular dialectic ensued.

An unhappy New Year

2010 began on an ambiguous note – the US Pacific Air Force (PAF) announced that just months after two squadrons of F-22 *Raptor* fighters had been rotated out of Kadena in Japan, and Guam, a fresh F-22 squadron was being flown in to Guam. The PAF pointed out, 'The F-22A is a transformational combat aircraft that can avoid enemy detection, cruise at supersonic speeds, is highly maneuverable, and provides the joint force an unprecedented level of integrated situational awareness'. Comparisons with Chinese

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counterparts were crucial.²¹⁹ 'As part of continuing force posture adjustments to address worldwide requirements, the United States continues to deploy additional forces throughout the Western Pacific'.²²⁰ At sea, the *USS North Carolina*, one of America's most modern attack submarines, joined sister boats *USS Hawaii* and *USS Texas* in Pearl Harbour.²²¹ Other major platforms, too, arrived in the theatre. Beijing noted Washington's military focus:

Military power still exists. There is still some country trampling on the norms of international relations with its military superiority. This practice has forced a couple of countries to regard possession of nuclear weapons as a strategic pillar of safeguarding the national security.²²²

So, nuclear proliferators were responding to US 'hegemonic unilateralism'. Other sources of tensions surfaced. Complaints that Beijing had attacked Google's e-mail service provided to a Chinese dissident exposed another sensitivity. Google pulled out of China. Hillary Clinton emphasized Washington's disapproval of Chinese conduct.²²³ In 'an important speech on a very important subject', she said Google's withdrawal had drawn 'a great deal of interest'. Asking for a 'transparent' inquiry into the incident, she warned:

Countries that restrict free access to information or violate the basic rights of internet users risk walling themselves off from the progress of the next century. Now, the United States and China have different views on this issue, and we intend to address those differences candidly and consistently.²²⁴

Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei said Google's complaints should not be 'over interpreted' or linked to Sino-US relations.²²⁵ Chinese commentary denounced US 'double standards',²²⁶ pointing out that America employed 80,000 specialists in cyber-warfare; they had created over 2,000 computer viruses such as 'Worms, Trojans, Logic Bombs and trapdoor viruses' with which to attack enemy networks. Chinese analysts insisted that America used control of the internet as a strategic tool.

Using the internet, the US can intercept information via the net, export US values and opinions, support 'Color Revolutions,' feed the opposition powers and rebels against anti-US governments, interfere with other countries' internal affairs and make proactive attacks on enemy's communication and directing networks.²²⁷

Hinting that this was a game two could play, Beijing noted that traditional differences over Taiwan, Tibet and Trade were 'old issues' and long-term interests should not 'be sacrificed for short-term political concerns'.²²⁸ However, the Google incident made an impression. Washington boosted its cyber defences, announcing that Japan and America would forge a cooperative

framework.²²⁹ The security focus was reinforced by US plans to sell arms to Taiwan. On 6 January, the DOD confirmed sales of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) ABM systems worth \$3.1 billion.²³⁰ These could shoot down PLA missiles aimed at Taiwan, reducing China's pressure against Taiwan's moves towards *de jure* independence.²³¹ Condemning the transfers, Beijing 'urge the US to clearly recognize the severe consequences of arms sales to Taiwan and adhere to the three Sino-US joint communiqués, especially the principles established in the Joint Communiqué on August 17, 1982'.²³² That communiqué obliged America to not improve Taiwan's combat abilities with new arms, gradually reduce and, eventually stop sales.

PLA officials asked, 'Why don't we take defensive countermeasures against them? Apart from just protesting to the US government and taking necessary steps, why don't we put sanctions on these troublemakers?'²³³ Some in Beijing saw the disputes as symptomatic of fundamental differences – contrary 'value systems' ensured the two countries were 'poles apart' on essential issues.²³⁴ Five days after the PAC-3 contracts, China conducted a mid-course missile-interception test.²³⁵ Beijing reassuringly said, 'the test is defensive in nature and is not targeted at any country'.²³⁶ Compared to 2007, China employed a sophisticated strategic communication framework for this test.²³⁷ A fortnight later, Clinton held 'a very positive exchange' with Yang Jiechi in London.²³⁸ The next day, the Administration notified Congress of plans to sell arms worth \$6.4 billion to Taiwan.²³⁹

The package included PAC-3 missiles, 60 Black Hawk helicopters, upgrades for Taiwan's command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) system, two Osprey-class minehunters, and Harpoon telemetry missiles. Washington was 'still assessing' Taipei's request for F-16 C/D fighters. US officials acknowledged Chinese fears of America's 'containment plans' but insisted Washington was boosting Taipei's confidence in advancing negotiations with Beijing.²⁴⁰ China disagreed. He Yafei made 'a solemn representation' to Ambassador Huntsman against such 'crude interference in China's domestic affairs (which would) seriously harm China's national security'. He warned, 'The US announcement of the planned weapons sales to Taiwan will have a seriously negative impact on many important areas of exchange and cooperation ... This will lead to repercussions that neither side wishes to see'.²⁴¹

China cancelled visits by General Chen Bingde, Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen, announcing sanctions against the relevant weapon vendors. PLA commanders argued the sale 'justifies China's efforts to raise its defense budget, purchase more weapons, and advance its research. China has not threatened the United States, so why the latter try to challenge our core state interests?'²⁴² Asked if China was acting like a strong country, Yang Jiechi said China did feel strong but had not organized the BASIC grouping. China, 'a fifth of humanity, does not seek special treatment, but deserves a hearing'. He recounted China's quest for a 'democratization of international relations. One country or a few countries definitely cannot decide the future

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of the world. China is not talking about blocs. China is talking about common interests'.²⁴³

US officials did not say if America had decided on a tough stance since the Copenhagen summit, noting that Sino-US relations were diverse and based on mutual interests. These were 'defensive weapons' meant to 'contribute to security and stability across the Taiwan Strait'. America had 'long-standing commitments' to Taiwan's defence and, 'we will, as always, pursue our interests'.²⁴⁴ These interests, and the consequent strategic objectives and military missions, were enumerated in reports handed to Congress in early 2010. One noted that while the Taiwanese Air Force mustered 400 combat aircraft, many were obsolescent or unserviceable, and could not match the PLAAF's growing capabilities.²⁴⁵ The report rationalized a response to Taiwanese requests for 66 F-16 C/D fighters. The PLA, 'highly concerned' by the report, asked America to act with caution.²⁴⁶

In his preface to the DOD's Quadrennial Defence Review Report (QDR), Gates noted, the US military's purpose was 'to project power, deter aggression, and come to the aid of allies and partners'.²⁴⁷ He acknowledged that the rise of China and India 'will continue to shape an international system that is no longer easily defined', one in which America needed help. The argument for US primacy, equating global wellbeing with American interests, was circular – 'America's interests and role in the world require armed forces with unmatched capabilities and a willingness on the part of the nation to employ them in defense of our interests and the common good'.²⁴⁸ The QDR recognized that

the continued dominance of America's Armed Forces in large-scale warfare provides powerful incentives for adversaries to employ methods designed to offset our strengths ... (with) states employing unconventional technologies, our current adversaries will have shown that they will tailor their strategies and employ their capabilities in sophisticated ways.²⁴⁹

Asymmetric challenges included cyberspace attacks, network intrusions, ASAT tests, the growing number of space-faring states, and 'the investments some nations are making in systems designed to threaten our primary means of projecting power: our bases, our sea and air assets, and the networks that support them'.²⁵⁰ Since 'Future adversaries will likely possess sophisticated capabilities designed to contest or deny command of the air, sea, space, and cyberspace domains', America was preparing 'for possible future adversaries likely to possess and employ some degree of anti-access capability – the ability to blunt or deny US power projection – across all domains'.²⁵¹ US armed forces 'will retain the ability to act unilaterally and decisively when appropriate, maintaining joint, all-domain military capabilities that can prevail across a wide range of contingencies'.²⁵² The QDR did not name China as a 'possible future adversary,' but Beijing 'took note'.²⁵³

US Intelligence profiled China's growing stature. A \$600 billion stimulus package and over \$1.4 trillion in new bank lending in 2009 helped China become an engine of global recovery, 'reinforcing perceptions of its increasing economic and diplomatic influence'. Contributions to the IMF, G-20 activism, anti-piracy naval operations and UN action on North Korea emphasized Beijing's supportive stance to America.²⁵⁴ However, China also pursued goals contrary to America's:

The PLA's capabilities and activities in four key areas pose challenges to its neighbors and beyond Taiwan, including China's military relationships across the developing world; China's aggressive cyber activities; its development of space and counterspace capabilities; and its expansive definition of its maritime and air space with consequent implications for restricted freedom of navigation for other states. The PLA is already demonstrating greater confidence and activism in such areas as asserting China's sovereignty claims and in military diplomacy.²⁵⁵

Although China had fewer than 50 ICBMs 'capable of targeting the United States', the number of warheads capable of striking America could more than double in 15 years, especially if Beijing built multiple, independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV).²⁵⁶ China emphasized strategic defence – integrating 'diplomacy, economics and information operations with conventional military forces', but US intelligence was not reassured: 'growing capabilities in counter-space, cyber warfare, electronic warfare and long-range precision strike could enable China to achieve strategic surprise'.²⁵⁷ The DIA worried that China's 'operational doctrine does emphasize seizing the initiative through offensive action, including possible preemptive action. China does not view an offensive operational doctrine within the context of a strategic defense as contradictory'.²⁵⁸

Washington was troubled by Chinese ballistic and cruise missile forces capable of hitting foreign military bases and warships in the western Pacific; anti-satellite (ASAT) and electronic warfare weapons to defeat sensors and information systems; development of terrestrial and space-based, long-range intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems to detect, track, and target naval, air, and fixed installations; and 'continuing improvements to its increasingly capable submarines to place naval surface forces at risk'. Many of these programmes had begun to 'improve China's ability to execute an anti-access and area-denial strategy in the Western Pacific'.²⁵⁹ Although no dominant adversary faced the United States posing existential military threats,²⁶⁰ Beijing did appear nettlesome. 'China's intelligence services continue to expand and operate in and outside the United States. Its human collection services enhanced their collection and processing capabilities directed against the United States'.²⁶¹

US District Judge Cormac Carney in California sentenced a 74-year-old Rockwell/Boeing aerospace engineer, Zhong Dongfan, to 15 years in prison

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for keeping at home around 300,000 pages of 'sensitive' documents containing details of the Space Shuttle, Delta IV rockets, F-15 fighters, B-52 bombers, C-17 *Globemaster* transports and CH-46/47 helicopters. Retained as a consultant after retiring, Zhong insisted he collected the documents for a planned book about his career in Rockwell and Boeing. Although Zhong had violated corporate regulations, he broke no law; still, he was convicted of committing economic espionage and 'acting as an agent of the Chinese Government' for over 30 years. Judge Carney said he was sending a message to China – 'stop sending your spies here!'²⁶² Beijing denied any involvement²⁶³ but this mattered little.

In the DOD's Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report (BMDR), Gates noted that China and Russia were the only countries capable of conducting 'a large-scale ballistic missile attack' on America. This was, however, 'very unlikely'. Washington's BMD architecture 'does not have the capacity to cope with large-scale Russian or Chinese missile attacks, and is not intended to affect the strategic balance with these countries'.²⁶⁴ However, America was 'closely monitoring China's continuing buildup of military capability, including its missile forces'.²⁶⁵ China's fleet of SRBMs, MRBMs and IRBMs could not only hit Taiwan, 'but also US and allied military installations in the region'. Beijing's 'advanced ballistic missile capabilities' could threaten neighbours, and its 'ASBM capabilities' could 'target naval forces in the region'.²⁶⁶ By deterring such threats, BMD helped America maintain its 'military freedom of maneuver'.²⁶⁷

America's BMD collaboration with Japan, Australia, and South Korea would ensure security of the US homeland, its forces and bases abroad, and allies and partners everywhere. While America sought good relations with China, it would 'reject any negotiated restraint' on its BMD.²⁶⁸ A month after the PLA's mid-course ABM test, the USAF carried out the 'first directed energy lethal intercept demonstration' against a ballistic missile, proving that 'revolutionary use of directed energy' from a high-powered laser generator mounted on a Boeing-747 was ready for integration into the BMD network.²⁶⁹ Possible disruptions to strategic stability resulting from the plan did not figure in the discourse. Beijing felt 'encircled' by America's anti-missile deployment chain.²⁷⁰

Diplomacy too, took a knock. Obama had told Chinese leaders that he would shortly receive the Dalai Lama.²⁷¹ The pontiff would be received in the White House's Map Room but there would be no public event or even video footage. Beijing, stressing its 'firm opposition',²⁷² warned that 'any state leader who meets with the Dalai Lama in private or public risks damaging relations with China'.²⁷³ The meeting generated a still photograph and a short statement from the White House:

The President stated his strong support for the preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural and linguistic identity and the protection of human rights for Tibetans in the People's Republic of China. The President

commended the Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way' approach, his commitment to non-violence and his pursuit of dialogue with the Chinese Government.²⁷⁴

Obama 'encouraged both sides to engage in dialogue to resolve differences and was pleased to hear about the recent resumption of talks'. Clinton, too, met the Dalai Lama. The next day, the National Endowment for Democracy honoured the pontiff for his 'principled pursuit of democracy'.²⁷⁵ Given the history of US intervention in Tibet and the Dalai Lama's role in it,²⁷⁶ the symbolism was powerful. Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai summoned Huntsman to deliver a 'solemn protest'. America had 'grossly interfered in China's internal affairs, gravely hurt the Chinese people's national sentiments and seriously damaged the Sino-US ties'. Tibet was 'an inalienable part of the inviolable territory of China, and the issues concerning Tibet are purely internal affairs of China'.²⁷⁷ China insisted 'The Dalai Lama's words and deeds have shown that he is not a pure (sic) religious figure, but a political exile who has all along been engaged in separatist activities under the pretext of religion'.²⁷⁸

Beijing may have assumed that assurances on 'core interests', 'state sovereignty', and 'territorial integrity' formalized in the November 2009 Joint Statement had secured US acceptance of China's positions on these issues. Now, Beijing condemned Obama's continued 'Cold War' approach to China, and stressed US responsibility for taking 'concrete steps' to repair the damage.²⁷⁹ Clinton responded, 'With China, we seek areas of common purpose while standing firm where we differ'.²⁸⁰

Despite tensions, Beijing sought to restore normalcy. In January 2010, China held \$895 billion in US T-bills, \$129 billion more than Japan, America's second-biggest creditor.²⁸¹ Amidst the arms sales controversy, Beijing approved Hong Kong port calls by the *USS Nimitz* and its escorts.²⁸² A day before Obama received the Dalai Lama, the *Nimitz* and its strike group docked for a week of R& R for five thousand combatants.²⁸³ Two days after that meeting came signs of Beijing's cooperative intent. Despite differences over sanctions on Iran, China and America worked to bring North Korea back to the Six-Party Talks. At the start of an Asian trip in February to mobilize momentum, US envoy Stephen Bosworth had 'good discussions' with his Chinese counterpart Wu Dawei in Beijing.²⁸⁴

A Beijing daily headlined a plaintive FMPRC plea with the photograph of smiling Obama and Hu clasping hands.²⁸⁵ When Washington offered to send Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg²⁸⁶ and the NSC director for Asian Affairs, Jeffrey Bader, to 'exchange views with Chinese officials on US-China bilateral issues', Beijing 'accepted' to 'save' relations.²⁸⁷ The visitors agreed with Yang Jiechi and Dai Bingguo 'on the high importance each attaches to the relationship and their commitment to building a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship'.²⁸⁸ They focused on North Korean and Iranian 'nuclear proliferation', trade disputes, market access and climate change.

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The Chinese raised US arms sales to Taiwan and Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama. The Americans insisted that Washington had 'followed a consistent approach, pursued by administrations of both political parties on a one-China policy', indicating 'a willingness to try to work together with China to bridge differences and deepen cooperation on areas of common interest'.²⁸⁹ America would continue arming Taiwan and expect Chinese collaboration on global issues. This is when Chinese officials reportedly told Steinberg that Beijing viewed the South China Sea as part of its 'core interests'.²⁹⁰

Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell indicated the possibility of gulfs being unbridgeable – 'The rise of new powers – India and China – and their interactions with the existing order and established powers, such as Japan and the United States, pose both significant opportunities and challenges'. Since 'strategic partner' India offered opportunities, the challenges came from China. Campbell insisted America was not in decline and 'there should be no doubt that the United States, itself, is a Pacific nation'.²⁹¹ He outlined America's Asia-Pacific framework within which Beijing had to operate:

- Foundation of the US alliance system and bilateral partnerships.
- Building a common regional security and economic agenda.
- The importance of result-oriented cooperation.
- The need to enhance the flexibility and creativity of multilateral cooperation.
- The principle that the Asia-Pacific's 'defining institutions will include key stakeholders such as the United States'.²⁹²

Beijing disagreed.²⁹³ Spokesman Qin Gang noted, 'The top priority for the US side is to take China's stance seriously, honor China's core interests and major concerns, show sincerity and take concrete actions to push for China–US relations back toward sound and stable development'. National People's Congress (NPC) spokesman Li Zhaoxing said, using Taiwan 'to interfere with China's internal affairs is unacceptable'. Selling arms to Taipei was like 'handing a dagger to a person when he is hugging his brother'.²⁹⁴ While Steinberg and Bader made no public comments, Qin and Li spoke at press conferences, suggesting the visit resolved little. Beijing insisted Washington accept the blame for its arms sales to Taiwan and for Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama. One Chinese report, citing sources 'close to the US embassy', said 'US envoys have explained to Chinese officials that Obama did so under pressure from the US Congress'.²⁹⁵

Around the same time, the two countries published their defence budgets. After nearly two decades of double-digit growth, China's outlay rose by 7.5 per cent (Yuan 37 billion) to Yuan 532.115 billion (\$78 billion) in FY2010–11.²⁹⁶ Wen Jiabao told the NPC that China would 'enhance the PLA's ability to respond to multiple security threats, with a focus on winning regional wars in the information age'. The PLA would build a modern logistical system, intensify research and development and improve its combat hardware. 'Governments at all levels should, as always, care about and support the

strengthening of national defense and the army'.²⁹⁷ Leading strategist, Major General Luo Yuan, a delegate to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC), explained fundamental insecurities – not revisionism – driving Chinese defence planning. 'China is the only permanent member of the UN Security Council that has not achieved territorial integrity. We need to think more on how to preserve national integrity. We have no intention of challenging the USA'.²⁹⁸

These assurances did not influence America's FY2011 defence budget, which rose by 3.4 per cent to \$708 billion, or 4.7 per cent of GDP. It included \$549 billion in discretionary spending and \$159 billion to support 'overseas contingency operations', in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁹⁹ DOD sought \$189 billion for force modernization – 'These advanced weapons and capabilities are essential to keep us ahead of our adversaries. We need weapons systems that give US forces an overwhelming advantage in combat'.³⁰⁰

Allocation priorities underscored America's determination to snuff out any resistance to its full-spectrum military dominance at the cutting edge of US primacy. Major General Luo spoke for the PLA; Foreign Minister Yang reflected Beijing's angst: 'The United States should properly handle relevant sensitive issues and work with the Chinese side to return the China-US relationship to the track of stable development'.³⁰¹ Few signs suggested America was listening. But exchanges on Iran and North Korea in April indicated continuing collaboration.³⁰² While Iran's nuclear envoy was visiting China, Beijing confirmed that Hu Jintao would attend Obama's 'nuclear summit' ahead of the NPT Review Conference. Obama spoke to Hu for an hour, urging Beijing's support for tougher sanctions on Tehran if it did not satisfy the P5+1 grouping. Breaking with past insistence on 'peaceful negotiations', while stressing Beijing's stance on Tibet and Taiwan, Hu agreed to consider fresh sanctions.³⁰³

America's Nuclear Posture Review Report (NPR) raised questions about maintaining strategic stability with China – and Russia. The NPR reiterated anxieties – 'the United States and China's Asian neighbors remain concerned about China's current military modernization efforts, including its qualitative and quantitative modernization of its nuclear arsenal'. Despite its small size, 'the lack of transparency surrounding its nuclear programs – their pace and scope, as well as the strategy and doctrine that guides them – raises questions about China's future strategic intentions'.³⁰⁴ Beijing reposted:

It is publicly known that the US once had hundreds of nuclear warheads aimed at China. Even today, it has numerous naval vessels deployed carrying nuclear weapons that can be retrained on China swiftly. In Asia, China is surrounded by countries that have signed nuclear pacts with the US. It is the US, not China, that should provide more transparency regarding its nuclear intentions.³⁰⁵

Still, Hu's discussions with Obama at the Nuclear Security Summit restored a measure of normalcy. Hu delivered on his pledge on North Korea and Iran.

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Soon after his return to Beijing, Kim Jong Il arrived there, promising to return to the Six-Party process.³⁰⁶ But as a multinational team of investigators concluded that a torpedo fired from a DPRK submarine had sunk the South Korean corvette, the *Cheonan*, in March, to Pyongyang's vehement denial, the scale of the challenge became apparent.³⁰⁷ On Iran, China joined America and fellow P5+1 states in drafting new sanctions if Tehran violated its non-proliferation obligations. Chinese delegations arrived in Washington to discuss the Ten-Year Framework for Cooperation on Energy and Environment, and to resume the human rights dialogue. Disagreements on strategic security persisted.

When Washington published the details of its nuclear arsenal, pressure mounted on Beijing to follow suit. China responded:

In contrast with the nuclear weapons held by the US and Russia, powerful enough to blow the planet apart dozens of times, the warheads possessed by China are limited in number and are for defensive and deterrent purposes only. Surrounded by countries that have signed nuclear pacts with the US, China cannot afford to make public the exact number and deployment locations of its nuclear weapons now. Such a move would put its territorial integrity and national security at high risk.³⁰⁸

Strategic mistrust notwithstanding, Beijing purchased \$17.7 billion in US bonds in March 2010, raising holdings to an all-time high of \$895.2 billion. 'Normalcy' was restored.

2 The Japan–Australia–India strategic triangle

A game of strategic chess

America's 'hub-and-spokes' security framework¹ combining alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines, and 'strategic partnerships' with India and Singapore, secured its regional primacy. The Bush Administration led a semi-formal 'Quadrilateral Initiative' – the Quad – linking America to Japan, Australia and India in a mainly naval coalition.² Following Washington's 2004–6 deployment of two-thirds of its expeditionary capability to the Pacific and advances in USA–Japan BMD projects, Chinese anxiety found expression on 11 January 2007. In a direct-ascent anti-satellite test, a modified missile destroyed a defunct satellite. US visitors – CJCS General Peter Pace, PACOM Commander Admiral Keating, and Secretary of Defence Gates – sought explanations and were told the test was 'a scientific experiment with no military import', offering little reassurance.³

Keating's visit generated additional excitement when he offered help to China's aircraft carrier project.⁴ His host, PLAN Commander, Admiral Wu Shingli, suggested that PACOM 'take care' of eastern Pacific while PLAN guarded the west. Keating refused to cede any control. This was not surprising; that Wu proposed such a division of labour was.⁵ The unease among commanders on both sides may have reinforced military diplomacy among America's allies and partners. Strategic networking and alliance-building picked up. The process began in December 2006 when, during a visit to Tokyo, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh formalized with Shinzo Abe an Indo–Japanese 'strategic and global partnership' stressing 'political, defence and security cooperation'.⁶ Three months later, visiting Australian Prime Minister John Howard signed a defence pact with Japan, creating a quadrilateral framework for military collaboration. This included 'exchange of strategic assessments and related information', military personnel exchanges, joint exercises and training 'to further increase effectiveness of cooperation', and 'coordinated activities including those in the areas of law enforcement, peace operations, and regional capacity building'.⁷

They insisted the accord was purely bilateral but responses, including non-Chinese ones, acknowledged China's strategic encirclement.⁸ The following

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month, the annual Indo–US *Malabar* naval drills moved from the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea, with Japanese warships joining up in triangular displays close to China’s shores. These proved so successful that the parties invited Australia and Singapore in an autumnal *encore*. *Malabar-07-2* would be the largest ever naval exercise in the Indian Ocean. Tokyo also hosted BMD talks, weaving together US–Japanese and US–Australian ABM mechanisms. The allies agreed to develop a ship-borne SM-3 BMD system while boosting India’s integration into the Asia-Pacific collective security carapace. In May 2007, ministers from the four states met in Manila and launched their Quadrilateral Initiative – dubbed the Quad.⁹ This ‘values-based’ coalition was forged on strong bilateral ties between America and its allies.¹⁰ The new element was a rapid development of security links among Japan, Australia and India themselves.

Brendan Nelson, Australia’s Defence Minister, visited China in July 2007, offering assurances that the Quad simply sought to maintain regional peace and security. Next, in Delhi, he formalized Indo-Australian defence collaboration with counterpart A.K. Antony. Next, Shinzo Abe and his Defence Minister, Yuriko Koike, arrived in India to boost security cooperation. Abe talked of his vision of an ‘expanded Asia’ joining countries on the shores of the Pacific and Indian Oceans – ‘By Japan and India coming together in this way, this broader Asia will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the USA and Australia’.¹¹ The Quad’s superstructure was undergirded with a fine mesh of security-military agreements among the four allies. Shared concerns vis-à-vis China reinforced ideological affinity. The four expressed these concerns using similar language.¹²

Beijing described this coalescing bloc around China’s periphery as the ‘Asian NATO’.¹³ This ‘democratic encirclement’ gathered pace in 2007.¹⁴ America and Australia launched their Joint Combined Training Capability facility in Queensland, deploying 27,000 troops in the ‘Talisman Sabre’ exercise, testing interoperability. Manmohan Singh hosted his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Tan Dung, signing a defence accord. Delhi began building another network of roads, bridges, airstrips and radar stations near its disputed Himalayan borders to ‘match’ Chinese activities across the ‘Line of Actual Control’. US marines trained with Indian forces in sub-Himalayan north-eastern forests. Washington offered to sell the F-35 *Lightning* fighter to India as the two governments announced the final text of their nuclear cooperation agreement – although Delhi later denied receiving an F-35 offer. Beijing issued diplomatic demarches to the Quad members asking what the group’s objectives were. Their anodyne responses did not reassure China. Meeting at a G-8 summit in Germany, Hu asked Singh what the Quad’s security parameters were – Singh said there were none!

Officials were candid. The new CJCS, Admiral Michael Mullen, told Congress what other Quad commanders said in private, that China had ‘the greatest potential to compete militarily with the US and field disruptive military technologies that could, over time, offset traditional US military advantages’.¹⁵ He assured senators, ‘We do not want to overreact but at the same time, we

must not under-react. Our strategy seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities'.¹⁶ Mullen did not explain if Beijing shared American views of those 'right strategic choices' and if it had the right to choose its options. America sought China's support for the security architecture and strategic order it fashioned and led. Washington wanted a status quo-oriented China, but prepared to thwart a revisionist Beijing.

China's concerns over this potentially hostile coalition triggered efforts to leverage its Eurasian links into military potential under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). With Russian anxiety over America's Euro-BMD plans and US anger over China's export of toxic toys, toothpaste and seafood reflecting insecurities, Sino-Russian convergence generated large-scale military drills. Chinese and Russian units, with token representations from other SCO members – moved long distances to conduct complex exercises in Xinjiang and the Urals. At an SCO summit ending 'Peace Mission 2007', President Putin revived strategic bomber missions, suspended in 1992. Soon, US and British fighters were intercepting 'Bear' bombers near Guam and Scotland.

As America's BMD negotiations with Russia sputtered on, Putin ordered Russian strategic rocket forces to prepare for 'defensive action', while announcing Moscow would no longer tolerate challenges to its 'core interests'. This would soon be executed in relations with Georgia and Ukraine, countries seeking integration into the European Union (EU) and NATO. With his United Russia party poised to win an electoral landslide in November 2007, and keen to retain influence after stepping down as president, Putin suspended Moscow's participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. Next, he resumed naval patrols in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, suspended in 1992. Critical of Washington's dominance, Beijing showed understanding of Russian concerns.

Quad commanders gathered in Delhi to finalize their game-plan, selecting the Indian Ocean for their debutante display. Flotillas from the US 7th Fleet and the Indian, Japanese, Australian and Singaporean navies teamed up for the *Malabar-07-2* exercises. Two US carriers joined an Indian one, two dozen other combat platforms, an American nuclear-powered attack submarine, and over 150 aircraft – with 20,000 personnel, conducting a spectrum of aerial, surface and subsurface operations for six days in September, demonstrating advances in inter-operability. The five commanders insisted the drills had no strategic objective, and they were building the capacity against terrorists, pirates, and WMD proliferators.¹⁷ The credibility gap may well have been the point in raising uncertainty while demonstrating a deterrent effect. As the fleet tested its combat capabilities, Howard hosted Bush and Abe in their first trilateral security summit in Sydney. They agreed to intensify links with India. China was the ghost at the banquet.

As the Bush presidency wound down, rotating deployments of USAF F-22 and F-16 aircraft to Japan and South Korea, stationing of submarine, surface and air-combat units in Guam, and the replacement of the Yokosuka-based

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USS Kitty Hawk with the nuclear-powered *USS George Washington* revealed the cutting edge of America's Pacific build-up. Washington responded to a Sino-Russian proposal against the militarization of space by shooting down a defunct intelligence satellite with an SM-3 ABM missile a year after China's ASAT test. The hegemon signalled the determination to defend its primacy.

Washington considered Beijing's deployment of 'anti-access' systems threatening its forces in the Western Pacific intolerable. Some acknowledged that China's growing economic, commercial and strategic interests drove its naval expansion. Few questioned Hu Jintao's account of Beijing's 'Malacca dilemma'. China was anxious to prevent its energy- and commercial lifeline through that strait being choked off, but it also worried that robust defensive action would incite adverse reactions. The 'string of pearls' theory instanced Quad efforts to cast Chinese activities in a threatening light. This posited that China was building naval facilities in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and elsewhere to gain control over the passage between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to the detriment of others' interests.¹⁸ Quad members, acknowledging the validity of Beijing's 'Malacca dilemma', also noted the 'threat' from China's 'string of pearls'.¹⁹ This ambivalence was the Bush legacy on Sino-US relations for its allies.

Japan – fluidity abroad

The foundations of America's Asia-Pacific security order were proving shaky. The first shock hit Japan, the cornerstone of the US 'hub-and-spokes' edifice. Shinzo Abe's government pursued twin-tracks of reviving a *modus vivendi* with China²⁰ while building Japan's diplomatic-military stature. Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had, barring a brief interval, ruled Japan since the 1950s, had carried a historically competitive view of China.²¹ Tokyo's response to China's nuclear weapons programme reflected this.

Despite its post-1945 insistence on neither acquiring nor stationing nuclear arms on its territory, Tokyo did, following Beijing's 1964 nuclear test, order a secret study to assess the costs and benefits of a nuclear weapons programme.²² A nationalist perspective informed its core worldview. In July 2007, the LDP lost control of the parliament's upper house to *Minshuto* (Democratic Party of Japan – DPJ). DPJ leader Ichiro Ozawa had vowed to block renewal of the law authorizing the Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) – the Japanese navy – to refuel US-led coalition naval vessels deployed to the Arabian Sea for 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (OEF) in Afghanistan. Tokyo used this refuelling commitment to establish itself as a major player; the DPJ's threats to end it challenged the LDP's nationalist-globalist perspective.

The LDP confronted declining support, ministerial scandals, and Abe's health concerns. In September 2007, Abe resigned. Successor Yasuo Fukuda, a transitional figure, moderated Japan's nationalist focus, pledging to end prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine which honoured 14 Class-A convicted war criminals among Japan's fallen soldiers. He also vowed to

achieve reconciliation with China while defending Tokyo's 'core interests'. A Bush–Fukuda summit restored some energy to the alliance, but the DPJ's opposition to the refuelling mission temporarily stymied Fukuda's efforts to maintain Japan's coalition role. Eventually, using the LDP's majority in the *Diet*, he forced the extension through, but for how long was uncertain. On China, however, the LDP and DPJ forged a tacit consensus. Fukuda and Ozawa travelled to Beijing separately, inviting Hu to visit Japan. Hu agreed.

Despite disputes over territorial and energy claims in the East China Sea, Japanese politicians edged towards acknowledging the need for a *modus vivendi* with China. This partly diluted the Japan–USA alliance revived by Bill Clinton in 1996 for countering 'threats' from a 'rising' China. In May 2008, Hu Jintao made a state visit to Japan. The two sides agreed to cooperate in 70 different areas of common concern. In environmental and energy-conservation, the neighbours initiated 505 public- and private-sector projects. Cooperation was effective in 80 per cent of these within a year, difficulties in the security realm notwithstanding.²³ The tone of the discourse, too, changed.

On 1 September 2008, Fukuda resigned. Taro Aso, former foreign minister and party Secretary-General, succeeded him, restoring some of the LDP's nationalist rhetoric. While maintaining exchanges with Beijing, Aso was hawkish on international issues. He sought to retain calm in Sino-Japanese dynamics and growing economic exchanges, while raising Japan's profile as a leading – if not the leading – Asia-Pacific actor. The competitive impulse in Tokyo's China policy was moderated by economic, commercial and systemic realities. Aso's strategic vision of Japan's global role had been reflected in his 2005 articulation of an 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' reshaping the former Soviet sphere of influence across the Eurasian space. As foreign minister, Aso had stressed the importance for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova of establishing 'fundamental values of a market economy, freedom, and democracy' in their post-communist future.²⁴

Sino-Japanese rivalry sharpened in early 2009 when, after Beijing's despatch of an anti-piracy flotilla to the Gulf of Aden, Tokyo followed suit. Aso's efforts to revitalize the Japan–USA alliance found favour in Washington. In February 2009, Clinton visited Tokyo. Aso sought assurances of American interest in the alliance²⁵; Clinton gave these. In addition to Aso and Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, she also met Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada, assuring him that 'the alliance between the United States and Japan is one of the most important in the world'. She noted defence was 'at the core of values' the two allies shared.²⁶ Clinton and Nakasone confirmed the May 2006 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) on redeploying 8,000 US Marines from Okinawa to Guam and relocating the Futenma Marine Air Station from its urban location to the coast.²⁷

Implementing the agreement proved contentious, even within the JSDF. Officers, however, acknowledging the alliance's asymmetric nature, recognized that 'Japan is able to obtain cooperation on the security front by providing US forces with bases and expenses and the US is able to achieve its strategy in

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Asia as a result of being granted bases and expenses from Japan'.²⁸ Implementation would, they believed, improve Japanese and US military 'situational responses' by building command-level synergies.

The relocation of 8,000 marines from Okinawa to Guam would not affect overall US regional strength. However, responsive deployments would demand more time, and additional transport capacity needs would grow 'by several thousand times' of current requirements.²⁹ Japanese officers also found the imposition of the bigger share of relocation costs, requiring Tokyo for the first time to fund military facilities on US soil, onerous. The fact that this was an '11th-hour outcome' of talks on reconciling the reduction of Okinawa's burdens and maintaining deterrence, rankled.³⁰ Relocation would also impact on the intra-alliance dynamics. With thousands of US combatants leaving Japan, Tokyo's longer-term contribution to the USFJ would decline, reducing American dependence. This would affect ties and could weaken the alliance's strategic cohesion.³¹

Clinton handed an invitation to Aso to become the first foreign leader to visit America's new president. That meeting, in February 2009, was warm. Obama reiterated that Japan was 'the cornerstone' of US security policy in East Asia, and to America's link to the world economy in crisis.³² With the alliance secure, Aso boosted engagement with China, building on an unprecedented exchange of warship visits in 2007–8. He sent Foreign Minister Nakasone to Beijing to see Yang Jiechi, Premier Wen and State Councillor Dai. Nakasone noted, 'there would be various problems between Japan and China, but it was important that both countries would deal with these issues from a broad standpoint and resolve them with composure'.³³ Expressing 'deep regret' that the 2008 agreement on joint development in the disputed East China Sea had not produced consultations, Nakasone said, 'responsible and courageous steps were needed'. His anxiety over Chinese military modernization, and request for restraint and transparency elicited assurances of defensive intent. Candour underscored the tensions colouring relations but eased the search for resolution.

A key area of Sino-Japanese contention was USA–Japan BMD cooperation. Begun in the 1990s following North Korean missile tests, the project had become a significant aspect of the region's security milieu. By end-2008, it deployed SM-3 ABMs aboard Aegis-equipped MSDF destroyers and Patriot missiles in Japanese city centres. Tests demonstrated mid-course and terminal-phase interception capabilities. Japan insisted it was protecting itself from North Korean ballistic (and cruise-) missiles, but the project's scale suggested Japan's US-linked BMD system could also negate the credibility of China's nuclear deterrent. Beijing had repeatedly expressed concern over USA–Japan BMD collaboration. To address Beijing's anxieties, Tokyo published a report on its BMD project. While stressing Pyongyang's missile programme, it noted that Japan's environs bristled with ballistic and cruise missiles. Providing details of Japan's ABM architecture and its alignment with the American BMD programme,³⁴ it underscored Japan's military transparency, while boosting confidence in its deterrent.

Shortly after Nakasone's trip to Beijing, General Ge Zhen Feng, the PLA's Deputy Chief of General Staff (DCGS), visited Tokyo as guest of General Ryoichi Oriki, Chief of Staff of the Japanese Army. This was the first such visit in 11 years. Ge brought an invitation from Defence Minister Liang Guanglie to Minister Hamada. A month later, Hamada arrived in Beijing. He spoke frankly, stressing the importance of stronger bilateral relations in promoting 'peace, stability and development of the Asia-Pacific region and the world'. Troubled by the PLA's 'lack of transparency', he sought explanations of 'uncertain purposes of the recent increase in activities of Chinese Navy and Air Force' in Japan's vicinity. He also asked about Beijing's aircraft carrier plans.³⁵ Liang assured Hamada that China's defence policy was defensive, Beijing was increasing transparency with its Defence White Papers, and PLAN and PLAAF were conducting routine training. He noted, China had 'no reason not to possess an aircraft carrier forever', but Beijing needed 'to make various considerations' on the issue.³⁶ Chinese reports noted that commanders of the 048 Engineering Command – assigned to build the first carrier – attended the meeting.³⁷

It is not known if Liang asked Hamada about MSDF's induction of the first of the *Hyuga*-class of 18,000-ton 'helicopter-capable destroyers' (DDH). *JS Hyuga*'s flattop through-deck, island-bridge, and cavernous hangers rendered it a small aircraft-carrier, types barred by the 1945 surrender terms. A sister DDH, *JS Ise*, would be launched in August 2009. Tokyo pointed to the need to counter 'growing threats' around Japan. MSDF Chief of Staff, Admiral Keiji Akahoshi, stressed 'information gathering in the seas around Japan' and the development of regional submarine forces:

In each country they are trying to develop their submarine fleets, and submarines are posing perhaps the biggest threat to maritime security around Japan. We have to develop our anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities to react and counter this threat.³⁸

Akahoshi spoke after commissioning the first of four *Souryu*-class submarines equipped with air-independent propulsion (AIP). These could stay submerged for a fortnight, compared to five days for non-AIP boats.³⁹ Analysts insisted, 'it is on China ... where most attention among Japan's senior maritime strategists is focused'.⁴⁰ Beijing acknowledged, 'Obviously it is targeted at China'.⁴¹ Hamada and Liang, however, agreed to promote defence exchanges, confirming Liang's planned visit to Japan before the year ended. The meeting cleared the way for Taro Aso's visit to Beijing in April. Before that summit, Aso and Hu met up in London at a G8 gathering. Insisting that 'the development of the current Sino-Japanese relations has been hard-earned and is worth treasuring', Hu proposed a framework to build on Abe's 2006 'new beginning' initiative:

- Maintain momentum of high-level exchanges and implement consensus reached.

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- Maintain stable trade relations, push forward economic cooperation, explore potential for growth, expand channels of interactions and overcome difficulties.
- Reciprocate exchanges of politicians, legislators, military commanders and youth to build trust and future friendship; enhance security and mutual trust.
- Enhance international cooperation, especially in Asia – jointly help regional states deal with the financial crisis, push for trade growth, and an Asian free-trade zone.
- ‘Properly handle sensitive issues and better safeguard the overall situation in bilateral relations’.⁴²

Diplomatic-security tensions emerged just before Aso set off for Beijing. At the Sasebo naval base, Rear Admiral Kevin Donegan of the US 7th Fleet received Japanese and Indian counterparts as three flotillas gathered ahead of *Malabar 2009* naval drills. Named after a coastal district in south-western India off whose shores annual Indo-US exercises were held since the 1990s, now, America and India move the manoeuvres close to China, integrating Japanese ships with theirs. Four thousand sailors, submariners and airmen would together hone their skills in ASW, surface warfare, air defence, live-fire gunnery, and ‘visit-board-search-and-seizure’ techniques against ‘hostile’ vessels. The objectives were sharing expertise and building interoperability.⁴³ Growing collaboration received strong support from the security community in all three states which were responding to shared anxiety over China’s ‘rise’.⁴⁴ As in 2007, the drills angered Beijing.

During his fourth meeting with Wen and Hu, Aso reached agreement on cooperation in four areas: handling the pandemic flu outbreak; economic-commercial relations; the environment, energy and climate change; and Sino-Japanese private sector deals. Chinese leaders told Aso the current level of Sino-Japanese relations, attained with much effort, should not be allowed to weaken.⁴⁵ This was Beijing’s message to all Japanese visitors.⁴⁶ The two sides restored ‘calm’. Aso reached agreement with his hosts on exchanges of students, officials, businessmen, tourists and information, and on the security implications of North Korea’s missile- and nuclear programmes. On North Korea, Aso and Wen would work together to return Pyongyang to the Six-Party forum.⁴⁷ As Aso ended his China visit, Defence Minister Hamada began a trip to Washington.

Foreign Minister Nakasone, responding to Obama’s vision of a nuclear weapon-free world, offered Tokyo’s perspective – ‘without transparency in its strategic direction, China is continuing to modernize its nuclear arsenals and has undertaken no nuclear arms reduction until today. Nor does the country disclose any information on its nuclear arsenals’. It was in this context that ‘the extended deterrent including nuclear deterrence under the Japan–US security arrangements is of critical importance for Japan’.⁴⁸

Gates reaffirmed to Hamada America’s extended deterrence underpinning Tokyo’s sense of security.⁴⁹ They reviewed the implementation of the 2006

SOFA. Tokyo had pledged to foot \$6.09 billion – 59 per cent – of the \$10.27 billion of relocation costs.⁵⁰ Hamada explained this was politically difficult, but Tokyo would persevere. On North Korean missile tests, they were satisfied with the level of military cooperation; Hamada said the seriousness of Pyongyang's challenges required closer collaboration. He noted his government's difficulties over the Arabian Sea refuelling mission and the anti-piracy duties off Somali waters. There were some disagreements – Tokyo had long sought to replace its F-4 *Phantoms* with the F-22 *Raptors*. Now, Gates told Hamada that Congress had prohibited the F-22's export⁵¹ fearing its sensitive technologies could be stolen.

Gates had already proposed changes to the DOD's procurement and deployment plans. One was to cut F-22 purchases to 187 and buy 2,443 of the cheaper F-35 *Lightnings* instead; another was to downsize a planned BMD architecture. He slashed the production of DDG-1000 destroyers and, cancelled orders for a fleet of presidential helicopters.⁵² Instead of selling the F-22 to Tokyo, Washington would deploy 12 of these to Japan's Kadena Air Force base, and another 12 to Guam, on four-monthly cycles.⁵³ Hamada thought this was a temporary setback, that America would change its mind and allow Japan to buy some *Raptors*.⁵⁴ US stress on the alliance's salience may have influenced Tokyo. Added to America's 2008 decision to remove Pyongyang from the list of state-sponsors of terrorism despite Tokyo's pleas, this hurt Japanese sentiments.

Nevertheless, Japan–USA security links remained paramount in Tokyo's calculus. In contrast, China was a source of anxiety. After visiting Beijing, Aso toured Europe. In a speech in Berlin, he set out his worldview. North Korea's nuclear tests and missile launches agitated him. His comments on China were atypically blunt – 'China's defense spending has increased by a double digit rate year-on-year for the last 20 years consecutively, yet the content is lacking in transparency. In addition, China has been proceeding with the modernization of its nuclear arms'.⁵⁵ Accusing China directly after his 'successful trip', demonstrating a schizophrenic China policy, Aso outraged Beijing.⁵⁶

A strategic triangle of anxiety

Discord appeared in Singapore, at the Asia Security Summit in late May 2009. Hamada, describing Pyongyang's recent nuclear test as 'totally unacceptable', urged 'China and other nuclear powers' to move towards disarmament. He also sought greater transparency in military spending and arms transfers.⁵⁷ General Ma Xiaotian, Deputy CGS of the PLA, noted crucial differences with Japan and America over the regional security framework, urging multilateral dialogue and cooperation, building 'cooperative security' as opposed to the current adversarial architecture, consideration of interests of all regional actors in reshaping the security framework, military-intelligence cooperation against trans-national threats, and securing understanding and trust with

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military diplomacy.⁵⁸ In response, US, Japanese and South Korean defence ministers held their first-ever trilateral meeting.

Leaks from Japan's draft mid-term defence policy guidelines (MDPG) now caused a stir. It proposed ending defence-budget cuts, an increase of troop-strength by 5,000 to 160,000, and the capability to 'secure options responsive to changing situations', suggesting preventive strikes on enemy bases.⁵⁹ While pre-emptive strikes seemed unlikely, the draft suggested significant rethinking. Tokyo's silence deepened Chinese anxiety. Analysts noted Japan was already the largest defence spender after the USA and Russia; the North Korean trigger for this shift notwithstanding, its target was 'in the long run, China'. Beijing saw 'some troubling signs in regional relations'. Most worryingly, 'If Japan uses some excuse to build up its military forces and break through into some previously forbidden ground, it will be more devastating to regional security than North Korea's related moves'.⁶⁰ The US Undersecretary of Defence, Michele Flournoy, meeting counterparts in Tokyo, endorsed Japan's security perspectives, reaffirming American support.⁶¹ The Aso cabinet now extended its Arabian Sea refuelling mission.⁶²

Tokyo juxtaposed its alliance with America and insecurity vis-à-vis China.

In the Asia-Pacific region, where elements of uncertainty and a lack of transparency still exist ... the presence of the US military remains extremely important in order to achieve regional stability ... although it is thought that the relative superiority of the United States, including its military power, will decline in the future, it is considered that the United States will still be the most influential member of the international community.⁶³

Tokyo's view of China stood in stark contrast:

China has been modernizing its military forces, with total defense spending rapidly and continuously increasing. However, with clarity on neither the present condition nor the future of its military power, there are concerns over how the military power of China will influence the regional state of affairs and the security of Japan. Moreover, due to the insufficient transparency, it is noted that other nations might have distrust and misunderstandings about China's decision-making processes concerning the security and the military of China ... Furthermore, several senior military officials recently made positive remarks on the possession of an aircraft carrier, and maritime activities in the sea surrounding Japan have been intensifying. Such events occurred and Japan should keep a careful watch over the situation.⁶⁴

Chinese reaction was frigid. 'A lack of mutual trust' between Japan and China could lead to 'friction, even conflicts'. Tokyo's focus on Japan's 'southwest line of defence' targeted China; Japanese efforts at 'responding to emergencies in the East China Sea, patrolling Diaoyu Island waters, and

responding to trouble in the Taiwan Strait' aimed a military finger at China; and 'what worries Japan the most is China's submarine force'.⁶⁵ The PLA insisted it posed no threats to Japan or any other country, and that Japan was 'trying to find an "imaginary opponent" to build its own aircraft carriers'.⁶⁶

Anti-Han rioting by Uighur youths in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, in July 2009, forced Hu Jintao to rush home from a G8 summit in Italy. China accused the US-based World Uighur Congress (WUC) and its leader, Rebiya Kadeer, of masterminding the violence. In July, Kadeer visited Japan, speaking against Chinese 'abuse' of Xinjiang's Uighurs. Beijing was incensed by Tokyo's apparent endorsement of three 'splittist' leaders – the Dalai Lama, former Taiwanese President Li Teng-hui, and Kadeer. All three were allowed to address gatherings in Japan.⁶⁷ When Tokyo requested permission for its returning anti-piracy flotilla to dock in Hong Kong, Chinese media campaigned against permission being granted.⁶⁸ The militaries sought to allay anxieties, with Liang Guanglie hosting the MSDF Chief, Admiral Keiji Akahoshi.⁶⁹ However, relations remained fragile.

Reports that a prime ministerial panel reviewing Japan's defence policy recommended an easing of the ban on arms exports, and interpreting the constitution to allow the exercise 'the right of collective self-defense'⁷⁰ deepened tensions. Still, the decision by Aso and his fellow-ministers not to visit the Yasukuni Shrine on the anniversary of Japan's surrender in 1945⁷¹ was welcomed in Beijing. Shinzo Abe and Wen Jiabao had also agreed on joint historical research to address major differences. In August 2009, hints of convergence on 'the Nanjing massacre' appeared. The city was captured by Japanese forces on 9 December 1937 when a large number of Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed. Beijing claimed around 300,000 civilians were murdered; some Japanese academics denied any massacre ever took place. Now, the joint panel reported that 'The Japanese scholars have acknowledged Japan massacred innocent Chinese people in Nanjing and the fact that Japan invaded China. There is no problem with such issues'.⁷²

In November 2008, Japan had submitted its continental shelf claims to the UN, identifying an islet, Okinotori, lying between Taiwan and Guam, as Japan's southernmost territory, and claiming rights to the continental shelf stretching from it. China acknowledged Japan's claim to Okinotori but not to its continental shelf. Its strategic location and likely impact on China's interests triggered a strong protest – 'the rock of Okinotori, which obviously cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of its own, shall have no continental shelf'. And since 'Okinotori does not have any ground to claim continental shelf, it is not within the mandate of the (UN) commission to make any recommendation'.⁷³ This exchange reflected and reinforced the competitive dynamic challenging attempts to balance conflicting interests.

Japan–USA relations, too, became somewhat volatile. The 2006 SOFA – an element of Washington's planned reordering of its regional military posture – was bogged down in disputes between Tokyo and Okinawan authorities. Against that backdrop, the DOD's cancellation of its 'multiple kill vehicle'

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programme raised the costs of the USA–Japan BMD project by \$700 million to \$3.1 billion, challenging in the prevailing financial circumstances. The SM-3 Block IIA missile interceptor would now cost much more than originally estimated, although it would now require a single Aegis-equipped ship, not three, to defend Japan.⁷⁴ Washington’s decision without consultation with Tokyo underscored the subordinate ally’s limited influence on measures affecting its security.

Both governments were embarrassed when Bunroku Yoshino, who as the MOFA’s representative had negotiated Okinawa’s 1972 reversion to Japan, claimed the two allies did sign a secret pact, corroborating allegations made by 25 plaintiffs including former journalist Takichi Nishiyama, who had been tried and convicted in the 1970s for asking the government to release these ‘non-existent’ documents. The plaintiffs filed a case in March 2009 claiming that the treaty secretly transferred the US obligation to spend \$4 million in restoring military land to their owners, on to Tokyo.⁷⁵ It also used deceptive phrases allowing Japan to sidestep its 1967 pledge that it ‘will not manufacture or possess nuclear weapons or allow their introduction into the country’.⁷⁶ Washington and Tokyo had allegedly agreed that ‘to introduce’ would indicate ‘installing on Japanese soil’, allowing visiting US aircraft and ships secretly to carry nuclear weapons.⁷⁷

Pressure for disclosure mounted as Japan braced for elections. Sensitivities became evident when Obama was quoted as saying, ‘the US-China ties are more important than any other bilateral ties in the world’. This caused such an outcry over America’s reliability as Japan’s defender that the MOFA had to issue a rejoinder describing that translation as ‘inaccurate’, and clarifying that Obama had described Sino-US relations being ‘as important as any bilateral relationship in the world’, and not ‘more important than any other’.⁷⁸ Against that backdrop, the DPJ’s ‘independent Japan, a balanced alliance with America’ slogan gained support.

Elections to the *Diet*, held on 30 August, were a watershed. The LDP had become unpopular and the DPJ – under the leadership of Yukio Hatoyama – was expected to win. But the scale of the DPJ’s victory marked a dramatic reversal of political fortunes. Before the polls, the LDP held 303 seats in the 480-seat house and, the DPJ, 110. In the polls, the LDP won 119 seats while the DPJ secured 308. The DPJ’s allies in the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the People’s New Party (PNP), and two smaller factions, won another 12 seats. The LDP’s partners in the New Komeito won 21 seats. The position in the *Diet* had been reversed.⁷⁹ Two weeks later, Hatoyama swore in his cabinet, putting in place a DPJ-led coalition which had campaigned for transforming Japanese politics and economics.

Paradigms shifting, or just shaking?

The elections caused anxiety over how far the DPJ might go to implement its promised changes.⁸⁰ After assuming DPJ leadership from Ozawa in early

2009, Hatoyama had proclaimed his radical vision in a series of press commentaries.⁸¹ He sought to reform Japan's domestic political-economic framework established over the LDP's half-century reign. Judging by the election results, his proposals had garnered significant support. However, Hatoyama's foreign policy proposals drew greater attention abroad. He proposed structural and ideational changes. Characterizing US leadership as 'market fundamentalism', Hatoyama claimed this driving force had formalized freedom in economic terms resulting in people being 'treated not as an end but as a means'.⁸² The recent economic crisis had:

resulted from a way of thinking based on the idea that American-style free-market economics represented a universal and ideal economic order, and that all countries should modify the traditions and regulations governing their economies in line with global – or rather American – standards.⁸³

He wrote, 'the era of American unilateralism may come to an end'. As a result of the US 'failure of the Iraq war and the financial crisis, the era of the US-led globalism' was coming to an end, and 'we are moving away from a unipolar world led by the US towards an era of multipolarity'.⁸⁴ However, 'the US will remain the world's leading military and economic power for the next two to three decades'. In the meanwhile, 'China will become one of the world's leading economic nations while also continuing to expand its military power'. The size of China's economy would surpass that of Japan 'in the not-too-distant future'.⁸⁵ The question was:

How should Japan maintain its political and economic independence and protect its national interest when caught between the United States, which is fighting to retain its position as the world's dominant power, and China, which is seeking ways to become dominant?⁸⁶

Hatoyama's answer was to the move towards 'regional currency integration as a natural extension of the path of the rapid economic growth' begun by Japan, followed by South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and then achieved by the ASEAN states and China. He thought Japan must 'spare no effort to build the permanent security framework essential to underpinning currency integration'. His path to regional integration via an 'East Asian Community' overlay a shift in strategic emphases:

Of course, Japan-US Security Pact will continue to be the corner-stone of Japanese diplomatic policy. Unquestionably, the Japan-US relationship is an important pillar of our diplomacy. However ... we must not forget our identity as a nation located in Asia ... the East Asian region, which is showing increasing vitality in its economic growth and even closer mutual ties, must be recognized as Japan's basic sphere of being.⁸⁷

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The DPJ's 2009 election manifesto pledged to focus on socio-economic equity and shift power from the LDP-bureaucracy-business nexus. Under DPJ, power would be devolved to local authorities supervised by elected politicians. In foreign and national security policies, the DPJ promised to 'contribute to the world through proactive diplomacy' thus:

- Develop proactive strategies; build 'a close and equal' Japan–USA alliance.
- Establish intra-regional cooperative mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific region with the aim of building an East Asian Community.
- Ensure that North Korea halts development of nuclear weapons and missiles, and resolves the abduction issue.
- Actively engage in UN peacekeeping operations, liberalization of trade and investment, and the fight against global warming.
- Take the lead to eradicate nuclear weapons, and remove the threat of terrorism.⁸⁸

Hatoyama's stress on changes, Japan's Asian locus, and disdain for the US-led economic system raised concerns over his commitment to the USA–Japan alliance.⁸⁹ He swiftly met the new US Ambassador, John Roos, and phoned Obama, reassuring both of the DPJ's fidelity. Still, Hatoyama's team indicated several changes to the compact:

- Japan's overseas military deployments beyond the needs of immediate self-defence would be under UN, not US, command.⁹⁰
- 'The right of collective defense is Japan's right under international law, and does not mean that Japan is automatically obliged to join missions with its allies ... there is a concern that Japan will be entangled in one-sided use of force by the US.'⁹¹
- Japan would not 'automatically' renew the Arabian Sea refuelling mission when the law expired in January 2010.⁹²
- The DPJ opposed the 2006 SOFA, questioned Japan's obligation to pay \$6 billion, and sought a review.⁹³ The DPJ manifesto too sought a review of the SOFA.⁹⁴
- The DPJ would maintain national security in the face of nuclear proliferation but outside the US's extended nuclear deterrence.⁹⁵

Toshimi Kitazawa, the DPJ Defence Minister, noted, 'The situation surrounding Japan's national security is changing so rapidly. The international community today is facing a range of issues' including inter-state confrontations and global issues such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and rampant international terrorism. Hatoyama had asked Kitazawa to 'ensure the peace and security of Japan based on the principle of an exclusively defense-oriented policy' while retaining civilian control.⁹⁶ Hatoyama met Obama at the UN General Assembly, acknowledging the value of the USA–Japan alliance. A meeting of the prime ministers of Japan and China, and the

South Korean president, in October, demonstrated less energy. They agreed to push for regional cooperation but there was no consensus on East Asian unity. Still, Beijing praised Hatoyama's vision.⁹⁷ The contrast with the USA was stark.

In late October, Kitazawa hosted Gates in Tokyo, both showing dissatisfaction. Gates insisted Tokyo implement the 2006 SOFA; Kitazawa noted that originally, realignment had been agreed between Prime Minister Hashimoto and US Ambassador Walter Mondale 13 years earlier – a little more delay would not be catastrophic. 'We were also able to hear very candid expression of views from the US side. Secretary Gates conveyed to us a very strong message on the Japan–US agreement.' Gates replied,

Our view is clear. The Futenma relocation facility is the lynchpin of the realignment roadmap. Without the Futenma realignment, the Futenma facility, there will be no relocation to Guam. And without relocation to Guam, there will be no consolidation of focus and the return of the land in Okinawa.⁹⁸

Kitazawa's responded: 'We should listen to the other side's remarks, even those that we do not wish to listen to – by accepting those words, we should try and further improve our coordination.'⁹⁹ Gates pointed out that the alliance and US forward deployments had secured Japan for half a century, allowing it to devote just a percentage of its GDP to defence. With the regional security scene becoming volatile, the alliance and the 2006 SOFA assumed even greater import.¹⁰⁰ Gates' meeting with Hatoyama went smoothly. Part of Gates' brief was to finalize plans for Obama's November visit to Tokyo. That part went well. On the realignment issue, Gates ruled out Hatoyama's hopes to move Futenma off Okinawa altogether. Hatoyama said, 'There isn't necessarily an agreement yet even within Okinawa, so while it's important to reach a final solution, I've said that we need more time. Of course we absolutely don't plan on wasting time.'¹⁰¹ The traditional warmth marking USA–Japan exchanges was missing.¹⁰²

During Obama's visit in November, the leaders discussed regional and global issues, focusing on nuclear proliferation, North Korea, Iran, climate change and energy security. While agreeing that the Japan–USA alliance was 'the cornerstone' of Japan's national defence and the regional security order, Hatoyama urged change – 'as time changes and as the international environment changes, there is a need for us to further develop and deepen the US–Japan alliance to make it ever more constructive and a future-oriented alliance'.¹⁰³ While maintaining the alliance remained 'the linchpin of Japanese foreign policy', Hatoyama stressed on building an 'East Asian Community' based on 'open regionalism', in a 'sea of fraternity'.¹⁰⁴ To put economic sinews beneath the strategic carapace, he began negotiating 'economic partnership agreements' with South Korea, Australia and India.

On the SOFA, Hatoyama proposed a review, expanding its remit from 'hard security' to include health, education, environment and disaster relief.

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He endorsed Obama's plan to send nuclear envoy Stephen Bosworth to Pyongyang in the hope of bringing North Korea back to the Six-Party process. On climate change, he pledged to slash Japan's carbon dioxide emissions by 2015. On Afghanistan, he insisted on ending Japan's refuelling mission in January 2010, but pledged a major five-year reconstruction project to build the Afghan educational system, infrastructure and police forces.

Obama said Japan was 'an outstanding partner' playing a 'key role' in an alliance which was the 'foundation for security and prosperity not just for our two countries but for the Asia-Pacific region'. Stressing the 'shared values and shared interests that have served our people so well and have provided peace and security for the region in an unprecedented way',¹⁰⁵ Obama noted, 'Our commitment to Japan's security and to Asia's security is unshakeable – and it can be seen in our deployments throughout the region'.¹⁰⁶ In the face of North Korea's nuclear 'provocations', and other regional threats, Obama pledged, 'So long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a strong and effective nuclear deterrent that guarantees the defense of our allies – including South Korea and Japan'.¹⁰⁷ The leaders agreed to make the alliance a more 'equal partnership',¹⁰⁸ setting up a 'high-level working group' to work on the base relocation plan. The visit was considered a success.¹⁰⁹

While Obama enthralled Tokyo audiences, China loomed on the socio-historical horizons. Some Japanese war-orphans from among the 2,800 who had been abandoned in China after Japan's defeat, to be raised by Chinese foster-parents until they went to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, returned to visit the mainland. Many foster-parents had died by then and the reunion among surviving parents and their former wards was emotional. Chinese media, highlighting this rare amity in Sino-Japanese history, urged Hatoyama to ensure his government took lessons and his proposed East Asian Community was 'purposive and mutually beneficial'.¹¹⁰ Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visited his counterpart, Katsuya Okada, asking him 'to ensure peace and stability in East Asia', including efforts to bring North Korea back to the Six-Party Talks.¹¹¹ Okada agreed.

Military symbolism helped. Three months after refusing to let MSDF ships dock at Hong Kong, Beijing sent PLAN's training vessel, the *Zhenghe*, and naval cadets to Japan's Etajima. The cadets visited Hiroshima, paying respects at the peace memorial.¹¹² In November, Liang Guanglie visited Tokyo. His host, Toshimi Kitazawa, urged transparency in 'details of arms and equipment inventories, procurement targets and records of major equipment, formation and deployment of major units, and detailed budget breakdowns'.¹¹³ Two years earlier, Tokyo had considered showing an Aegis-equipped destroyer to PLA visitors; but US military commanders demurred. Now, Hatoyama told Liang, 'The transparency of Japan's defense policy is high and there is nothing to conceal'.¹¹⁴ Liang was taken to the Sasebo naval base and, escorted by US and Japanese commanders, shown round the *JS Chokai*, an Aegis-equipped destroyer.

DPJ Secretary-General Ichiro Ozawa led a delegation of legislators on a visit to Beijing. Hu Jintao received him, but Ozawa's substantive talks were

with General Liang. They agreed that expanding military exchanges would help to warm political ties. Visits by young officers and naval ships were planned.¹¹⁵ Problems persisted: Japanese vessels had recently detained a Chinese fishing boat in disputed waters; Tokyo–Taipei ties too were problematic.¹¹⁶ But progress was apparent. Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping visited Japan in December. Praising Hatoyama’s ‘East Asian Community’ initiative as a sign of ‘the importance the Hatoyama government places on East Asian cooperation’, Xi pledged to address maritime disputes with the 2008 ‘joint development agreement’.¹¹⁷ Xi was controversially granted an imperial audience. Tokyo originally resisted Beijing’s request, but in 1998, Akihito had received Vice President Hu Jintao and, eventually, relented. Hatoyama, regretting the fuss, agreed with Xi on ‘deepening strategic and mutually beneficial relationship’.¹¹⁸ But anger at Beijing’s ‘support’ for Pyongyang persisted.¹¹⁹

News that Japan’s ‘Government Revitalization Unit’ established to cut waste was examining Tokyo’s ‘host nation support’ towards US military basing costs caused consternation in Washington. Japan funded the construction and maintenance of military facilities and residences used by US Forces in Japan (USFJ), US personnel’s utility bills, and salaries of USFJ’s Japanese employees. Cuts to this funding would strike at principles underpinning US forward deployment. PACOM Commander Admiral Willard reminded Tokyo,

What the United States brings to this region in terms of security is very much worth it ... I view host nation support as an important aspect of the alliance and as being an effective tool, and certainly one that is very much worth it for Japan.¹²⁰

With upper house elections approaching, US pressure to move swiftly on base relocation notwithstanding, the DPJ and its coalition partners decided to delay decisions until early 2010. SDP leader Mizuho Fukushima warned that if, as SOFA stipulated, the base stayed in Okinawa, she would ‘seriously consider taking action – i.e., leave the DPJ coalition’.¹²¹ When Tokyo informed Washington of the postponement, Marine Corps Commandant, General James Conway, described the decision as ‘unfortunate’, airing fears that the redeployment of 8,000 marines from Okinawa to Guam, and the relocation of Futenma, scheduled for completion by 2014, would be delayed. Hatoyama noted that the Government of Japan ‘has its own policy’, and sought US ‘understanding in the course of negotiations’. He restated a quest for a new location for Futenma rather than the one agreed in 2006, explaining this would take ‘several months’.¹²²

Secretary of State Clinton summoned Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki and said Washington wanted ‘Japan to swiftly implement the relocation of the Futenma base’. Defence Minister Kitazawa agreed that Tokyo should decide ‘as soon as possible’. However, Foreign Minister Okada, noting that Hatoyama was ‘resolved on a new location’, and a coalition-partner had claimed it had ‘a better plan’, refused to hasten the review without further discussions.¹²³ In

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January 2010, the city of Nago near Camp Schwab, where the SOFA would move the Marine Air Station, elected 'anti-base candidate' Susumu Inamine as mayor. Hatoyama saw this as rejection of the relocation plan.¹²⁴

However, he insisted, 'not only is the importance of an unshakeable Japan–US Alliance unchanged but such an Alliance is indispensable as a precondition for forming an East Asian community ... Japan will maintain the Japan–US Alliance as the cornerstone'.¹²⁵ He would decide on the SOFA by the end of May. Now, revelations of Cold War-era secret accords inflicted fresh strains. A Foreign Ministry panel examining the evidence on alleged 'secret pacts' reported finding 'tacit agreement' that 'led Tokyo to allow nuclear-armed US military vessels to make port calls in Japan without prior consultation', violating Japanese policy. It noted that Tokyo had been 'dishonest in giving accounts on the nuclear pact issue'. Japan had allowed America to use military bases without consultation 'in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula', and had taken on America's financial obligations flowing from Okinawa's reversion in 1972. Besides, many key security-related documents were 'missing'.¹²⁶ Okada promised, although 'it was regrettable that such facts were not disclosed to the public for such a long time', the alliance would remain unaffected.¹²⁷

Approaching his end-of-May 2010 deadline, Hatoyama visited Okinawa, apologizing for failing to honour his campaign pledge to remove the base and, instead, asking Okinawans to accept its relocation to Nago. Pointing to post-*Cheonan* tensions, Hatoyama said, 'As a Premier, I have to say we cannot allow the situation in which deterrence provided by the US forces in Japan will diminish'.¹²⁸ US and Japanese foreign and defence ministers issued a statement confirming slight modifications to the 2006 SOFA.¹²⁹ A bitter political battle within Japan's ruling coalition ensued. When SDP leader Fukushima rejected Hatoyama's decision and was sacked from the cabinet, her party left the coalition. With opinion polls dipping before the imminent upper house elections, pressure built on Hatoyama to resign, and he eventually did.¹³⁰ Uncertainty returned to Japan.¹³¹

Australia – anxious times down under

The Australian Labour Party's victory in the 2007 polls and Kevin Rudd's accession to leadership marked a sea-change in Australian politics. The most singular contrast was in the external response. After years of strategic integration, Western leaders feared Rudd would moderate Canberra's support for the US-led security order. Rudd had studied Asian history and politics, specializing in China and mastering Mandarin, had served in Beijing as a diplomat, and expressed the wish to act as a bridge between China and the West. His sons studied in China and his daughter married a Hong Kong Chinese. No wonder that in Beijing, there was jubilation.

Amity greeted Rudd during his April 2008 visit to China, his first overseas trip since taking office. His speeches, delivered in flawless Mandarin, were warmly received. Rudd acknowledged China's position as Australia's top

trading partner. Beijing's imports of iron and copper ore, coal, wool and fish roe – with talks on gas purchases well advanced – had boosted Australia's economy. Rudd focused on trade, energy and climate change empathetically. His stress on Canberra's need to maintain the 'continuing, profound and sincere friendship' with Beijing, and support for the 2008 Olympics when many Western leaders turned taciturn, distinguished Rudd's China policy.¹³²

However, Beijing believed bridge-building required neutrality, a dramatic departure from Australia's strategic stance, and respect for China's Confucian, hierarchical order.¹³³ Policy analyses and prescriptions from Australia's armed forces offered insights into the establishment's contrary views. The Air Force insisted it must build expeditionary capability; such assets made 'our Air Force useful to the Government across a range of scenarios and provides options for strategic force employment'.¹³⁴ A combination of threats loomed. 'Australia can expect to face asymmetric and complex security threats, while still having to deal with the more symmetric threat posed by conventional military forces, many of which will develop advanced capabilities'.¹³⁵ Given Australia's geographic reality, the Air Force feared attacks originating in its neighbourhood.

There also were apprehensions of turbulence destabilizing America's grand strategy. A consensus emerged that Canberra must 'retain US engagement in Asia. An Asia from which the US is largely absent would be radically different' to what Australians had become familiar with. Although America would 'remain a potent power for decades to come', non-Western influences 'are on the rise in global politics, and the long-term effect would be to make the world less of the Western-led entity that it's been for at least five hundred years'.¹³⁶ America's 'unchallenged geopolitical pre-eminence' and its strategic primacy now looked fragile.¹³⁷ In that fluid context, 'the changes now sweeping through the international system will eventually refashion the geopolitical landscape and perhaps key elements of the Western liberal order'.¹³⁸ Canberra needed to secure Australian interests in that uncertain milieu. Analysts offered varying suggestions:

- The US–Australian alliance would remain Canberra's most important security relationship, but against a dynamic backdrop, Canberra must be alert to changes and to its 'own distinctive national interests'.
- Canberra should attach a high priority to Asia and the South Pacific, where its interests would be 'most directly and fully engaged'.
- Australia should advance multilateralism and 'active involvement in regional and global institutions'.
- Australia should help strengthen international rules and norms that would 'uphold the Western liberal order, security and stability', and enhance 'international law as an important global institution'.
- Retain a 'credible, highly-trained, well-equipped and technologically advanced defence force' able to meet 'the full spectrum of Australia's security needs'.¹³⁹

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Rudd identified systemic fluidity as a defining feature:

A core challenge for Australia is, how do we best prepare ourselves for the Asia-Pacific century – to maximise the opportunities, to minimise the threats and to make our own active contribution to making this Asia-Pacific century peaceful, prosperous and sustainable for us all.¹⁴⁰

The Australian–US alliance remained pivotal in Canberra’s calculus. With America an ‘overwhelming force for good in the world’, Rudd described the alliance as the ‘key strategic partnership and the central pillar of Australian national security policy’,¹⁴¹ but Australia would pursue ‘middle power diplomacy’ to actively shape the regional future. Rudd sought to reconcile liberal internationalism and realism: ‘Interdependence is not the expression of sentimental idealism ... Interdependence is the new realism of the 21st century’.¹⁴² This explained his ‘three pillars’ of diplomacy – alliance with America, engagement with Asia, and active membership of the UN.¹⁴³ Initially, Rudd’s perceived proximity to Beijing caused some unease,¹⁴⁴ but his action suggested a sophisticated grasp of the Chinese reality and its systemic impact:

The rise of China represents the great unfolding drama of this new century. Will China democratise? How will China deal with climate change? How will China deal with crises in the global economic and financial systems? How will China respond domestically to the global information revolution? And how will Chinese culture adjust to the array of global influences now washing across its shores?¹⁴⁵

Despite his nuanced approach, Rudd proved tougher than his predecessors in facing Beijing. He boosted the security-diplomatic edifice Howard had erected with Australia’s allies. The Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) among America, Japan and Australia exemplified their shared stance toward China. Set up at official level in 2002, it was elevated by Condoleezza Rice in 2005. In 2007, Howard hosted Bush and Abe at the first TSD summit. Such high-profile security collaboration reflected Washington’s strategic perspective.¹⁴⁶ Analysts admitted the TSD was to coordinate policy on China.¹⁴⁷ Canberra saw the TSD as a ‘useful vehicle for ensuring that Australia’s role as Washington’s closest ally in Asia is not overshadowed by Japan’s role as Washington’s most important ally in Asia’.¹⁴⁸ Tokyo treated the TSD differently, depending on the leader’s views of Sino–Japanese relations. Abe and Fukuda considered Beijing with some detachment; Aso upgraded Japan’s security links to Australia and India.¹⁴⁹

Chinese analysts noted that Beijing neither wished to nor could challenge US primacy; Chinese concerns focused on the growing Sino-US military disparity. Using the TSD to deter Beijing’s ‘alleged military provocation’ was, therefore, ‘to overestimate China’s ascent in terms of both military capability as well as Beijing’s intentions’.¹⁵⁰ Chinese anxiety was practical:

Washington has viewed Beijing as its main strategic competitor. The United States thus is focused on China's potential to challenge US hegemony in the region or to damage the credibility of the US security commitment to the Asia-Pacific. To counter Beijing's presumed strategic intentions, Washington is expanding its alliance network, with the enhanced trilateral or multilateral arrangements being the main component of its East Asian security strategy.¹⁵¹

Apparent Sinophilia notwithstanding, Rudd insisted,

Our relationship with the United States is Australia's most important relationship. Our interests with the United States are broad and they are deep and they extend back many, many decades, a relationship which has earned the support of both sides of Australian politics, in times of war and in times of peace.¹⁵²

So, Canberra conformed to US concerns over China's 'rise'. There were other concerns. With an ageing population, Australia faced slower growth 'accompanied by steadily rising health and aged care costs'. Australia's military edge over its South-East Asian neighbours would erode; also 'the already appreciable economic margins enjoyed by China and India are set to grow substantially'. Australia's 'relative military capability will decline in the absence of action on our part'.¹⁵³ In June 2008, Rudd broached his 'Asia-Pacific Community' concept,¹⁵⁴ discussing it with foreign leaders and refining it. He appointed Ambassador Richard Woolcott to spearhead the socializing of regional leaders with an inclusive security architecture. This would enable them to jointly address Asia-Pacific security, economic, social and trans-boundary issues. Rudd urged regional elites to erect a construct by 2020 when it would become necessary:

The choice is whether we seek actively to shape the future of our wider region – the Asia Pacific region – by building the regional architecture we need for the future, if we are together to shape a common regional future ... Do we sit by and allow relations between states to be buffeted by economic and strategic shifts and shocks? Or do we seek to build institutions to provide anchorages for stability able to withstand the strategic stresses and strains of the future?¹⁵⁵

Rudd stressed that regional states could not 'simply assume that peace and prosperity are inevitable products of human progress'. It was uncertain whether they would 'make choices for cooperation or conflict? Will we make active choices for cooperation; or allow drift to set in that takes us in the reverse direction?' He warned, inaction would allow 'traditional interstate tensions to evolve and in some cases escalate'.¹⁵⁶ Rudd feared that without a regional community, 'fundamental strategic rifts' would generate conflict, 'given the

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deep, underlying challenges concerning unresolved territorial claims in the Korean Peninsula, and the Taiwan Straits, in the South China Sea and elsewhere'.¹⁵⁷

Reaction to Rudd's proposal was mixed.¹⁵⁸ With ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN+Three (China, Japan, South Korea), and the East Asia Summit already active, the neighbourhood's lukewarm response was understandable. While Rudd was diplomatic about the dynamic Sino-US diarchy, other Australians were forthright. Former DOD official Hugh White noted the strategic turbulence caused by China's ascent, deepened by India's growing influence, being followed by Japan, South Korea and Russia. This instability made war possible in the region.¹⁵⁹ For him, the question was how China's rise affected Australia's long-term security. 'If it is addressed squarely, the question has large and unsettling implications for every aspect of Australia's strategic posture, including our alliances, partnerships and regional diplomacy'.¹⁶⁰

Others suggested China's rise was economic, the PLA's transformation was evolutionary – not revolutionary or immediate; having invested heavily in multilateral institutions to advance its interests, Beijing would defend the order which had revived it.¹⁶¹ A debate ensued between the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) and the Office of National Assessment (ONA), and the more hawkish DOD. China's 'threat' to Australia was less clear-cut than White posited.¹⁶² Some noted that since Nixon's 1971 China initiative, a consensus acknowledged Beijing's defensive military planning, its development focus requiring a stable environment, and China's rise transforming 'regional strategic relativities'. This is why Australia had forged 'an increasingly beneficial relationship' with China. Any re-evaluation of that consensus merited serious cost-benefit analyses.¹⁶³

The contradictions in Canberra's maritime security perspectives assumed salience. Australia viewed its northern seas – the Sea-Air Gap – as a moat separating it from its South-East Asian neighbours, seen as potential threats. Canberra's efforts to shore up defences against them triggered counter-action which deepened insecurity. Submarine activities in proximate waters were worrying, but growing Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the straits caused deeper concern. Australia had 'a clear strategic interest in helping to build good order and stability in the oceans and seas', but how this should be accomplished eluded Canberra. A robust naval build-up and vigorous maritime diplomacy were considered the most promising approaches.¹⁶⁴ The Army's evaluation of future contingencies identified anxiety caused by Delhi and Beijing:

China and India's growing military ambitions, matched by growing military spending, have the potential to destabilise the region with their military expansion. China and potentially India ... have the potential to challenge US dominance within their regions. Of particular concern is an increased likelihood for dispute escalation as a result of changes to the perceived balance of power with the real potential for a return to major combat operations involving states.¹⁶⁵

A muscular response to strategic flux

Which side would earn Rudd's favour was the question. The answer arrived in May 2009.

The DOD's much awaited white paper explained Canberra's security priorities, setting out an ambitious action plan. Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon noted,

The biggest changes to our outlook over the period have been the rise of China, the emergence of India and the beginning of the end of the so-called unipolar moment; the almost two-decade-long period in which the pre-eminence of our principal ally, the United States, was without question.¹⁶⁶

In response, Canberra would dramatically boost military – especially naval – capabilities in a framework titled 'Force 2030'. Fitzgibbon described it as 'a balanced force, *capable of meeting every contingency* the Australian Defence Force may be required to meet in the coming two decades'.¹⁶⁷

The DOD described four concentric circles of security interests. Beyond the 'most basic' one of defending Australia against attacks lay 'the security, stability and cohesion' of neighbouring states. Canberra would ensure that none of these became 'a source of threat to Australia', and that no power 'that could challenge our control of the air and sea approaches to Australia, has access to bases in our neighbourhood from which to project force against us'.¹⁶⁸ Australia enjoyed military superiority to proximate states but repeated mention of Indonesia underscored historical tensions. Of the 'major military powers', America was Australia's 'fundamental ally'; India had close ties to both Australia and America, leaving China as the source of insecurity.

The third circle represented 'enduring strategic interest in the wider Asia-Pacific region, which stretches from North Asia to the Eastern Indian Ocean', Canberra professed 'a deep stake in the security of Southeast Asia',¹⁶⁹ which sat 'astride our northern approaches, through which hostile forces would have to operate in order to sustainably project force against Australia'. A stable and cohesive South-East Asia 'will mitigate any such threat and is in our strategic interests'.¹⁷⁰ Canberra sought 'an Asia-Pacific regional security environment that is conducive to the peaceful resolution of problems between regional countries and (one that) can absorb the rise in strategic and military power of emerging major players'. Finally, Australia could not be secure 'in an insecure world. We have a strategic interest in preserving an international order that restrains aggression by states against each other, and can effectively manage other risks and threats'.¹⁷¹

Canberra would be concerned about the emergence of a security environment dominated by any regional power, or powers, not committed to the same shared goals. It would be in Australia's strategic interests that 'no power in the Asia-Pacific region would be able to coerce or intimidate others in the region through the employment of force, or through the implied threat of

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force, without being deterred, checked or, if necessary, defeated'.¹⁷² America's 'continued engagement and presence' was 'a crucial element' of but not sufficient for peace and stability. This explained Canberra's quest for a 'regional security architecture' embracing America, Japan, China, India, 'Indonesia and other regional states within a community' which could, by 2020, 'engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action' on contentious regional issues.¹⁷³ The white paper did not identify Beijing as the source of insecurity *per se*, pointing to the US-led coalition's ability to face the challenge:

As China assumes a greater role on the regional and world stage, the Government recognises that Australia must build a deeper understanding of China's security policies and posture. China is critical to stability in Northeast Asia and the wider region. Its approach to regional security in North Asia and the wider region, and how it interacts with our key strategic partners – the United States, Japan, and increasingly India – is fundamental to Australian interests.¹⁷⁴

Canberra stressed that Sino-Australian relations would be shaped by Beijing's stance towards Quad allies. China's role in Rudd's vision was clear. 'China will be central to the development of a cooperative security community in the Asia-Pacific region'.¹⁷⁵ Until then, Australia would seek to erect the regional edifice while acquiring capabilities to secure its interests should the former fail.¹⁷⁶ The white paper detailed the required military force-structure, quantum, organization and capabilities.¹⁷⁷ It identified essential new weapon systems, the most striking growth being in maritime combat and combat-support assets. The Navy would acquire 12 'Future Submarines' for 'anti-ship and anti-submarine warfare; strategic strike; mine-detection and mine-laying operations; intelligence collection; supporting special forces including infiltration and exfiltration missions; and gathering battlespace data in support of operations'.¹⁷⁸ Long-range Land Attack Cruise Missiles (LACM) would extend Australia's strategic-strike reach. Canberra would upgrade the existing six Collins-class submarines and 'continue the very close level of Australia-US collaboration in undersea warfare capability'.

The Navy would commission three or four Destroyers armed with SM-6 long-range anti-aircraft missile networked to airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft. It would procure eight 'Future Frigates', more capable than the existing Anzac-class, with extended sonars, onboard helicopters and UAVs. The Anzacs would be upgraded with new radars and anti-air and anti-missile missile systems.¹⁷⁹ Twenty-four new helicopters would build embarked ASW and air-to-surface capacities. Forty-six new MRH-90 helicopters would replace the Navy's Sea Kings and the Army's Blackhawks. Twenty Offshore Combatant Vessels would replace smaller craft. Two new Landing Helicopter Docks (LHDs), a 10,000–15,000 ton strategic sea-lift ship, and six heavy landing craft¹⁸⁰ would extend Australia's expeditionary reach.

The Air Force would commission a squadron of ‘highly capable 4.5 generation’ F/A-18F *Super Hornets*, and 100 fifth-generation F-35 *Lightning IIs*, significantly expanding air-defence and strike capabilities. Twelve EA-18G *Growlers* would provide electronic warfare capability. New *Wedgetail* AEW&C aircraft and five KC-30A tankers would network the fleet and extend its range. Eight maritime patrol aircraft, four C-17 *Globemasters* and 12 C-130J *Hercules* transports would secure regional maritime-air-space dominance and a global reach.¹⁸¹ The Army would grow by two battalions while retaining three 4,000-man brigades. With a brigade of new reconnaissance, lift and utility helicopters, the battlegroups would gain rapid deployment readiness. The Special Forces group would retain a Special Air Services Regiment, a commando battalion, an Incident Response Regiment, a reserve commando regiment and specialist support units. The Army would increase its sustainment and surge potential with professional part-timers.¹⁸² Rudd authorized real budgetary growth of three per cent from 2009–10 to 2017–18, and 2.2 per cent from then on to 2030, with an annual indexation of 2.5 per cent in 2009–30.¹⁸³

The white paper stressed Chinese-triggered systemic fluidity and America’s relative decline, defining the military as the core of Canberra’s response to strategic uncertainty. It said nothing about the strategic interests of other regional states, and the action these might generate. Australia’s assumption appeared to be that its environs must remain Australia-friendly; variations would pose threats, which must be met forcefully. Canberra’s assertion of its interests in a framework which ignored possible aspirations, anxieties, hopes and fears shaping neighbourhood policies suggested a zero-sum approach to security, illuminating a subliminal blindness to regional realities.

Responses varied. One suggested Canberra ignored possible regional contributions to its security, and its maritime expansion could trigger an arms race.¹⁸⁴ Others stressed the financial burden the plan would impose at a difficult time.¹⁸⁵ Canberra responded with details of A\$60 billion to be spent in the scheme’s first phase.¹⁸⁶ Another four phases would follow until 2030. Defence expenditure could easily be raised from 2 per cent of GDP to 3.3 per cent.¹⁸⁷ Some questioned a lack of clarity on Australia’s strategic interests but the key question was about the essential argument – faced with uncertainties caused by China’s rise and America’s relative decline, Canberra must boost its military capabilities. Whether the first premise led to the second, with the military option optimally defending Australia’s interests, remained unanswered.

One Chinese analyst noted that in transitional periods, middle powers lost their balancing influence ‘between large and small, between East and West, and between developed and developing’ states. Australia would build up military forces to fashion a leading role for itself, and rebuild its ‘middle power leadership’. Some states followed development first – or ‘developmentalisation’; others sought security first – or ‘securitisation’; yet others tried to integrate development and security priorities. ‘With the special relationship with the US in mind, the Australian Government follows the US example of “securitisation,” addressing all issues from a security perspective’. That China’s rise

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'is viewed as a source of threat is the best example of this approach'.¹⁸⁸ Another found Australia's fears 'baffling'. If Australia did not 'advance with the times', but took a 'step backward instead', if it returned to the era of a 'defensive China policy' of maintaining contact with China, but also expecting to adopt 'balancing measures such as alliances and other forces to contain China, this will be very bad, and detrimental to Australia itself'.¹⁸⁹

Sino-Australian relations chilled. The mining conglomerate Rio Tinto, having negotiated with China's National Aluminium Corporation (Chinalco) the sale of an 18 per cent stake for \$19.5 billion, called off the deal. It offered no credible explanation, but there had been much concern over 'the consequences of giving China direct access to a huge trove of natural resources'.¹⁹⁰ The deal's failure proved popular in Australia.¹⁹¹ Beijing saw this as evidence of Western containment:

Over the years, certain forces, with the USA and Britain at core, have been trying to organize forces to 'contain China.' In order to make this strategy work better, they need Australia as a 'super aircraft carrier' on the west coast of the Pacific ... There will always be some who will try to reverse Australia's integration into East Asia, and turn it into a bridgehead for containing the region, especially China.¹⁹²

Others noted China's unpopularity in the global marketplace, urging compatriots 'to look deeper within for the engine to drive' China's economy.¹⁹³ Soon, Shanghai police arrested four Rio Tinto employees, including an Australian national, on suspicions of bribing Chinese officials negotiating mineral prices, 'spying on China, stealing state secrets and causing enormous economic losses'.¹⁹⁴ Chinese commentary stated that Rio Tinto's 'espionage' had caused China 'huge' losses. 'Some multinational corporations may take this opportunity to stir up allegations of the Chinese Government using these investigations into thefts of secrets to help Chinese enterprises to secure commercial interests'.¹⁹⁵ Canberra worried that trade-relations worth \$53 billion could be threatened. Rudd warned that while Australia had economic interests in bilateral relations, resolving the dispute was important for Beijing, too:

A range of foreign governments and corporations will be watching this case with interest and be watching it very closely, and they'll be drawing their own conclusions as to how it is conducted. It is in all of our interest to have this matter resolved.¹⁹⁶

In January 2010, Beijing informed Canberra the case had been transferred to the Shanghai state prosecutors for trial, later hinting the charges had been downgraded to industrial espionage. There were other sources of tension. In late 2009, officially stimulated growth in China led to growing gas shortages.¹⁹⁷ In 2007, PetroChina had signed a \$40.4 billion deal with Australia's Woodside to supply 2–3 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually

over a 20-year period, to a total of 60 million tons. While demand grew, Woodside cancelled the deal on 31 December 2009 without explanation. Canberra's grant of a visa to Rebiya Kadeer, who spoke at public events around the screening of a documentary on her life at the Melbourne film festival in August 2009, triggered another controversy. When Beijing's efforts to prevent the film's screening failed, three Chinese directors withdrew their entries from the festival. Australians were aghast at Chinese attempts to control their artistic freedom.¹⁹⁸ Beijing was outraged that the leader of a separatist group was being treated as a heroine.¹⁹⁹

Axes and alignments anew

Some responses to the Australian white paper were positive. Japan expressed satisfaction that another US ally robustly faced 'Chinese-caused' strategic uncertainty. The white paper noted that USA–China–Japan dynamics would shape Northeast Asian security:

Japan is, and will remain, a significant military power. Within its alliance with the US, Japan is likely to expand slowly its strategic engagement, including by way of contribution to UN operations and multinational coalitions. Japan's alliance with the United States has been a key stabilising feature of the post-war regional security environment and will continue to play a vitally important role. *Were Japan unable to rely on that alliance, its strategic outlook would be dramatically different, and it would be compelled to re-examine its strategic posture and capabilities.*²⁰⁰

Given Japan's 'strong national capacity and defence capabilities', Tokyo could 'make a significant contribution' to regional security. Building on 'the 2008 Memorandum of Defence Cooperation', Australia would take bilateral military collaboration to maturity.²⁰¹ Japanese analyses praised this as enhancing joint efforts to address security concerns.²⁰² However, by September 2009, the DPJ-led coalition had transformed Japan's political landscape. The DPJ's election manifesto had downplayed any muscular pursuit of national security goals. Hatoyama's coalition partner, the SDP, insisted on a pacifist orientation, and the coalition's response to Canberra's stance remained unclear at best.²⁰³ Then, in February 2010, Rudd's ultimatum – Japan must end its whale-hunting 'research' in the Antarctic Ocean by November, or face action – challenged the partnership.

Rudd had called on Obama in March 2009. At that meeting, they discussed Asia-Pacific security issues as well as global economic and financial matters. Obama stressed the importance of Afghanistan where he wanted to focus allied resources. Within a month, Rudd had boosted Australian military presence there by 40 per cent, to 1,550 troops.²⁰⁴ He visited Obama again eight months later, promising to increase police trainers and civilian reconstruction staff in Kabul and Uruzgan province. He previewed the climate summit in

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Copenhagen, and reviewed the recent Commonwealth Conference. At a working lunch, he and Clinton fleshed out the alliance's regional priorities.²⁰⁵ Rudd explained the premises of his defence white paper. Pointing to Washington's dependence on Chinese purchases of US Treasury Bills, and the need to 'handle' Chinese intransigence over recent months, Clinton asked, 'how do you deal toughly with your banker?' Describing Hu Jintao's leadership team as 'paranoid about Tibet; sub-rational about Taiwan', Rudd advised his host to deploy force against Beijing if 'everything goes wrong'.²⁰⁶

Rudd's white paper stressed India's role as 'an important partner for Australia given our shared democratic values, our maritime interests, and our commitment to combating regional and global terrorism and maintaining a rules-based global security order'. As India extended 'its reach and influence into areas of shared strategic interest', Canberra wanted stronger defence relations with and deeper understanding of Delhi's strategic thinking. Australia would expand 'high-level defence dialogue', 'practical cooperation in defence information sharing, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping', and other exchanges.²⁰⁷ Rudd ordered DOD to 'examine opportunities for increased bilateral maritime cooperation' in the Indian Ocean where they shared 'strong mutual interest'. This was 'part of the Government's strategy to develop a regional community with the capacity to forge a constructive Asia-Pacific security environment'.²⁰⁸

Rudd's November 2009 visit dispelled any doubts in Delhi about Canberra's consistency. In discussions with Manmohan Singh, and in high-profile addresses, Rudd noted his appreciation of India's economic prowess offering opportunities for Delhi to pursue great-power ambitions. He pushed for deeper trade and military collaboration.

India has emerged as a central pillar of regional and global economic strength and significance ... By 2030, India will have the world's biggest population and be the third largest economy ... Our growing commercial links are already being reinforced through greater cooperation on the world stage. The designation of the G20 as the premier forum for global economic cooperation was an historic occasion for India and Australia.²⁰⁹

Rudd was confident that trade, already at \$18 billion and supplemented by service sector transactions worth \$3 billion, would rapidly grow. That aside, Rudd and Singh agreed to 'cooperate in defence security in a big way'.²¹⁰ Rudd noted, India was emerging as a global power, and was a critical country in the region to which 'the centre of global strategic and economic weight for the century is now shifting'. India was expanding its strategic reach and capabilities while forging closer links with the United States and leaving a larger footprint across the Indian Ocean:

The Indian Navy is the fifth largest in the world. Globally, India is increasingly engaging in and exerting influence through the multilateral system, whether in the UN, G20, the East Asia Summit or beyond. India

is a confident, outward-looking power intent on securing its rightful place in the world through an active foreign policy firmly anchored in her national interests. In short, India is going to play a more prominent role in shaping global and regional security.²¹¹

Rudd pointed to Australia's attractions: the world's 14th largest economy, it was 'a middle power committed to middle power diplomacy'; it had the fifth largest defence budget in Asia and 13th largest in the world, and was the biggest of non-NATO military contributor to Afghanistan. 'My objective is to build a comprehensive, enduring strategic partnership between Australia and India that will not result in yet another false dawn'.²¹² Despite clear strategic affinity, a dark cloud hung in the background. As Rudd noted, Indians comprised a fifth of the 500,000 foreign students studying in Australia. Between May 2009 and early 2010, attacks on some of them led to at least two deaths and many being injured. None had been killed by the time of Rudd's visit. In Delhi, he expressed regret, conveyed condolences and promised to improve foreign students' security. Then, on 29 December 2009, the partially burnt body of Ranjodh Singh, an Indian national, was found in suburban New South Wales. Police said he was alive when set alight but insisted it had not been a racist attack.²¹³

On 2 January 2010, Nitin Garg, a 21-year-old Indian student, was stabbed to death in Melbourne.²¹⁴ Six days later, Jaspreet Singh, a 29-year-old Indian, was set alight in a Melbourne suburb. He survived but faced allegations that he might have set himself alight, which outraged his wife and friends.²¹⁵ These incidents caused much anger in India, triggering official protests.²¹⁶ External Affairs Minister, S.M. Krishna, an advocate of Indo-Australian strategic partnership, cautioned – 'Australian authorities should take note of the deep anger being caused by such incidents and the bearing they could have on bilateral ties'.²¹⁷ Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard condemned the attacks, but given the Indian community's size and profile, and the attackers' unidentified motives, this could detract from the governments' eagerness to forge a strong strategic partnership.

India – a giant stirs

Delhi's security calculus had emerged as an India–China–USA strategic triangle fashioned since Bill Clinton's 2000 visit. India's military intimacy with America was slightly dented in early 2009 as the Obama Administration found its feet. Following the launch of China's defence white paper in January 2009, Delhi discerned a contradiction between Beijing's assurance 'that it will never seek hegemony or engage in military expansion now or in the future, no matter how developed it becomes', and 'the double digit growth in Chinese defence expenditures over the previous 20 years', Delhi felt the PLA's plans to build strategic missiles, space-based assets, a blue-water navy, and upgraded 'infrastructure, reconnaissance and surveillance, quick response and operational capabilities' would affect India's 'military environment'. The PLA would be

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‘monitored carefully in the foreseeable future for the implications that it can have on the security and defence of India’.²¹⁸

China’s security relations with Pakistan ‘as well as the possibility of enhancing connectivity’ through parts of India’s disputed Jammu & Kashmir state ‘illegally occupied by China and Pakistan ... will also have direct military implications for India’. Delhi would engage Beijing, seeking ‘greater transparency and openness in its defence policy and posture’, while taking ‘necessary measures to protect the national security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of India’.²¹⁹ This anxiety evidenced the adversarial bases of Sino-Indian dynamics. Delhi felt justified in its fears when the PLA’s China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CISS), published an article causing outrage. The author compared the present situation to that in 1962 when, he contended, Delhi provoked a border war which has ever since been a defining impulse in Delhi’s security perceptions.²²⁰

The author, refuting Indian claims that it responded to Chinese aggression, suggested that instead of ‘walking today along the old road of resisting China’, Delhi should not ‘requite kindness with ingratitude’.²²¹ The 1962 war was so traumatic that India has viewed China with angry suspicion ever since. That catharsis reduced Nehru from a national hero to a physical and emotional wreck, shook up India’s military–political establishment, forcing Delhi openly to seek US defence and intelligence assistance. Casting a shadow over civil–military relations, it led to politicians limiting themselves to making political comments, leaving military matters to professionals, ceding autonomy to the uniformed services.²²² Indian analyses of the Chinese white paper revealed Delhi’s view of China.²²³

- China’s opacity about its military capabilities totally excludes details about its Armed Force.
- China feels assured of increasing military strength and confident about operating abroad.
- The increase in Chinese defence spending over the past 30 years has effected qualitative changes under a shifting military strategy.
- China’s insistence on peaceful development, never seeking hegemony or military expansion ‘does not amount to a rational explanation and does nothing to reassure the world at large and its neighbouring countries in particular’.
- India, China’s largest neighbour,²²⁴ was unconvincingly excluded from ‘the strategic calculus for a rethink of its military strategy and RMA’.
- China’s ‘No first use’ nuclear doctrine notwithstanding, the white paper’s stress on the nuclear missile forces’ plans to ‘go into a state of alert, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy’ generated ambiguities. India’s NPT non-signatory status left its position ‘unclear in Chinese viewpoint’.
- The PLAN’s anti-piracy deployment was not ‘a mere short-term measure ... but a way to establish the foundations to develop its capabilities for defence of its sea lines of communication ... much to our discomfort’.

- China's 'goal no longer appears to be merely the preservation of its land, territorial waters and airspace', but the defence of its global national interests; 'military expansion indeed appears to be the purpose of the above shift'.²²⁵

One analyst insisted India urgently review its 'defence preparedness vis-à-vis China'.

The real challenge for India, however, lies in China's rise as military power (sic). If the latest white paper is any indication, China already views itself as a superpower-in-waiting and despite all the lofty pronouncements, a Chinese hegemony in the region will adversely impact upon Indian interests. The Indian government owes it to the nation to set this imbalance right.²²⁶

Others contended that China still had a long way to go and was 'prematurely trying to force a unipolar Asia regime down the throats of other Asian countries'. With new military capabilities, 'China may be overstretching itself. It is becoming, if it has not already become, the single most destabilizing factor in Asia'.²²⁷ Perceiving strategic convergence with America, Delhi pursued collaboration initiated during Bill Clinton's 2000 visit. George Bush boosted this synergy with the nuclear cooperation accord, ratified in 2008.

After the Chinese defence white paper was published, India's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) showed interest in developing a 'laser-based' anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system. Some US analysts urged collaboration here, too.²²⁸ Given Chinese anxiety over US BMD programmes, collaboration could only deepen suspicions of encirclement. Pointing to Beijing's growing assertiveness, Indian analysts cautioned, 'the US better be worried!'²²⁹ Indo-US military intimacy had been consolidated the previous August with the Indian Air Force's (IAF) participation in the USAF's Exercise Red Flag in Nevada. The IAF sent eight Su-30MKI fighters; two IL-78 tankers and an IL-76 transport. This was the first time that India had been invited to this exercise. Training with US, French and South Korean pilots, the Indians gave a good account of themselves. The exercise marked the integration of a key Indian capability into US strategic efforts. Delhi noted, 'There is then the China factor', shaping collaboration.²³⁰

This Sino-centric strategic convergence, harking back to covert collaboration in the 1950s and 1960s,²³¹ triggered procurement decisions. Sophisticated *materiel* was sourced from America and Israel, rather than from Russia. Delhi planned to acquire hardware worth over \$35 billion in 2009–13. Of the \$26.5 billion-defence budget in 2008–9, a 10 per cent rise, \$12 billion was for procurement. Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee's November 2008 comments on 'Chinese threats' partially explained Delhi's action.²³²

A new defence doctrine stipulated that the Navy and the Air Force 'exert influence' across the Indian Ocean from the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of

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Malacca. The Navy would deploy a carrier to the Bay of Bengal to counter Chinese initiatives; on land, the Army raised a corps of mountain divisions to boost power along the Himalayan borders with Tibet.²³³ In early 2009, Delhi's anxiety focused on Obama's China policy, and a 'downgrading' of India. Bush had built a 'strategic partnership' with Delhi, verging on an anti-China containment alliance. Now, with US priorities shifting, that edifice looked shaky.²³⁴ Indians identified three errors vis-à-vis Obama – having 'seriously underestimated the military stalemate in Afghanistan', India had failed to appreciate America's 'consequent acute dependence' on Pakistan; friendship toward Pakistan was tantamount to indifference to India. Indians, with 'a touching faith in the "New American Century" project,' failed to grasp that the economic 'crisis would fundamentally change the world order'. Indians had also misjudged Obama's capacity to 'change' US policy.

These 'failings' produced strategic surprises: 'Indian strategists who fancied that New Delhi was Washington's preferred partner in South Asia' were stunned. 'Clearly, India is nowhere near as valuable an ally as Pakistan for the US for the present'. Also, 'Obama's China policy renders obsolete the Indian strategic calculus built around the US containment strategy'.²³⁵ Indians worried that 'while it is unlikely that Obama administration will consciously reverse the policy of greater engagement with India, it has certainly raised doubts about the US as a dependable strategic ally'.²³⁶ Delhi encouraged Indian firms to engage lobbyists to plead their case in Washington.²³⁷

The competitive Sino-Indian dynamics took on a sharp edge. Indian naval analyses posited that the area comprising north-eastern Indian Ocean, the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea was 'important for India's *supreme national security interest of survival*. This makes China highly vulnerable in case of a Sino-Indian military conflict'.²³⁸ Chinese commentary enunciated goals which reinforced Indian anxieties:

China's maritime strategy pursues to control its marginal sea and secure its SLOCs ... The strategic value of the Indian Ocean for China, an energy-thirsty giant, is vital. The vulnerability of the SLOCs for China from the Gulf to the Malacca Straits has drawn a lot of concern of China, and to secure this energy transportation channel has become a significant component of China's maritime security strategy ... (The) wide presence of Chinese Navy and merchant marine in the Indian Ocean ... could be regarded as an indirect strategy to enhance China's position on its marginal water dispute with some Southeast Asia countries ... in the framework of China's Indian Ocean security strategy, Pakistan should be regarded as a decisive partner and Gwadar project should lay the cornerstone for this strategy. The meaning of Gwadar port for China is a bridge to reach energy diversity, not a fort to scout and dominate the Indian Ocean.²³⁹

Maritime competition emerged as a potent source of friction, but rivalry was not limited to the high seas. In 2008–9, the Indian military analysed scenarios

likely to trigger conflict with China. The study culminated in March 2009 in a battle-simulation exercise called 'Divine Matrix'. It suggested that China had built up military infrastructure in Tibet to the point that the PLA could, by 2017, mount an offensive without warning. Beijing would conduct information-warfare before launching a 'short, swift war that could have menacing consequences for India'. Without any nuclear escalation, the offensive would establish China as 'the only power in the region'.²⁴⁰ Chinese spokesman Qin Gang said, 'We feel surprised at the report. The state leaders of China and India have already reached consensus that the two countries will not pose a threat to each other'.²⁴¹ Sino-Indian tensions contrasted Sino-Pakistani cooperation, evidenced by a high-level PLA delegation's talks with Pakistan's Defence Minister, Mukhtar Ahmed. The two sides focused on China building F-22P frigates and JF-17 *Thunder* aircraft for Pakistan.²⁴²

The Obama Administration's India policy emerged in March 2009 when Deputy Secretary of State, James Steinberg, said Washington planned on 'developing a comprehensive agenda, doing more bilaterally, regionally, globally across the full spectrum of economic, political and security challenges'. Trade had doubled from \$21 billion in 2004 to \$44 billion in 2008; more than two dozen formal dialogues existed, and military exercises continued. As India emerged as a leading economic and political power globally, 'the central question is how the United States and India can work together to address the regional and global challenges that no country alone could solve'.²⁴³

Shyam Saran, Delhi's lead nuclear negotiator, explained how the agreement had transformed India's nuclear locus: 'From being an outlier, India is now accepted as a partner in the global nuclear domain'. The success of the civilian nuclear initiative had 'injected a sense of assurance and confidence which enables us to look, proactively and not defensively, at a new global agenda for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament'.²⁴⁴ Delhi planned to order US nuclear reactors worth \$150 billion to generate 10,000 Mwe and, a significant part of its \$120 billion-worth defence procurement budget for the next decade 'could be reoriented towards the USA' if America overcame 'lingering Indian doubts about the reliability of US supplies'.²⁴⁵

When Singh met Obama at the London G20 summit, mutual admiration indicated warmth reserved for friends. Obama said, 'The United States sees India as a global power and a critical partner in helping to deal with the challenges of the 21st century such as in climate change, trade, science and innovation'. Singh reminded Obama of the shared values and family links underpinning ties.

We are two democracies which believe in the rule of law. We are two civil societies. There is hardly any middle class family in India that doesn't have a son or a daughter, brother or a sister studying in the US. This itself is a very important link. We want to further strengthen the India-US relations ... Under your leadership, we will chart out a new path in dealing with economic issues, climate change, challenges from terror, and

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how to make the world safe from terror. We will work together in bilateral and multilateral fora.²⁴⁶

Republicans warned that strategic linkages built by Obama's predecessors were eroding. Former ambassador Robert Blackwill spearheaded this enterprise.²⁴⁷ Obama's envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, arrived in Delhi with Admiral Mullen, to elicit support for Obama's Afghanistan policy in which Pakistan's help was critical. Washington wished Delhi would resume normal ties with Islamabad, suspended since the November 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai. Unless Pakistan's perceived 'Indian threat' was diluted, Islamabad would not focus its military efforts on the militants along the western borders. Holbrooke was met with suspicion.²⁴⁸ In public, Holbrooke denied making any requests. 'We did not come here to ask the Indians to do anything. We came here to inform about our trips (to Afghanistan and Pakistan) as we always do and to get their views. We did not come here with any requests'.²⁴⁹

The Sino-Indian-US strategic triangle came to the fore in April at the 60th anniversary of the PLAN's establishment. Four-day festivities included an international fleet review in Qingdao, joined by 21 naval vessels from 14 countries including India and delegations from 29 countries. Admiral Sureesh Mehta, India's naval chief, led the Indian delegation which included guided missile destroyers *INS Mumbai* and *INS Ranvir*. Mehta visited PLAN 'ships and submarines', and called on Defence Minister Liang.²⁵⁰ Then, the Indian destroyers joined the missile corvette *INS Khanjar* and tanker *INS Jyoti* at Japan's Sasebo naval base from where the flotilla embarked on Exercise *Malabar-09*.²⁵¹ The drills, conducted by around a dozen vessels from the US, Japanese, and Indian navies, included joint ASW, surface warfare, air defence, live-fire gunnery training, and 'visit, board, search and seizure' practices. 'The free exchange of ideas and trust that develops from these swaps proves invaluable in developing a framework for future engagements'.²⁵²

The Commander, US 7th Fleet, noted: 'Malabar gives us the chance to build greater interoperability with two of our most important regional partners'.²⁵³ Interoperability drills near Chinese shores directly after felicitating the PLAN underscored the dynamics' duality among the allies, and China.²⁵⁴ Admiral Keating visited India in May, reassuring Delhi of US interest in the 'strategic partnership', restoring confidence in China-focused collaboration. Keating urged Delhi to finalize three agreements necessary for advancing the partnership to being truly 'strategic'.²⁵⁵

On the Sino-Indian 'strategic and cooperative partnership', Delhi pledged to engage China and 'seek greater transparency and openness in its defence policy and posture, while taking all necessary measures to protect the national security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of India'.²⁵⁶ Admiral Mehta downplayed Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean.²⁵⁷ Formally, Delhi sought 'to promote a shared understanding of the maritime issues facing the littoral nation-states of the Indian Ocean and the formulation of a common

set of strategies designed to enhance regional maritime security'.²⁵⁸ This stress on littoral states bypassed China. Delhi repeated this theme at its Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, attended by heads of littoral navies. India's 'aggressively competitive strategy aimed at developing a credible minimum nuclear deterrence, pursuing littoral warfare and dominating the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)',²⁵⁹ was apparent.

The Navy planned a force of 145 vessels – over half ocean-going – by 2020. Three carrier battle groups with missile-destroyers, frigates, corvettes, submarines and aircraft armed with long-range precision-guided anti-ship and land attack weapons would form the core. Two nuclear-powered attack submarines – one locally built, the other leased from Russia – and three SSBNs inducted from 2015–17 would provide the strategic triad's third leg. Domination of the IOR by controlling choke points complemented expansive ambitions. Mehta noted, 'We need to develop a capability-driven force to take charge of the situation that includes protecting offshore oil blocks in areas like the Sakhalin Islands and off the Venezuelan coast'.²⁶⁰ Beijing took note.²⁶¹ China's 'diplomatic inroads' into India's periphery troubled Delhi. Besides the challenge of Sino-Pakistani ties, Delhi found developments in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh difficult to countenance.²⁶²

A dynamic triangle

The May 2009 polls returned Manmohan Singh's government to office without the challenge of maintaining Leftist support. Singh's ability to pursue objectives changed the context in which Indo-US engagement was revived. In July, Clinton brought Singh Obama's invitation to pay the first state-visit by a foreign leader in the new administration. She and S.M. Krishna 'committed to building an enhanced India-US strategic partnership' seeking to address 'the defining challenges of our time'.²⁶³ The two ministers would co-chair the first session of an 'India-US Strategic Dialogue' on 'bilateral, global and regional issues', in Washington within months.

They pledged to advance 'common security interests'. Clinton invited Home Minister Chidambaram to finalize intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism cooperation. Agreement on 'End Use Monitoring' of US hardware, a sticking-point preventing the transfer of American lethal armament, boosted defence collaboration. The two partners also ironically agreed on 'seeking a world without nuclear weapons', 'civil nuclear co-operation', reforming global institutions such as the UN Security Council and the G-20, 'pursuing sustainable economic growth and development', education, space, science and technology including high technology cooperation, and energy security, environment and climate change.²⁶⁴

Clinton did notice complexities affecting the 'strategic partnership'. In talks with Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, she stressed US interest in getting major developing economies to commit to legally binding carbon dioxide emission targets before the Copenhagen climate summit in December.

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Ramesh's rejection was striking: 'There is simply no case for the pressure'. Pointing to a House of Representative bill imposing tariffs on exports from countries like India which refused mandatory cuts, Ramesh said,

As if this pressure was not enough, we also face the threat of carbon tariffs on our exports to countries such as yours. Legally binding emissions targets won't be acceptable for India. It's going to be impossible to sell in our democratic system.²⁶⁵

Proclaiming 'India considers China its most important ally in Copenhagen negotiations', Ramesh visited China, Brazil and South Africa – the BASIC grouping – to forge a joint position for Copenhagen.²⁶⁶ The Indo-US partnership's defence-focus was evidenced by Army chief General Deepak Kapoor's US visit directly after Clinton's trip. Kapoor discussed the spectrum of strategic issues with his counterpart, General Casey, CENTCOM Commander, General Petraeus, and Admiral Mullen. Next, Chidambaram visited America, establishing counter-terrorism and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Then, Manmohan Singh visited Pittsburgh for a G-20 summit, sitting next to Obama. After Obama announced the G-20 was the premier forum for economic governance, Singh said the G-8 was 'ill-equipped' to handle global issues. 'With the rise of Asia, with the growth of India, China and Brazil, the economic decision-making has to take into account the views of these countries if it is to have an optimum impact'.²⁶⁷

Under-Secretary William Burns finalized Singh's November state visit, and the first Indo-US Strategic Dialogue, with India's Foreign Secretary, Nirupama Rao. At this time, a squadron from the US Army's 14th Cavalry, 25th Stryker Brigade, was training with an Indian armoured regiment in Exercise *Yudh Abhyas* (war practice)'09, in southern India. The following month, the DOD's International Trade Administration led a team to Delhi, hoping for orders worth '\$15bn-\$20bn over the next 3–5 years'.²⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Sino-Indian relations worsened. Indian media, quoting military commanders, alleged PLA 'incursions' across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the disputed borders. State Minister for Defence, Pallam Raju, acknowledged, 'We are taking steps that Chinese influence does not pose a threat'.²⁶⁹ Delhi boosted frontier defence. General J.J. Singh, Governor of the Chinese-claimed Arunachal Pradesh, announced the deployment of two new mountain divisions. 'Increase of the force level, and improvement of weapons, fighting platforms, intelligence acquisition and other equipment' were aimed at enhancing the 'capabilities of the army troopers to effectively meet any sort of challenges'.²⁷⁰ The military took over eight Advanced Landing Grounds; 18 Su-30 MKI fighters were deployed close to the border.²⁷¹ Outgoing IAF Chief, Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Fali Major, spoke about the IAF's readiness for short, sharp wars with both China and Pakistan. Beijing noted these developments.²⁷²

Chinese analysts had several explanations. 'China's GDP has tripled that of India and per capita income doubled, which turns out to be a totally

unacceptable fact to many Indians'. Additionally, 'some Western powers have been inciting India to challenge China, and even insidiously convince India that China would be the "greatest obstacle" threatening India's rise'. The West had gone so far as to 'devise ways to extol India as a potentially No.1 democracy in Asia', while intentionally downplaying China's social and economic progress. 'India, on the other hand, draws the Western hint trying for dear life to surpass China'.²⁷³ Despite its 'advanced political system', India could not 'compete with China' in building 'international influence, overall national power and economic scale. India apparently has not yet realized this'.²⁷⁴ Delhi expected rewards for 'simply not joining "the ring round China" established by the US and Japan'. India's growing power would have a significant impact on the balance of this equation. This had led Delhi to think that 'fear and gratitude for its restraint will cause China to defer to it on territorial disputes. But this is wishful thinking'.²⁷⁵ Conflicting perceptions persisted.²⁷⁶ After Delhi announced troop deployments, Chinese opinion was coloured by Indian 'threats'.²⁷⁷

Things got tense enough that in June 2009, Lt. General Ma Xiaotian asked Admiral Mehta and India's Defence Secretary, Vijay Singh, what the reasons behind military-media allegations of Chinese threats were. This led Antony to order ACM P.V. Naik, the new IAF Chief, to ensure commanders did not 'speak out of turn on India's neighbours or Indian military capability'.²⁷⁸ Confirmation that politicians, not the military, made policy came from officials accompanying Manmohan Singh to a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. Officials posited that Sino-Indian relations combined competitive and cooperative elements; 'appropriate dialogue forums' existed for handling complex issues.²⁷⁹ At the summit, Hu Jintao offered to Singh implementation of the mutually agreed '10 strategies' – 'enhance mutual political trust and reciprocal cooperation in various fields, take into consideration each other's concerns and core interests, and strengthen coordination and cooperation on major international and regional issues'.²⁸⁰ Noting there was enough room in the world for the two countries to grow together, Singh pledged to expand cooperation in areas of shared regional and global interest.²⁸¹

Three days later, Beijing denounced the Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) \$2.9 billion aid package for India, complaining that a \$60 million watershed protection project in Arunachal Pradesh involved the ADB in Sino-Indian disputes. 'China shows its strong dissatisfaction that the ADB Board of Directors dismissed its concerns and passed the Country Partnership Strategy for India 2009–12, the content of which has included a territorial dispute between China and India'.²⁸² Following Chinese protests in March, the ADB had postponed discussions of the project; but in June, its Directors, insisting the Bank took no position on the dispute, passed it.²⁸³ Much commentary on Sino-Indian rivalry followed. 'At the heart of Sino-Indian antagonism is the Indian belief that China is seeking to deny India its proper stakes in the game of international politics'.²⁸⁴ Beijing's opposition to India's permanent UNSC membership, P-5 – the five nuclear-armed states 'legitimized' in the NPT, the

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Asia-European Summit (ASEM), APEC and the East Asia Summit provided 'evidence'. But the rivals shared similarities, too.²⁸⁵

China would not 'contract out the security of its maritime trade' to America and India,²⁸⁶ just as neither would they. Indian defence establishment's expansive view of maritime interests included the South and East China Seas in the Indian Ocean's strategic reach. Delhi's energy investments around Sakhalin Island and collaboration with Vietnam required the Indian Navy's ability to ensure security for oil flows from there through the Malacca Strait. The Indian Navy needed to maintain its status as the 'major regional maritime power' there. The establishment of a 'string of pearls' by Japan or Australia would not trouble India; Chinese efforts certainly would.²⁸⁷ Besides, by 2025, China would likely 'stand up to' America, triggering strategic volatility. India had to defend its interests through that turbulence.²⁸⁸

Sino-Indian views diverged while India's perceptions resonated with those of America, Japan, Australia and ASEAN members. India's concerns over the South China Sea echoed Washington's.²⁸⁹ 'India would have preferred to avoid contestation and rivalry with China in the Asia-Pacific region, based on a mutual understanding that there was sufficient space for both without rubbing up against each other'. However, 'China's approach has probably made such contestation an unavoidable perennial'. India and America shared an interest in preventing a shift in regional power-balances favourable to China.²⁹⁰ Indian analyses suggested, 'a pro-US/Japan tilt in India's national security policy – a reaction to the power-projection capabilities of China – will be a defining characteristic of an increasingly globalized India'.²⁹¹ China, however, posited that India sought strategic autonomy and was unlikely to join the USA in an anti-China concert.²⁹²

Manmohan Singh's state visit restored the intimacy seen in Indo-US relations in recent years. Obama noted that this first state visit in his presidency reflected 'the high esteem in which I and the American people hold your wise leadership'. Moving relations to 'one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century', Obama accorded India a nuclear weapons-state status:

As nuclear powers we can be full partners in preventing the spread of the world's most deadly weapons, securing loose nuclear materials from terrorists, and pursuing our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons. This is the India America welcomes today – a leader in Asia and the world.²⁹³

Singh enthused, 'We seek to broaden and deepen our strategic partnership, and to work with the United States to meet these challenges of a fast-changing world'.²⁹⁴ He appreciated being received during the Thanksgiving week. Talks ranged from counter-terrorism efforts through economic concerns, climate change and the environment, to moving towards a 'global zero' nuclear state. Agreements affirmed 'the global strategic partnership', launching 'a new phase'.²⁹⁵ The two sides signed six MOUs, two memoranda of interest, and

several Initiatives and Agreements.²⁹⁶ Washington's subtle acknowledgement of India's nuclear-weapons status was of systemic significance.

For many Indians, the key point was Obama's assurance that despite what his joint statement with Hu Jintao said about South Asia, Washington saw no Chinese role in resolving Indo-Pakistani disputes. Singh pointed out, 'The reference to South Asia in the US–China joint statement is not aimed at mediation by any third power. I am satisfied with what President Obama has assured me'.²⁹⁷ Even Beijing desisted from adding to tensions on this.²⁹⁸ Singh told Obama that India had 'noticed a greater degree of assertiveness' from Beijing, 'But I did not seek any help from the US. We just reviewed the world situation and I am confident that with time, purposeful negotiations between our two countries, we can resolve contentious issues'.²⁹⁹ Most commentary described the visit as a success. The partners overcame uncertainties of the Obama presidency's first months. Beijing noted its inadvertent role as the ghost at this banquet.³⁰⁰

Indian officials blamed the media for the controversy over the Sino-US joint statement.³⁰¹ However, sceptics insisted that America was paying more attention to China than to India.³⁰² Singh himself pointed to systemic fluidity and India's potentially helpful role in supporting America through the transition. 'The changes in the global economic and political structures and the growing interdependence among nations today offer us a unique opportunity to look beyond our bilateral engagement and establish a strategic partnership of global dimensions'. Indo-US collaboration could 'create an open and inclusive regional architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. The India–USA partnership can contribute to an orderly transition to the new order' and contribute to global peace and stability.³⁰³ Help to the hegemon in establishing a new order, and a partnership in which India would play an equal role – that was the Indian proposition to Obama's America.

Delhi's subtle assertion resonated with Japanese perceptions. Keen to build peaceful ties to Beijing, Hatoyama also deepened security links to Delhi. Tokyo hosted A.K. Antony, fine-tuning collaboration.³⁰⁴ The 'new stage of India–Japan strategic and global partnership' was formalized during Hatoyama's December 2009 visit to India. He and Singh authorized extensive cooperation entailing annual meetings between themselves, foreign ministers, defence ministers, service chiefs, senior defence officials, regular exchanges of intelligence assessments, and of personnel and scholars. Bilateral and multilateral exercises, and cooperation in economic, commercial, scientific-technological, and developmental areas followed.³⁰⁵ This alignment bore the seeds of a potent new element in the Asia-Pacific security dynamic.³⁰⁶

India implemented its version of a 'hedge and engage' stance vis-à-vis China. Delhi responded to the 3,000 km-range DF-4 IRBMs deployed to south-western China with military infrastructure improvements near the border.³⁰⁷ President Pratibha Patil, aboard the carrier *INS Viraat*, described the commissioning of the nuclear missile submarine the *INS Arihant* and ongoing acquisitions as 'an important milestone in the Navy's modernisation

process and to ensure an equitable balance of power in the region'.³⁰⁸ After repeated media complaints of Chinese 'intrusions', Foreign Minister Krishna said, 'in the dying days of 2009 the India–China border is peaceful, they are tranquil (sic)'.³⁰⁹ Still, the army issued a new doctrine for waging a two-front war from a 'cold start'.³¹⁰

During their climate change tryst in Copenhagen, Singh secured Wen Jiabao's assurances that Beijing would not 'meddle in the affairs of South Asia'.³¹¹ Diverse differences notwithstanding, Delhi could not ignore China's 'rise'.³¹² Indian Defence Secretary Pradeep Kumar flew to Beijing in the New Year on the first such trip for talks with PLA Deputy CGS, General Ma Xiaotian. Ma wished to 'clarify concerns, deepen mutual trust and coordinate stances'. Kumar sought to expand defence cooperation.³¹³ Ma worried about 'irresponsible remarks made by a few Indian leaders and some Indian media's untrue reports'. Kumar assured him senior officials had 'endeavoured to clarify the related remarks and those untrue reports'.³¹⁴

Days after the Sino-Indian defence dialogue, Robert Gates met Singh, Krishna, and Antony in Delhi, focusing on Chinese military modernization.³¹⁵ They agreed to explore 'how to expand defense cooperation after remarkable advances made in the last few years'.³¹⁶ As Clinton was berating Beijing over the 'Google affair', Gates noted, 'we also talked about larger regional and strategic issues including China'. After signing an End Use Monitoring Agreement, a Communications Interoperability and Security MOU, and a Mutual Logistic Support Agreement, Gates noted, 'The emergence of India as a global power and the development of the US–India relationship is one of the great success stories of the last two decades ... this will be a defining partnership for the 21st century'.³¹⁷

Next, Delhi test-fired the *Agni III*, a 3,500 km-range IRBM, bringing many Chinese cities within India's nuclear reach. India's quest was for 'a strategic deterrent against neighbouring rival China'.³¹⁸ This IRBM was 'superior in terms of accuracy and technology' to China's 2,500 km-range DF-21 and DF-25 missiles.³¹⁹ The *Agni-III* was an advance in extending Delhi's strategic deterrent but this was not enough. Claiming that India was 'way ahead of China in terms of BMD technology' and 'Beijing has a lot of catching up to do', officials prepared to test-fire the *Agni V*, a 5,000 km-range ICBM, 'within a year'.³²⁰

Beijing optimistically downplayed the excitement: 'The China–India relation is friendly and cooperative. China will not be a threat to India, and nor will India pose a threat to China'.³²¹ Indian analyses, however, focused on China's alleged efforts to 'teach India another lesson'.³²² Delhi boosted defences along the 4,057-km LAC. In 2011–15, eight *Akash* SAM squadrons would be deployed; 36 Su-30MKI fighters each would be based at Tezpur and Chabua in Assam; electronic sensors to detect vehicle- and troop movement along the borders would be installed; by 2014, a 'spy satellite' would intercept 'hostile' radio traffic; the army had already moved an artillery brigade to Arunachal Pradesh – now, reinforcements were on their way.³²³ Antony, confirming the

army was raising two mountain divisions with over 36,000 soldiers to be deployed to the LAC by 2012, insisted, 'I must tell you it is not against China. But these are being raised under the overall policies to strengthen the presence of the armed forces in the Northeast'.³²⁴

Delhi announced an increase of \$32 billion in the 2010 defence budget.³²⁵ While the militaries grew in a competitive dialectic, hope shone through occasionally. General Deepak Kapoor insisted, 'there have been no major issues of Chinese transgressions' on the border.³²⁶ Notably, Pallam Raju, noting China's efforts to protect its 'oil interests' in the Indian Ocean, said India was 'happy to assist China to keep open vital sea lanes' between the Gulf and Chinese ports.³²⁷ Beijing welcomed the offer.³²⁸ The announcement by ACM Naik that the two air forces were planning their first-ever joint exercise in 2012³²⁹ shone a rare positive light on Sino-Indian military dynamics.

3 The Kremlin's gamesmanship

Russia resurgent

Is Russia European, or Eurasian? This conundrum has informed the cultural, national and ideational soul-searching characterizing imperial Tsarist, Soviet Communist and, now, Federal Russian efforts to locate its strategic moorings. Although Russia's elite culture is defined within European frameworks, territorially, most of Russia is Asian. Stretching across much of the Euro-Asian landmass, modern Russia displays symptoms of a Cerberus-like geopolitical schizophrenia, symbolized by the double-headed eagle – looking to the east and to the west – on its coat of arms. As a result of this duality,

Russia, for objective and inevitable reasons, has been forced in the past – and will be in the future – to sustain the burden of being Europe's outpost in Asia, to act as a cushion between two civilizations, and has done so reluctantly and often hampered by other Europeans.¹

Asia is said to begin in Russia's Northern Caucasus, Tatarija, Bashkirija and the neighbouring Urals and the Caspian Sea.² Geography, history, politics and economics render Russia both Asian and European; neither continent can escape this mega-state's existential influence. China and Japan, America's key Asian security interlocutors, invested much diplomacy in managing relations with the Soviet Union and, since 1992, Russia.³ Russia herself has stressed continuities across the Eurasian security spectrum. In the 1990s, Russian strategic attention was focused to the west and south. Improving relations with China, Japan, South Korea and America lowered security concerns over the Asia-Pacific theatre. However, with political and economic changes, anxiety over the fragility of the strategic landscape to the east, and fears of a confrontation there threatening Russian stakes, grew. Moscow began reappraising its Asia-Pacific security interests.⁴ This trend would likely intensify.⁵ Increased Russian activism would add to the volatile mix.

Portents of Russian thinking came in the summer and autumn of 2008 in President Dmitry Medvedev's speeches. In the first of these in June, he posited that European security arrangements and their underlying premises were

outdated. He proposed a new 'regional pact based, naturally, on the principles of the UN Charter and clearly defining the importance of force as a factor in relations within the Euro-Atlantic community'.⁶ Inviting European and Eurasian states to a conference, he proposed to host China, too. Tensions in the Caucasus temporarily buried the proposal. After the guns of August fell silent, Medvedev elaborated his belief that the unipolar premises of European security were unsustainable, as demonstrated, in his view, by Georgian action. While less critical of America than his predecessor, Medvedev nonetheless laid much blame for insecurity on Washington. NATO's eastward expansion, US Euro-BMD plans, and 'economic egoism' were the roots of trouble, he said.

Offering cooperation, Medvedev set out his vision of the 'principles of self-organization in a just and multipolar world'. The G-8 was no longer enough as a system-management tool; the participation of 'China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, and maybe others, too', was necessary.⁷ Some Western analysts saw the speeches as an attempt to restructure Euro-Asian security dynamics by inserting China into the discourse, and using it as a strategic counter-balance to Washington in what should be a purely Euro-Atlantic discussion.⁸ Others urged engagement, even offering Moscow a Membership Action Plan for eventually joining NATO!⁹ This is why Russia figures in any meaningful review of the Asia-Pacific security discourse.

After Boris Yeltsin managed the transitional phase of Russia's re-emergence from Soviet ashes, Vladimir Putin's presidency served as the Russian Federation's foundations. In this period, the Russian state consolidated its authority over the federal territory, imposing its writ on the Russian space. Putin made Russia an actor domestically and globally. Surging energy prices, Russia's ability to leverage its control over sources and delivery mechanisms, a parallel increase in domestic control, European energy needs, and America's quest for Russian cooperation in aspects of international security, made Russian recovery, indeed resurgence, inevitable.

Russia–USA relations, a key component of the post-Soviet narrative, combined collaboration in some areas with frustrations over divergences elsewhere. The Bush–Putin diarchy was strengthened by Russian support for US action following the *al-Qaeda* attacks on Washington and New York in 2001. Russia allowed its airspace to be used by Americans for 'Operation Enduring Freedom', and encouraged former Soviet republics to aid America's war effort. Moscow's Afghan partners, the Northern Alliance led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud, provided crucial support to US Special Forces in defeating the *Taliban* with minimal investment in blood or treasure. This was the high point of US–Russian amity.

The leaders collaborated in securing sensitive nuclear material and technologies at vulnerable Russian facilities, expanded trade and investment, and worked to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability.¹⁰ But Russia found it difficult to maintain a cooperative stance around America's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. For America, the 'partnership' was challenged by Russia 'steadily becoming more authoritarian' at a time when Washington 'made

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democracy a goal of American foreign policy'. Moscow's use of energy 'as a policy weapon' against Ukraine and the European Union (EU) caused much unhappiness. Putin's invitation to Palestinian *Hamas* leaders to Moscow rankled. Russia's efforts to secure 'special relationships' with former Soviet republics, including those anxious to Westernize, were 'increasingly entwined' with differences over energy, counter-terrorism and support for democratic reform'.¹¹

Putin's 'extremely active foreign policy', especially in the post-Soviet republics, impacted on relations. America did not wish Russia to become a 'center of gravity for anti-American forces', but Washington also sought cooperation with 'Russia's special services' and help on Iran, North Korea and the Middle East.¹² But the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004 pitted the two 'partners' on the opposite sides of the political-diplomatic fence. Under Russian pressure, America had to withdraw from a Uzbek military facility in 2005.¹³ Putin's April 2005 Duma statement that the Soviet collapse was 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century' confirmed a parting of the ways. During the 2006 Lebanon War, Russia did not support US policy. Moscow shipped air-defence systems to Syria, while aiding Venezuela and pressing pro-American governments in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. By early 2007, US and Russian policies had sharply diverged.

In January 2008, the DOD announced plans to install a Euro-BMD system with 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and tracking radars in the Czech Republic, to down Iranian ballistic missiles. Having opposed this plan since June 2006, Moscow may have felt confirmed that Washington had identified Russia as an adversary. Putin personally delivered evidence of Moscow's outrage. At the Munich Security Conference, he shocked participants, including Robert Gates, with his critique of America's global policies:

Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. As a result we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts. Finding a political settlement also becomes impossible. We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. And independent legal norms are, as a matter of fact, coming increasingly closer to one state's legal system. One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has over-stepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?¹⁴

Putin questioned Western refusal to ratify the 'Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe' (CFE) on the ground that Russian forces had not vacated troubled Georgian and Moldovan territory:

But what is happening at the same time? Simultaneously the so-called flexible frontline American bases with up to five thousand men in each. It

turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfil the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions at all.¹⁵

Putin proposed ways to address strategic offensive and defensive issues, implementation of the CFE Treaty,¹⁶ likely militarization of outer space, and preventing nuclear proliferation. He invited Gates to discuss mutual security concerns in Moscow, insisting 'We are open to cooperation'. Putin's terms:

Of course we would like to interact with responsible and independent partners with whom we could work together in constructing a fair and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few, but for all.¹⁷

In Moscow, Gates tried to allay fears. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice followed him, hoping to clear 'misunderstandings' in 'candid and friendly' talks while insisting America and Russia had equal rights in pursuing 'normal relationships' with former Soviet Republics. Her aides, meanwhile, began consulting Polish counterparts to finalize installation of the BMD interceptors. In the second half of 2007, Putin and Bush met several times but shared little warmth. That summer, Admiral Vladimir Masorin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, announced plans to rebuild the fleet, including six aircraft carrier strike groups. Moscow's decision to plant a Russian flag on the seabed near the North Pole in August, and the resumption of strategic military exercises, marked the downward trajectory in relations. As the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's 'Peace Mission 2007' military drills spanning Xinjiang and the Urals ended in Bishkek, also in August, Putin announced the resumption of Russia's strategic bomber patrol missions, suspended in 1992. Large-scale naval exercises in the Atlantic and other oceans were similarly revived.

In December, Moscow suspended implementation of the CFE Treaty and began the first major post-Soviet naval exercise in the Atlantic. The two-month drill by four warships, seven auxiliaries, 47 fixed-wing aircraft and 10 helicopters attracted attention.¹⁸ The *Admiral Kuznetsov* carrier task-group comprised the eponymous carrier, two *Udaloy*-class destroyers, a replenishment ship and a 25,000 horse-power ocean-going tug. Su-33 interceptors and *Kamov* helicopters from the task-group approached a Norwegian oilfield in the North Sea later that month, triggering alerts. In January, the task-group rendezvoused in the Mediterranean with the cruiser *Moskva*, flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. The flotilla then reached the Bay of Biscay, exercising with Tu-160, Tu-95MS and Tu-22M-3 strategic bombers, MiG-31 and Su-27 fighters, Il-78 aerial tankers and A-50 airborne early warning aircraft. British Air Force fighters were scrambled to 'intercept' Russian bombers which had 'test-launched nuclear-capable missiles'.¹⁹

The task-group covered more than 15,000 nautical miles during the exercise. Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov noted, the deployment was 'proof of

Russia's serious intention to return to the world's oceans as a leading naval power'.²⁰ As the exercise ended on 3 February 2008, the Russian navy's new commander-in-chief, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, said, 'What is important is that we have appeared (in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean) at a scheduled time, and not just that we appeared there. We will do all that we can to build up our presence where Russia has strategic interests'.²¹ Six days later, two *Bear* bombers, flying south of Japan, were detected turning towards the US carrier *Nimitz* which scrambled four F/A-18 *Hornets* to intercept them. One *Bear* flew directly over the carrier while the other maintained distance. US fighters 'escorted' them away in the first such incident since July 2004.²²

The exercises were the front end of the Kremlin's military organizational initiative. Reductions indicated the scale of reforms. The officer corps – with an authorized strength of 400,000 but with only 355,000 slots filled, would be reduced to 150,000; General Officers' billets would be slashed from 1,107 to 886, Colonels from 25,665 to 9,114, Majors from 99,550 to 25,000, and Captains, from 90,000 to 40,000. The number of Lieutenants would rise by 10,000 – suggesting a new officers' corps was being built.²³ Of the 140,000 warrant officers in service in 2008, only 20,000 would remain by December 2009.²⁴ The General Staff's restructuring suggested fundamental changes. Over four years, the number of officers at the MOD and the General Staff would fall from 27,873 to 8,500.²⁵ A consolidated cluster of training institutes would be the core of the 'new' forces – three military educational centres, six academies, and a military university – instead of the 65 campuses active in 2008. A professional corps of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) would take on much of the rank-and-file training and leadership responsibilities.²⁶

These reforms could, in conjunction with increased funding and induction of new hardware, transform Russia's armed services into a more effective fighting force. However, officers noted that the process would not be completed before 2020.²⁷ President Medvedev, addressing senior commander days before his first meeting with Obama in London, stressed Russia's resurgence as a global military power.²⁸

This muscular approach to relations with America was driven by several grievances. US analysts acknowledged Russian perceptions that America had violated the post-Cold War 'settlement', encroaching on Russia's historical national interests. Instances were, NATO expansion into former Warsaw Pact- and post-Soviet territory, especially the prospect that Georgia and Ukraine would join NATO, US abrogation of the ABM Treaty and decision to deploy missile-defence systems to Eastern Europe; and US-orchestrated plans to build oil pipelines from the Caspian Basin to Europe bypassing Russia. Given Russia's 'lost status and diminished influence' and Putin's 'neo-authoritarian tendencies', these actions deepened US–Russian cleavages.²⁹

One upshot was Medvedev's February 2009 offer of a \$2.1 billion loan to Kyrgyzstan on President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's pledge to expel US forces from the Manas airport.³⁰ While Moscow voiced myriad grievances, few mattered more than American interest in integrating Ukraine and Georgia

into the NATO–EU bloc. The Ukrainian elites were divided between those who saw Russia as a threat to their independence and others who identified interests in consonance with Russia's. Historical, politico-economic, cultural and ethnic interactions had built up a Russo–Ukrainian palimpsest which challenged 'normal' bilateral inter-state relations. In that context, NATO's 'absorption' of Ukraine posed 'elemental threats' to Russia.³¹

Russian anger over Georgia's dalliances with America met a muscular response. In the summer of 2008, a 'small war' broke out between the two. In the early 1990s, Georgia and its breakaway South Ossetia region had agreed to a ceasefire monitored by Russian 'peacekeepers' stationed in the region. Moscow extended citizenship and passports to most ethnic Ossetians. Simmering long-time tensions escalated on the evening of 7 August 2008, when South Ossetia and Georgia accused each other of launching intense artillery barrages against each other.³² Georgia claimed South Ossetian refusal to respond to a ceasefire appeal forced Tbilisi to send in troops. On 8 August, Russia launched air attacks on Georgia as Russian troops engaged Georgian forces in South Ossetia. By the morning of 10 August, Russian units had occupied much of South Ossetia, reached its border with Georgia, and shelled areas across it. They occupied several Georgian cities. Russian warships landed troops in Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia region, taking up positions off Georgia's Black Sea coast.³³

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, as the EU president, brokered a Russo–Georgian peace plan in mid-August. It called for a cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of forces to pre-conflict positions, humanitarian aid, the return of displaced persons, but allowed temporary Russian patrols in a 'security zone' outside South Ossetia. It also supported Georgian interests by urging a greater international role in peace talks and peacekeeping. While Sarkozy was negotiating this plan, on 13 August, President Bush announced that Secretary of State Rice would travel to France and Georgia to assist with the peace process, and Defence Secretary Gates would direct US aid shipments to Georgia. Rice proposed a multi-year \$1 billion aid plan for Georgia. Several Members of Congress visited Georgia, and Congress passed legislation in support of Georgia's territorial integrity and independence. P.L. 110–329, signed into law on 30 September 2008, provided \$365 million in added assistance for Georgia for FY2009.

On 25 August, Medvedev declared Russian recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia for 'humanitarian reasons'. America and its allies condemned this decision.³⁴ Medvedev told the press that 'the five principles' governing Russian foreign policy included 'determination to protect Russian citizens and interests overseas', and 'the unacceptability of a unipolar world dominated by the United States'.³⁵ Sarkozy negotiated a second accord with Russia in September, leading to at least 200 EU observers being deployed to the conflict zone and almost all Russian forces being withdrawn from areas adjacent to the borders of these territories.

US analysts posited that the conflict would have long-term effects on the region's security dynamics as Russia augmented its military presence by

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establishing bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia's military capabilities were degraded in the conflict, and it would need substantial Western assistance to rebuild its forces.³⁶ This assistance arrived but the shock effect of Russia's robust military action drew a line around the former Soviet space. The Obama Administration inherited this legacy of relations with a Russia struggling with modernization while defending its 'core interests' in the 'near abroad' and the world more generally.³⁷

Washington 'resets' relations

Some analysts saw the risks inherent in US–Russian tensions, and urged the West to 'devise a new formula for their relations with Russia. There is much at stake'.

Russia is the other major nuclear power, the indispensable actor in the campaign against nuclear proliferation from Iran to North Korea, an important actor in the Middle East, a major force in energy markets, and a nation that by virtue of its position astride the Eurasian landmass controls key lines of communication across the continent.³⁸

US need for a reliable logistics network to sustain Afghan operations alone demonstrated 'the importance of Russia as the gateway to the heart of Eurasia'.³⁹ One of the first changes the Obama Administration sought in diplomacy was in US–Russian relations. In the first major speech on the subject, Vice President Joseph Biden told the Munich Security Conference, 'The United States rejects the notion that NATO's gain is Russia's loss, or that Russia's strength is NATO's weakness'. Noting 'a dangerous drift in relations between Russia' and the Alliance, he said it was 'time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should work together'.⁴⁰ Identifying areas of convergence, he pledged to work with NATO allies to allay Russian concerns. Biden insisted America would pursue its missile-defence goals against Iranian 'threats', but in consultation with Russia. A pragmatic return to *realpolitik* created space for movement.⁴¹ The two sides began urgent negotiations.⁴²

The 'reset' notion resonated in Moscow. In March, Clinton arrived in Geneva for a meeting with counterpart Sergei Lavrov. She presented him with a yellow box with a red 'Reset' button. Lavrov pointed out that the Russian word for reset was *perezagruzka*, while the word printed on the button, *peregruzka*, meant 'overcharge'. Smiling, Clinton told Lavrov, 'We won't let you do that to us!'⁴³ This set the scene for a meeting between Presidents Medvedev and Obama at the London G-20 summit in April. The two leaders agreed that relations had drifted, and pledged to cooperate on a range of questions, setting a new tone.⁴⁴ They issued two declarations, one on improving relations and cooperating on 'nonproliferation of WMDs, limitation of strategic weapons, countering terrorism, and improving economic and financial situation and the overall economic situation in the world'.⁴⁵ The other noted agreement on

beginning the drafting of a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) to replace the 1991 original, and the Bush–Putin Moscow Treaty signed in 2002. The original START would expire in December 2009 and the leaders agreed to get an outline readied by the time Obama visited Medvedev in Moscow in July.⁴⁶

Stressing that ‘the biggest threat the country faces, our country faces, is a nuclear weapon in the hands of a terrorist’, Obama said he was ‘committed to the goal of locking down all loose fissile material within the next four years’.⁴⁷ Obama vowed to work closely with his Russian counterpart. However, differences remained. Obama said, ‘in order for us to have a very strong and solid relationship, we need to be honest and truthful with one another’.⁴⁸ The two leaders agreed to disagree on Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, spheres of influence, human rights and missile defence. This allowed agreement on several substantive issues. The US side published details of strategic nuclear weapons in the US and Russian arsenals, to be subjected to a soon-to-be-negotiated new START agreement.⁴⁹

Tensions further evaporated after Obama proclaimed his vision of a nuclear weapon-free world in a speech in Prague. Lavrov visited Clinton in Washington a month later, agreeing ‘to set a standard and an example to improve the security of nuclear facilities and prevent proliferation of nuclear material around the world’.⁵⁰ They noted, ‘The task of further reductions of strategic offensive weapons is too important, both for Russia and the United States and for the entire world, in fact, to make it a hostage of any particular regime anywhere around the globe’.⁵¹ Irritants in the form of NATO exercises in Georgia, America’s continued BMD development, and tit-for-tat expulsions of Russian and NATO officials showed the reset’s fragility.

BMD deployment plans caused particular concern. Russian analysts noted, ‘Full-scale deployment of a missile defense system in Alaska and California will cover about 90% of US territory’. If these were expanded to their full potential, the balance of strategic advantage ‘between the Russian and American nuclear potentials will be one to 10, or even one to 15 in favor of US’.⁵² Moscow also opposed USA–EU punitive sanctions against Iran’s nuclear programme – seeking coordinated UN action instead. Russia welcomed Washington’s review of the original Euro-BMD plans.⁵³ Talks reduced some strains as the two powers sought to refashion relations.

The Kremlin sheltered two different schools of thought on Russia’s interests. This schizophrenia became apparent after Lavrov’s meeting with Clinton when Medvedev signed the decree on ‘The Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation until 2020’. Russia’s aim was, ‘An improvement of the standard of living of Russian citizens by guaranteeing personal safety; high welfare standards ... developed by means of strengthening the role of the state and perfecting state-private partnership’. A core objective was to make Russia ‘a world power, whose activity is aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually advantageous partnership in the conditions of a multipolar world’.⁵⁴ The strategy identified several challenges to Russia’s national security:

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The threats to military security are the policy by a number of leading foreign states, aimed at attaining dominant superiority in the military sphere, in the first place in strategic nuclear forces, by developing high-precision, information and other high-tech means of warfare, strategic armaments with non-nuclear ordnance, the unilateral formation of the global missile defence system and militarization of outer space, which is capable of bringing about a new spiral of the arms race, as well as the development of nuclear, chemical and biological technologies, the production of weapons of mass destruction or their components and delivery vehicles.⁵⁵

The cited weapon systems made clear where the Kremlin's finger was pointed. 'The negative influence on the condition of military security of Russia and its allies is exacerbated' by the withdrawal from international accords in the fields of limitation and reduction in armaments, as well as by the actions by unnamed actors 'aimed at unbalancing the systems of state and military control, missile warning, outer space monitoring, the functioning of strategic nuclear forces, the nuclear armaments storage facilities', nuclear power plants, atomic and chemical industries, 'and other potentially dangerous facilities'.⁵⁶ Russia had other anxieties, too. 'The instability of the existing global and regional architecture, especially in the Euro-Atlantic region, is an increasing threat to international security'. In a competition for resources, problems that involved military force could not be ruled out, but this would 'destroy the balance of forces close to the borders of the Russian Federation and her allies'.⁵⁷

Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, explained that national security required 'achieving an array of strategic national priorities' including sustained development of 'a competitive state' with high-tech industry, modern defence capabilities, and 'decent living standards'. Russia rejected NATO's expansion plans and 'attempts to grant the military alliance a global role'. Russia was ready to build relations 'on the basis of equality and respect for international law'.⁵⁸

In June, Admiral Mullen visited Moscow, stressing common challenges over Afghanistan, Iran, missile defence and European security. 'We need to work these very, very hard challenges to improve security, not just in Europe, but also globally so that the world can actually move forward in a more stable way'.⁵⁹ Mullen and his host, General Nikolai Makarov, drafted the security aspects of agreements to be formalized during Obama's visit.

In the Western Pacific, PACOM and the Russian Pacific Fleet eyed each other warily. The latter was deployed to secure Russian maritime interests across the Asia-Pacific battle-space. American military capabilities remained the focus of its attention.⁶⁰ The Fleet's four ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs), five cruise-missile submarines, four nuclear-powered attack submarines, nine diesel-electric submarines, a cruiser, seven destroyers, numerous frigates, corvettes, landing ships and mine countermeasure vessels carried a significant punch. The Pacific Fleet's 'overriding concern' was the US Navy's

carrier strike forces, its 14 *Ohio*-class SSBNs, and its four cruise-missile submarines.⁶¹

Russia's security focus on America also triggered an SLBM modernization programme, aiming to replace *Delta-3* and *Typhoon*-class SSBNs with the new *Borei*-class, and *Sineva* SLBMs with *Bulava* missiles. Failures of *Bulava* test-launches underscored the frailties of Russia's strategic-technological infrastructure, weakening its nuclear deterrent. An arms-control accord requiring mutual reductions of offensive systems and allowing Russia to maintain strategic parity looked attractive.⁶² Obama's July 2009 Moscow visit hinted at a thaw.

The main thing that I want to communicate to Russian leadership and the Russian people is America's respect for Russia, that we want to deal as equals. We are both nuclear superpowers; and we have to handle those responsibilities in a way that encourages peace.⁶³

Obama and Medvedev endorsed several agreements. One was 'Joint understanding for a follow-on agreement to START I', committing both to a new treaty reducing deployed warheads from the previously agreed 1,700–702,200 to 1,500–501,675.⁶⁴ The new deal reduced permitted delivery vehicles from 1,600 to 500–501,100. The reductions would be effected within seven years from the treaty taking effect. It would include 'effective' verification measures.⁶⁵ Obama noted he had ordered a review of the BMD programme and that Euro-BMD would defend America and Europe 'from an Iranian ballistic missile armed with a nuclear warhead. We are not building and will not build a system that is aimed to respond to an attack from Russia'.⁶⁶ The summit statement stressed joint threat assessments and the establishment of a data-exchange centre.⁶⁷

Another agreement was on Afghanistan. Keen to prevent it from again becoming a sanctuary for religious extremists mounting attacks abroad, the two presidents agreed on Russian aid to US operations. Mullen and Makarov signed relevant documents. Moving up from non-lethal supplies, Moscow allowed Washington 4,500 free ordnance flights annually – saving America \$133 million.⁶⁸ Mullen and Makarov also resumed military cooperation, broken off after the 2008 conflict. The two presidents agreed to cooperate on North Korea and Iran, and on the Middle East. They revived a presidential commission, to be co-chaired by the foreign ministers, with 13 cabinet- or sub-cabinet level working groups covering the spectrum of collaborative links.⁶⁹

Obama's brunch with Putin, too, went well, although both agreed there would be disagreements in the future. Obama had 'a wonderful conversation' with Medvedev and praised Putin's 'wonderful work for the Russian people'. Putin said 'We associate with your name the hope for development of bilateral relations'. Energy security in particular and security more generally featured over a meal including prohibited smoked Beluga and black caviar.⁷⁰ Obama's speech at Moscow's New Economic School restated his belief that America

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and Russia faced a new era in which cooperation was mutually advantageous. He repeated his Euro-BMD reassurance, 'this system is directed at preventing a potential attack from Iran and has nothing to do with Russia. I want us to work together with Russia on a missile defense architecture that makes us all safer'.⁷¹ Medvedev expressed satisfaction to the Russian–American Business Forum: 'The United States is a long-standing and promising partner for Russia'.⁷² Munich in 2007 felt like a distant memory.

A fortnight after Obama's return from Russia, Biden travelled to Ukraine and Georgia rebutting fears of US–Russian relations warming at Georgia's expense. 'I come here on behalf of the United States with a simple straightforward message', Biden said, 'we, the United States stand by you on your journey to a secure, free, democratic and once again united Georgia. We will stand with you'.⁷³ Endorsing President Saakashvili's policies, Biden added, 'We understand that Georgia aspires to join NATO. We fully support that aspiration'. Saakashvili, thankful for US aid – including \$1 billion disbursed on Biden's initiative – noted, 'we are a state that is continuously under threat'. After private meetings with Saakashvili, Biden visited refugees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and met Georgia's opposition leaders.

He did not refer to military assistance to Georgia from America, Israel, Turkey, Greece and Bosnia Herzegovina. Still, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Grigory Karasin, complained, 'We are deeply concerned by the activity of the Georgian leadership to remilitarise the country, which some countries are responding to in a surprisingly calm and even positive way'.⁷⁴ Karasin threatened to sever 'military-technical' cooperation with countries providing Georgia with Russian-made or ex-Soviet arms. Moscow warned of 'concrete steps' to prevent Georgia from rebuilding its military capability. Washington noted that Tbilisi had not 'formally' requested military assistance.⁷⁵ Medvedev's chief foreign policy adviser, Sergei Prikhodko, found Biden's criticism of Russia 'perplexing' because it sent out mixed messages so soon after Obama's visit. 'If some members of Obama's team and government do not like this atmosphere, why don't they say so?' he asked, 'If they disagree with the course of their president, we just need to know this'.⁷⁶ Russian agitation was acknowledged by a US official shortly after Biden's return from Tbilisi.⁷⁷

Old stratagems, or a 'new era'?

When Medvedev called to wish Obama a happy birthday in August, Obama urged a diplomatic approach to rising Russo-Georgian tensions. Signs of *realpolitik* as a motif in US–Russian dynamics reappeared. Two nuclear-powered Russian attack submarines were discovered patrolling 200 miles off America's eastern shores for the first time in nearly a decade. Washington insisted the submarines had not violated US waters or taken any threatening steps, but their presence caused concern. The *Akula*-class boats included a most modern *Akula II*. These could carry torpedoes and cruise missiles for attacking submarines, ships and onshore targets. The DOD noted, 'Clearly

there is an effort on their part to project force around the world. No one here is overly concerned by it'.⁷⁸ General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff, said these were 'regular' patrols not meriting excitement; Russia had resumed long-range submarine patrols after reviving strategic bomber flights in 2007. He noted that America mounted similar submarine sorties near Russia.⁷⁹

When Obama scrapped Bush's Euro-BMD plans, Moscow quietly set aside plans to 'neutralize' those plans by aiming missiles at Europe. Putin praised Obama's 'correct and brave' decision.⁸⁰ While some Russian conservatives harped on a 'trust deficit' with America, Medvedev focused primarily on Russian reforms. In a 'state of the federation' address, he noted:

The global economic crisis has shown that our affairs are far from being in the best state. Twenty years of tumultuous change has not spared our country from its humiliating dependence on raw materials. Our current economy still reflects the major flaw of the Soviet system: it largely ignores individual needs. With a few exceptions domestic business does not invent nor create the necessary things and technology that people need. We sell things that we have not produced, raw materials or imported goods ... Every year there are fewer and fewer Russians. Alcoholism, smoking, traffic accidents, the lack of availability of many medical technologies, and environmental problems take millions of lives. And the emerging rise in births has not compensated for our declining population.⁸¹

He noted the 'too high' price of the 'totalitarian state machine' of the recent past, 'centuries of corruption' which had 'debilitated Russia from time immemorial', and the 'paternalistic attitudes widespread in our society' holding Russia back. He urged democratic and modernizing change. Russian democracy would not copy foreign models. 'Civil society cannot be bought by foreign grants. Political culture will not be reconfigured as a simple imitation of the political traditions of advanced societies. An effective judicial system cannot be imported'.⁸² Russia had to find its own way to the future. 'We will act patiently, pragmatically, consistently and in a balanced manner. And act now: act today and tomorrow. We will overcome the crisis, backwardness and corruption. We will create a new Russia. Go Russia!'⁸³ His project raised questions about Putin's failings and whether chinks were opening between the two.

Arms control negotiations with America suggested this could well be the case. Talks stalled as the 1991 START expired on 5 December. Obama's hopes for completing the successor treaty before accepting his Nobel Peace Prize remained unmet. Asymmetry in US-Russian circumstances and major differences stymied progress. Obama's falling popularity and challenges to his domestic reforms may have boosted incentives to strike foreign policy successes. Neither Medvedev nor Putin faced such problems.⁸⁴ Still, Medvedev

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and Prikhodko appeared keen to sign an agreement sooner rather than later. Putin and Defence Minister Serdyukov reportedly insisted on Russian security concerns being addressed first.⁸⁵ Their anxiety appeared reasonable.

To deter a possible US first-strike, Russia needed to maintain forces which could not only destroy deployed US strategic nuclear warheads and delivery systems, but also all US storage sites for decommissioned warheads and ICBMs. This calculation assumed America had no ABM umbrella protecting its offensive arsenal. With Washington deploying a BMD system, Russian calculations were in a flux. This new US strategic offensive-defensive configuration would force Russia to redesign its forces and doctrine. Since both had been updated recently, Moscow was reluctant to repeat that expensive and complex exercise.⁸⁶ So, Russia sought an outcome which imposed minimal short-to-medium-term costs while maintaining a balance of advantages. An asymmetry in interests held agreement up.

Reduction ceilings, status of delivery vehicles, and antimissile systems were the most sensitive issues. Russia sought a reduction ceiling of 500 while America wanted 1,000. Having to recalculate the consequences of 'deep cuts', they insisted that in addition to warheads, – ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers be included within reduction ceilings. America, with a 'global precision strike' capability and several SSBNs reconfigured to SSGNs, mounted conventional warheads on some ballistic missiles, excluding these from ceilings. Russia opposed this, insisting that strategic defensive systems affected the adversary's strategic offensive system and, so, ought to be counted within the overall strategic force. America rejected that argument. Verifications measures, too, proved contentious.⁸⁷

As 2009 ended without a new START treaty, Obama and Medvedev repeatedly reassured each other and chivvied officials along. Economic and political uncertainty in Russia encouraged a willingness to examine its problems; there also were introspective tendencies, avoiding serious rethinking of global priorities.⁸⁸ Obama's efforts to depersonalize and institutionalize US–Russian relations helped 'reset' ties, but anxieties – Russian fears over US intentions, especially NATO expansion, ties to Georgia, and BMD; and Central- and Eastern European fears over Russian designs – dogged prospects.⁸⁹ These became visible in the Military Doctrine and the Principles of State Nuclear Deterrence Policy which Medvedev signed in February 2010.

The new doctrine mentioned NATO as the first external threat to Russian security. While few considered a NATO–Russian conflict likely, Russia's inability to shape NATO's decision-making may have justified Moscow's view of it as a strategic threat.⁹⁰ The new doctrine also imposed a modest constraint on its first-use provision – saying nuclear weapons could be used 'in case of aggression against the Russian Federation with use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened'.⁹¹ One of the Doctrine document's authors confirmed that the final version did not carry a draft provision allowing the use of nuclear weapons in response to the 'threat' of the use of WMDs. The new doctrine also introduced the use of high-precision

conventional arms alongside nuclear ones to boost strategic deterrence.⁹² Whether these innovations reflected new thinking or a relaxation of anxieties remained unclear.⁹³

Residual mutual mistrust, especially over the former Warsaw Pact, was clear. There was 'a palpable obsession in Russia with America's intentions toward it, and an equally strong obsession in many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with Moscow's motives'. Both fears were 'baseless', but they 'misinform and misguide, and allow for wide manipulation'.⁹⁴ Obama assigned Clinton to allay Russian anxieties.

A meeting of the Middle-East 'Quartet' – the UN, the EU, America and Russia – hosted by Lavrov allowed Clinton to do just that. She hammered home the message to Lavrov, Putin and Medvedev that America and Russia needed to put the Cold War to rest, and work to shape a mutually beneficial era. America would not hold Russia back. Instead, 'Our goal is to help strengthen Russia. We see Russia with the strong culture, with the incredible intellectual capital that Russia has, as a leader in the 21st century'.⁹⁵ Putin raised Russia's problems with the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and US trade and investment sanctions while praising the cooperation in areas of security.⁹⁶ Clinton told the press only a few technical issues stood before a new START accord which would soon be signed.

In April, Washington released its Nuclear Posture Review Report (NPR), placing the prevention of nuclear terrorism and proliferation 'at the top of the US policy agenda'.⁹⁷ The NPR noted:

Russia remains America's only peer in the area of nuclear weapons capabilities. But the nature of the US–Russia relationship has changed fundamentally since the days of the Cold War. While policy differences continue to arise between the two countries and Russia continues to modernize its still-formidable nuclear forces, Russia and the United States are no longer adversaries, and the prospects for military confrontation have declined dramatically.⁹⁸

The NPR stressed US–Russian cooperation on nuclear- and other strategic issues. Within hours, Lavrov announced the completion of START negotiations and plans for the signing of a new treaty by the presidents in Prague two days later. Lavrov noted the Treaty was concluded in conditions of the parties' existing levels of strategic defensive systems. 'In case of a change of these levels each party reserves the right to decide the question of its future participation in the process of reducing strategic offensive arms'.⁹⁹ The signing ceremony at Prague Castle exuded warmth.¹⁰⁰ The leaders shared cordiality reserved for friends.¹⁰¹ Medvedev said the treaty allowed each side to deploy 1,550 strategic offensive weapons, 700 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers, and possess 800 deployed or non-deployed missile launchers and heavy bombers. It also provided for exchange of missile telemetry data and other verification measures.¹⁰² Both sides described the treaty

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as a great success representing the dawn of a new era in Russo-American relations.¹⁰³

However, almost parallel to this presidential meeting, Vladimir Putin arrived in Caracas for a summit with US critic Hugo Chavez. Caracas and Moscow had already forged a military-supplies relationship generating hardware transfers. In 2006, Venezuela ordered 24 Su-30 fighters, 53 military helicopters and 100,000 assault rifles worth \$3 billion. The two sides exchanged pilots and technicians, with Russian instructors training Venezuelan pilots. Russia agreed to set up a factory in Venezuela capable of annually producing 50,000 assault rifles. Orders for transport planes and SAMs too were reported.¹⁰⁴ In April 2010, Putin delivered the last four of 38 Mil-17 helicopters, offering \$2.2 billion in credit for further orders.¹⁰⁵ The two leaders agreed to cooperate in agriculture, energy and space before Putin met President Evo Morales of Bolivia, in Caracas on a short visit. Putin's great success was a 40-year, \$20 billion Orinoco Basin oil extraction joint-venture,¹⁰⁶ similar to a Sino-Venezuelan deal.¹⁰⁷

Later in April, Obama hosted Medvedev and other leaders at a 'Nuclear Security Summit'. His objectives were set against a 'cruel irony of history' – with threats of great-power nuclear confrontation low, 'the risk of nuclear attack has gone up ... the danger of nuclear terrorism is one of the greatest threats to global security'.¹⁰⁸ They pledged to secure all nuclear materials within four years, with progress to be reviewed in Seoul in 2012. Medvedev announced the shutdown of Russia's last remaining weapons-grade plutonium producing reactor.¹⁰⁹ Clinton and Lavrov signed the 'Plutonium Disposition Protocol', enabling their countries to dispose of 34 tons of weapon-grade plutonium each, together enough for 17,000 warheads. America agreed to pay the \$400 million promised in 1999–2000 towards funding the Russian programme.¹¹⁰ Washington felt US–Russian relations were set on a collaborative, not confrontational, trajectory, with understanding replacing misapprehensions. Officials admitted much still needed to be done to ensure history did not overwhelm their shared future, but they insisted a strategic corner had been turned.¹¹¹

Ambiguities persisted in the BMD arena. The US Missile Defence Agency (MDA) insisted it was proceeding with planned deployment of defences in Europe against ballistic missile attacks originating in 'the Middle East'. SM-3 interceptors would be deployed at sea and, later, on land, along with radars and fire-control systems, all to be completed by 2020.¹¹² Asked if the new treaty had ceded a 'veto' on US missile defences to Russia, the Director of MDA replied he had received 'no instructions to curtail' any of the current or planned projects.¹¹³ Washington maintained Obama had rejected Medvedev's attempts to link strategic offensive and defensive systems. However, a Russian official insisted, 'I can't quote you unequivocal language from President Obama or Secretary Clinton in conversations with us that there would be no strategic missile defences in Europe, but everything that was said to us amounts to this'.¹¹⁴ The contradictory signals indicated the limits of the 'new era'.

A Sino-Russian–Indian triangle

Russia's diplomacy had focused on forging a loose politico-economic front with Asia's giants – China and India. With their longstanding rivalry a source of concern, Beijing and Delhi sought to fashion a *modus vivendi* while continuing slow negotiations on their disputed borders. Moscow–Delhi strategic cooperation, formalized in an August 1971 treaty linked to the 'Bangladesh War' that year,¹¹⁵ declined in the post-Soviet years as India built a strategic partnership with America. Putin engaged both China and India to establish a new framework of Eurasian collaboration. The triangular linkages, first at official level and, then, at ministerial consultations, eventually generated annual summits, laying the foundation of a potentially innovative structure for absorbing the shocks of contention.

The 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighbourly and Friendly Cooperation began a decade of consolidation via frequent official, military- and summit-level exchanges. Hu Jintao set out five principles for the 'China–Russia strategic partnership' in Moscow in 2007: develop bilateral political ties and enhance mutual support on issues of vital importance to either party; continue strengthening mutually beneficial economic–commercial ties; establish a multi-level scientific–technological partnership; promote cooperation in culture, health-care, tourism, and other social dimensions; and strengthen cooperation on peace and security issues both bilaterally and multilaterally such as on the SCO platform.¹¹⁶ The resolution of Sino-Russian border disputes boosted the 'strategic partnership'.

Medvedev's quest for China's inclusion in Eurasian security discussions underscored how far the two neighbours had come. For China, energy was a key area of cooperation. Over 2006–30, China's oil consumption was expected to grow from 7.4 billion barrels per day (bb/d) to 15 bb/d, and natural gas, from 49 billion cubic meters (bcm) to 198 bcm.¹¹⁷ The proximity of sources and markets made linkages 'natural'. With Chinese demand for oil and gas growing, and Beijing investing in Siberian and Central Asian energy reserves, and in new pipelines linking these to Chinese 'energy hubs', a 'strategic network' of mutual dependence overlay the Eurasian landmass.¹¹⁸

In 2009 China and Russia agreed to build an oil pipeline from Skovorodino in Amur Oblast to China's energy terminus at Daqing via China's border city of Mohe. Construction began in April with plans to become operational in October 2010. With an annual capacity to deliver 15 million tons of crude, the pipeline would operate for 20 years, deepening 'long-term and stable energy cooperation'. China's envoy, noting Russia's urge to diversify markets and China's need to diversify energy sources, saw the deal as 'a new height of China–Russia strategic partnership of cooperation'.¹¹⁹

Membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China), and the Russia, India, China trilateral association widened bilateral collaboration.¹²⁰ With India an SCO observer, and all three states prominent in the G-20, the strategic triangle acquired

potential. However, Sino-Russian relations remained complex. Chinese interests in Central Asia, and demographic imbalances between a depopulating Russian Far-East and China's large population south of the border posed challenges.¹²¹ Moscow feared that by outnumbering natives in these regions, Chinese migrants could threaten identity and sovereignty.¹²² Some Russians warned of Chinese threats to Russian security, especially in arms-sales.¹²³

Joint leadership of the SCO may have diluted threat perceptions by increasing collective security efforts with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and cooperation with Iran, Pakistan and India. Consensus on stability, counter-terrorism and opposition to extremism allowed members to fashion collaborative linkages. Joint exercises have largely been Sino-Russian affairs with others only symbolically present, but they sent a message of unity in security. SCO members expressed shared concern about US influence in Central Asia although some, including Russia, provided transit facilities to US forces. Some Russians viewed the SCO as a Chinese-led body with Russia only a junior partner.¹²⁴ The SCO's failure to endorse Moscow's position after the Georgian War underscored the limits of Russian clout.¹²⁵ Still, the SCO gave Russia a platform for engaging China and Central Asian states beyond bilateral relations, generating additional regional influence.

Substantial Chinese procurement of Russian military equipment and technology manifested strategic commerce, averaging at least \$1 billion annually in 1992–2006, peaking at \$15 billion in 1999–2006, adding up to \$26 billion.¹²⁶ Given Western restrictions on transfers to China since 1989, and an end to Israeli supplies in 2000, the flow of high-end Russian platforms, jet engines, air-defence and anti-ship missiles, control gear, electronic sub-systems, and other hardware helped China to build a sophisticated military-industrial capability.¹²⁷ With indigenous capacity growing, in 2005, Beijing decided against buying further Su-30 fighters or license-producing Su-27s. Instead, Beijing built its own J-10s and J-11s, the latter resembling the Sukhoi design.¹²⁸

Many aircraft, ships and submarines which Russia sold to China, were on show in SCO exercises. In the first *Peace Mission* manoeuvres in August 2005, 10,000 troops – including 1,800 Russians – and air and naval elements operated in China's Shandong peninsula. A Russian Pacific Fleet flotilla with an assault ship, an ASW vessel, a destroyer, and diesel submarines, joined PLAN vessels simulating an amphibious landing while Russian *Flanker* fighters provided cover against naval targets, and *Bear* and *Backfire* bombers staged an air-landing near Qingdao.

Two years later, in *Peace Mission 2007*, Chinese forces exercised in Russia. One thousand six hundred PLA personnel joined 4,700 Russians and smaller contingents from other SCO members. The Chinese contingent included 46 aircraft, modern armour, and combat electronics, in the first overseas exercise for China's airborne forces.¹²⁹ These drills involved strategic planning in Xinjiang, deployments across thousands of miles to the Urals, and exercises near Chelyabinsk – demonstrating the PLA's long-range mobility, and Sino-Russian strategic and tactical collaborative abilities. In May 2008, the

two governments asserted that 'international security is comprehensive and inalienable, and some countries' security cannot be guaranteed at the cost of some others, including expanding military and political allies.'¹³⁰

In July 2009, Russian forces returned to China. Smaller in scale, this exercise involved several thousand soldiers including a Russian paratrooper company, over 100 tanks and self-propelled guns, and over 60 aircraft. The two forces rehearsed together in Shenyang, in north-eastern China. PLA CGS General Chen Bingde and CMC Vice-Chairman General Guo Boxiong observed the final phases with the Russian CGS, General Makarov, stressing the Sino-Russian 'strategic partnership', and emphasizing the two forces' ability to collaborate tactically.¹³¹

Moscow did not, however, treat China with the confidence it showed in India. Given Sino-Indian competitive dynamics, that differentiation was significant. China was not licensed to assemble Su-30s, and had to buy these directly.¹³² Delhi was given a \$3 billion license to assemble 140 Su-30MKI,¹³³ a version considered superior to the one sold to Beijing. India bought large numbers of tanks and multiple-launch rocket systems from Russia, also taking licenses to mass-produce them locally; China was granted neither.¹³⁴ China ordered around 50 Su-33 *Flanker* fighters worth \$2.5 billion for its first aircraft carriers¹³⁵; these would be delivered without any technology transfers. Subsequently, this deal appeared to fall through, although Moscow agreed to sell more advanced Su-35s to China.¹³⁶ However, Delhi and Moscow then agreed jointly to design, develop, build and commission several hundred units of an Indo-Russian fifth-generation stealth fighter, technologically far superior to the Su-35.¹³⁷ Nor did Russia sell China space technologies with military potential.¹³⁸

If anxiety restricted Russian military transfers to China, exports to India were increasingly affected by growing Indo-US proximity. By 2007, US officials were predicting large-scale sales of American hardware to India.¹³⁹ These grew, with the DOD notifying Congress of plans to sell 10 Boeing C-17 *Globemaster* 'Very Heavy Lift Transport Aircraft' along with 45 engines, missile-warning and countermeasure packages, armour and training for Indian pilots and crew with an overall cost of \$5 billion, in April 2010 – the latest in a series of deals.¹⁴⁰ Moscow refused to give in. Putin led a delegation in March, presiding over the signing of contracts worth over \$10 billion, including for refurbishing the carrier *Gorshkov*, MiG-29 fighters for it, and two nuclear reactors.¹⁴¹

Russia's different approach to India and China were best instances by Moscow's fifth-generation stealth fighter aircraft project. Moscow and Delhi agreed to develop a fifth-generation fighter based on the Su-T50/PAK-FA design. Most of the early prototype, power-plant, avionics, and armament designing, fabrication and testing were done in Russia. Indian capital and orders would move the T50 from prototype to line aircraft in combat service. Designed to challenge the US F-35 *Lightning II* and the Chinese J-XX, the T50 would enable Russia and India to secure air superiority in the early twenty-first century. Although pursuing different agendas, Moscow and Delhi saw strategic convergence in this and other collaborative projects.¹⁴²

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Initially, Delhi sought the lighter and simpler Multifunctional Fighter being advanced by the Mikoyan-Gurevich (MiG) design bureau, the twin-engine, bobtailed I-2000. Its rival was a single-engine aircraft descended from the F-35. Anxious to commission this sophisticated aircraft as soon as possible, Delhi took Moscow's offer to collaborate on the PAK FA programme. The Indian version would feature a two-seat cockpit and a number of additional electronic systems. In the 2020s and 2030s, these aircraft would replace the Su-30MKI fighters currently flying with the Indian Air Force. India would locally mass-produce the PAK FA.¹⁴³

Russia did not offer China the T-50's qualitative advances. This differentiation underscored a search for advantageous equilibrium in a milieu of strategic fluidity. As Russia, China and India sought to expand the space within which to pursue strategic autonomy with a combination of competition and collaboration with each other and the USA, their strategic triangle acted as a fluid frame on which the system-manager, America, endeavoured to build a stable platform for a more collegial management of the regional and international security architectures. With so many variables in play, the outcome of the quadrilateral dynamics remained uncertain at best.

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Return of the prodigal?

As the Obama Administration eased America into a more collegial and collaborative frame, the risks of great-power conflict appeared to subside. However, some threats to stability remained. The sinking of the South Korean corvette, the *ROKS Cheonan*, presumably by a North Korean submarine using a torpedo,¹ in March 2010, taking 46 lives and triggering a major crisis, underscored continued volatility. Still, with America, Japan and South Korea demanding tough action, and China and Russia urging caution,² fears of rapid escalation to conflict were partially balanced by restraint.

Beijing condemned planned US–South Korean naval-air exercises in the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea from July 2010,³ responding with live-ammunition manoeuvres in the East China Sea, the first-ever ‘wartime military communication emergency protection drill’ in the Yellow Sea in mid-July and, then, a coastal belt air-defence exercise.⁴ Beijing was signalling its determination to defend ‘a peaceful radius’ in its ‘near seas’.⁵ Seoul mounted its largest-ever anti-submarine drill in the Yellow Sea in August, but America did not join in.⁶ When the allies postponed the planned transfer of operational control (OPCON) over South Korean forces to Seoul from 2012 to December 2015, the effort, ‘Strategic Alliance 2015’, and sanctions against Pyongyang’s arms trade and of luxury imports, were described in defensive terms.⁷ Even when US Secretaries of State and Defence, Clinton and Gates, together visited the ‘Demilitarized Zone’ (DMZ) on the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War, they spoke of deterrence, restraint, and peace, not war.⁸ Despite Pyongyang’s plans ‘to use the nuclear deterrent’ to counteract the US–ROK naval drills, efforts to defuse tensions were apparent in the *Cheonan’s* fatal wake.⁹ Pyongyang even held talks with the US-led UN Command!

In August, Kim Jong-il met Chinese leaders on his second visit in four months, presumably discussing regional security, disaster relief, Six-Party Talks and his youngest son’s succession. Coincidentally, former US President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang, securing the release of an American, Aijalon Gomes, imprisoned for illegally crossing over from China. Carter’s success

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accompanied reports of Pyongyang's willingness to resume nuclear talks,¹⁰ easing some of the tensions. Fears of events spiralling unpredictably nearly came to pass after Pyongyang showed its Yongbyon uranium-enrichment facility to US physicists.¹¹ When the project's details emerged, the ROK Defence Minister hinted Seoul would consider redeploying US tactical weapons, although this was later denied.¹² An artillery duel on the ROK's Yeonpyeong Island, killing two marines and two civilians, and injuring others, triggered another crisis.¹³ America and South Korea mounted a series of naval drills which threatened to escalate tensions. Korea was the most visible, but not the only flashpoint challenging East Asian security.

Persistent low-level anxieties over territorial disputes and a convergence of conflicting great-power interests across the South China Sea, on the other hand, simmered with the potential for sudden conflagrations.¹⁴ Against that backdrop, some of America's allies and partners complained Washington had neglected this vital region for far too long.¹⁵ To make amends, Clinton's first overseas trip as Secretary of State brought her to Asia, with an unprecedented stop at the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat in Jakarta. Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan was delighted to hear Washington's decision to sign the organization's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) which, setting out a framework for peaceful resolution of disputes and non-interference in internal affairs, was the region's pre-eminent security instrument.¹⁶ Signed by 15 non-ASEAN states,¹⁷ it left America, the only major Asia-Pacific power, outside the group.

America had been an ASEAN 'dialogue partner' for 32 years,¹⁸ but its presence had indicated little interest. Surin noted that for the past 41 years, ASEAN had been 'an anchor of stability, peace, and harmony for the region'. Welcoming the power responsible for ASEAN's emergence as an anti-Communist front succeeding the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), he said, 'As a region, ASEAN and East Asia is (sic) ready, able, and willing to work with the United States in the search for solutions to global impasses, including bridging the cultural divide'.¹⁹ A cultural divide apparently separated America from the region.

Acknowledging Washington had 'not been fully engaged in the region', Clinton replied that America must have strong relationships and 'a strong and productive presence here in Southeast Asia. This region is vital to the future of not only the United States and each of the countries, but to the world's common interests'.²⁰ She would attend the next ASEAN post-Ministerial Meeting and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)²¹ in July, a first. She arrived in Bangkok amidst a showdown between the government and the opposition 'Red Shirts'. Her talks with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva focused on Thai politics and economics, and regional concerns.²² The next day, in the presence of ARF foreign ministers, she signed the TAC, noting that 'Amity, as we know, does not mean absolute agreement'. Future disagreements could not be ruled out, but accession reflected 'our commitment to an honest and open dialogue'.²³ She began one with her ARF

counterparts, focusing on North Korea and Pakistan.²⁴ Despite mixed success in her quest for support for new sanctions against North Korea,²⁵ she insisted America was 'back'.²⁶

Evidence came when Barack Obama arrived in Singapore for the first US–ASEAN summit, at an APEC conclave, in November 2009. Obama bilaterally met key ASEAN and ARF leaders, and co-chaired the first ASEAN–US summit, presiding over the signing of a 'Revised Priorities for Cooperation under the ASEAN–US Enhanced Partnership 2009'. Endorsing the group's plans to achieve 'an ASEAN Community'²⁷ by 2015, Obama announced America would open a mission at ASEAN, naming Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Scot Marciel, as Ambassador. The summiteers 'shared a vision of a regional architecture that is inclusive', promoted shared values and norms, and respected the diversity within the region. They agreed to work 'closely together in building this regional architecture, and were ready to study initiatives of this nature. We reaffirmed the importance of ASEAN centrality (sic) in this process'.²⁸ America's 'Lower Mekong Initiative' aimed at helping ASEAN's Indo-Chinese member-states, especially Vietnam, in 'the areas of environment, health, education and infrastructure development'.²⁹ America had moved from being 'absent' to a partner in ASEAN's integrative plans, and in its 'centrality' in forging a new regional security architecture.

The leaders noted strong trans-Pacific commercial and economic ties. US–ASEAN goods trade reached \$178 billion in 2008, while ASEAN absorbed US FDI worth \$153 billion – the highest in Asia. Meetings between Finance and Trade Ministers aimed at boosting this linkage.³⁰ With the leaders encouraging stronger defence ties, Gates planned to attend ASEAN's Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM+) forum in October.³¹ The leaders discussed 'ASEAN's growing capacity and role in global issues'. Anxious over strategic uncertainties, ASEAN leaders were reassured with Obama's pledge that America would 'support ASEAN's continuing role in multilateral efforts where ASEAN has a growing ability to make contributions'.³² With childhood memories refreshed during a meeting with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Obama accepted an invitation to visit 'strategic partner' Indonesia, promising to bring his family along.³³

America's regional concerns focused on the emerging security architecture, especially on ensuring Washington's imprint in consonance with US interests. Clinton's analysis stressed the symbiotic economic, commercial and strategic ties – American exports to Asia were worth \$320 billion annually, trade which supported 'millions of good-paying jobs'. People across the Pacific depended on each other. 'The United States has a strong interest in continuing its tradition of economic and strategic leadership, and Asia has a strong interest in the United States remaining a dynamic economic partner and a stabilizing military influence'. America heavily invested in defending its interests. 'Hundreds of thousands of our servicemen and women provide the region with security – a task that our military has shouldered for generations ... the United States is

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not a visiting power in Asia, but a resident power'.³⁴ Clinton set out the principles on which a new security architecture would be fashioned:

- Alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines remained the 'cornerstone' of US involvement. Washington was also building dialogues and partnerships with China, India, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.
- Regional institutions must address nuclear proliferation, territorial disputes and military competition – 'persistent threats of the 21st century'. Trade barriers must come down, and societies must be opened up to protect human rights.
- Institutions must be effective and able to deliver results. 'It's more important to have organizations that produce results, rather than simply producing more organizations'. America 'will continue to be a leader' in building useful organizations. Effective governance required burden-sharing. 'Systems that reward free riders and minimalist contributions are designed to fail'. America would strengthen the ARF.
- Washington sought flexibility in pursuing its goals, setting up coalitions, for example, the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, Strategic Dialogues with Japan and Australia, and Japan and South Korea, informal arrangements on defending the Malacca Strait, and US–Australian foreign and defence ministerial talks – appropriate to specific objectives. America sought tri-lateral dialogues with Japan and China, and Japan and India, as well. The ARF and ASEAN+3, too, mattered.
- Regional states needed to select the premier grouping from existing ones. The East Asia Summit and APEC were contenders, but the one selected must serve collective security interests.³⁵

Clinton said America was 'back in Asia to stay'! US leadership could 'benefit everyone'.

We can provide resources and facilitate cooperation in ways that other regional actors cannot replicate or, in some cases, are not trusted to do. No country, however – including our own – should seek to dominate these institutions. But an active and engaged United States is critical to the success of these ... The ultimate purpose of our cooperation should be to dispel suspicions that still exist as artefacts of the region's turbulent past, and build in their place a future of openness, honesty, and progress for all our peoples.³⁶

Turbulent waters

South-East Asia bore seeds of instability. ASEAN had focused on 'comprehensive security' since its inception. Its brief encompassed political stability,

economic health, technological development and territorial defence.³⁷ This approach progressed from the 1971 enunciation of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), to the creation of the ARF in 1994, and ASEAN+3 and the Bali Concord in 2003. ASEAN built a concertina of security discussions among regional players and their key interlocutors. Washington's envoy, Scot Marciel, told Congress America had

long had a vital interest in maintaining stability, freedom of navigation, and the right to lawful commercial activity in East Asia's waterways. For decades, active US engagement in East Asia, including the forward-deployed presence of US forces, has been a central factor in keeping the peace and preserving those interests. That continues to be true today.³⁸

Myriad sovereignty disputes roiled the South China Sea, an area traversed by over half the world's merchant tonnage.³⁹ China, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei claimed stretches of the Sea and its land features. The scale and intensity of assertions varied. Most disputes centred on sovereignty over 200 small islets, reefs and rocks in the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos:

There is considerable ambiguity in China's claim to the South China Sea, both in terms of the exact boundaries of its claim and whether it is an assertion of territorial waters over the entire body of water, or only over its land features. In the past, this ambiguity has had little impact on US interests. It has become a concern, however, with regard to the pressure on our energy firms, as some of the offshore blocks that have been subject to Chinese complaint do not appear to lie within China's claim.⁴⁰

Washington worried about the South China Sea's trove of hydrocarbons under contested ownership. Growth had boosted the region's energy demands. Oil consumption in developing Asia was expected to grow from 14.8 million barrels per day (MMBPD) in 2004 to 29.8 MMBPD by 2030, China accounting for half of the growth.⁴¹ In 1993–94, the US Geological Survey estimated oil reserves in the South China Sea's offshore basins at 28 billion barrels (bbls). A Chinese study put reserves at 213 bbls; another suggested the Spratly and Paracel offshore waters alone carried oil reserves of 105 bbls.⁴² By mid-1998, Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam produced 1.36 MMBPD of oil and 2,323 billion cubic feet (bcf) of gas daily from fields with proven reserves of 7.5 bbls of oil and 145.5 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of gas.⁴³

Waters claimed by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam showed much higher presence of gas – probably at 60–70 per cent – than oil. However, estimates varied. One Chinese study placed the entire South China Sea gas reserves at two quadrillion cubic feet; another assessed the reserves around the Spratlys alone at 225 bbls of oil-equivalent. In

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April 2006, Canada's Husky Energy, working with the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), announced proven reserves of 4–6 tcf near the Spratlys.⁴⁴ Four years later, Husky and CNOOC proclaimed their third gas find in the South China Sea, this time at a well with likely daily production at 60–70 million cubic feet.⁴⁵ Husky planned production from the first two wells in 2013.

Conflicting claims of seven ASEAN states, China, and Taiwan complicated the search for resources.⁴⁶ The most destabilizing potential lay in the Spratly and Paracel archipelagos. In 2007, several incidents raised the contests' profile. In February, Taiwan's President Chen Shuibian visited Taiping Dao (Itu Abu), the largest Spratlys island, long under Taipei's control. Chen's visit evoked anger in Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Hanoi. In March, Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi visited the Swallow Reef (Terumbu Layang), one of the three Spratlys islands controlled by Malaysia, again arousing neighbourly ire. Within days, President Gloria Arroyo signed the Philippines Baseline Bill which included the Spratlys in a 'regime of islands' under Manila's jurisdiction. More protests followed.⁴⁷ Because of the potential challenges to ASEAN's cohesion, the disputes merited attention.⁴⁸

China, insisting on its 'inalienable rights', urged bilateral negotiations to establish joint-development agreements to exploit the sea's resources. America, on the other hand, boosted security ties with all the non-Chinese claimants. Admiral Mullen announced:

From the bedrock alliances we have with the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, to burgeoning relationships we foster with emerging partners like Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam ... we are duty bound and will remain so to dedicate our might to mutual defense. Those who need our help may depend upon it; those who question our sincerity, need not.⁴⁹

With tough rhetoric reflecting hardening positions, disputed maritime claims took on the features of Sino-US flashpoints.

Brunei: claim limited to Brunei's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which extended to the Louisa Reef on the Spratly Islands' southern fringes. While announcing the extent of its EEZ in 1984, Brunei did not claim that reef or any part of the Paracels. By 1997, its nine oil fields were producing 143,000 barrels per day. It maintained close ties to the West. After lengthy discussions, in July 2010, USPACOM and the Brunei Armed Forces signed an agreement on mutual logistics support, supplies and provision across the spectrum of 'joint exercises, training, deployments, operations or other cooperative efforts and for unforeseen circumstances or instances in which either the US or Brunei may require them'.⁵⁰ Brunei was now a US ally.

Cambodia: claimed stretches of the Gulf of Thailand on the South China Sea's western margins as its EEZ. In 1982, Cambodia and Vietnam signed an

'Agreement on Historic Waters' as the basis of future cooperation. In 2006, they announced plans to share the Gulf's energy resources. Cambodia's traditional friendship with China was supplemented with America's economic diplomacy. This led in 2009 to the transfer of 20 Uighur prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay to Cambodia on the assurances of refuge. Washington promised military trucks from its surplus stocks. However, just before Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping's December 2009 visit to Phnom Penh, Cambodia extradited the Uighur men to China, ignoring US protests. Washington cancelled its offer of vehicles. During his visit, Xi promised \$1.2 billion in grants and loans; China supplied the same number of trucks held back by America.⁵¹

Indonesia: claims limited to Indonesia's EEZ and continental shelf, including the gas field around Natuna Island. Claims made by China and Taiwan extended into Indonesia's EEZ, including the Natuna gas fields. Jakarta's relationship with America warmed a decade after the fall of General Suharto. After the National Intelligence Council (NIC) identified Indonesia as a potential great power,⁵² US attention focused on reviving security relations. By 2010, Washington had rebuilt much of the previous links to the Indonesian military.⁵³ The Obama Administration proclaimed a 'comprehensive partnership' to help Indonesia develop its 'security role in the region'.⁵⁴ This new enterprise was manifest in Exercise Cope West-10 when three C-130 aircraft from the USAF's 374th Airlift Wing flew in from Japan to Indonesia for joint drills with Indonesian counterparts.⁵⁵ US analysts described this as integrating the Indonesian military into America's evolving combat doctrine against China.⁵⁶ Jakarta wrote to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, challenging China's claims in the South China Sea specified in Beijing's 'nine-dotted-lines map'. It insisted that Beijing's claims 'as contained in the above circular note Number: CML/17/2009 dated 7th May 2009, clearly lacks international legal basis and is tantamount to upset the UNCLOS 1982 (sic)'.⁵⁷

As Clinton, in Hanoi, expressed America's 'national interest' in maintaining the status quo across the South China Sea, Gates gave practical expression to that interest in Jakarta. He saw President Yudhoyono, announcing the resumption of US military contacts with Indonesian Special Forces, *Kopassus*. US training assistance had been suspended in 1998, and links cut off in 1999. Now, Washington began delivering 'a complete capability package'.⁵⁸ Soon, Jakarta announced joint exercises between *Kopassus* and Australian Special Air Services.⁵⁹

Malaysia: claims limited to the EEZ and continental shelf running into the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. Malaysia occupied three Spratly reefs, building a hotel on one and raising the level of another with mainland earth. It also claimed four nearby rock groups. By 1990, Malaysia was operating 90 oil-wells and planning further investments. In 1979, Malaysia signed a joint development agreement with Thailand for the Gulf of Thailand. In 1992, it signed a similar accord with Vietnam over the South China Sea. Prime Minister Badawi's successor Mohammed Najib Abdul Razak sought a

balanced relationship with great powers. On his first official visit as premier, Najib went to China, signing agreements on economic, commercial, educational and cultural ties. Malaysia, the first ASEAN state to open diplomatic relations with Beijing, had, by 2009, the largest bilateral trade with China among ASEAN members.⁶⁰

Najib and Hu reached no agreement on maritime disputes which ruffled feathers when Admiral Abdul Aziz Jaafar, commander of the Malaysian Navy, said, 'any Chinese ship encroaching on Malaysian territory will be escorted away'. PLAN's Rear Admiral Ma Guochao responded, 'China will always try peaceful means before resorting to force in the Nansha Islands issue and avoid possible conflicts. However, China will not compromise when it comes to protecting our territory'.⁶¹ Najib's Washington meeting with Obama stressed shared security concerns in 'the growing partnership'.⁶²

Philippines: Manila's claims to eight Spratlys islands were based on adventurer Tomas Cloma's 1956 expedition to the chain. In 1972, Manila designated the 'Kalyan' group as part of the Palawan Province. Based on the EEZ and the continental shelf principle, Manila claimed another 50-odd neighbouring reefs and shoals. By the 1990s, Manila was producing modest amounts of oil from seven wells near Palawan with two Western oil companies.⁶³ In 1995, Manila's dispute with China over 'Mischief Reef', became pronounced. America aided the Philippines' armed forces under a security treaty. In addition to its counter-insurgency assistance, PACOM helped the military's transition 'from a focus on internal security operations to territorial defense by 2016'.⁶⁴

In August 2010, PACOM Commander, Admiral Willard, and his hosts in Manila focused on 'China's assertiveness' in the South China Sea. Willard noted, 'It's going to be a very important topic for all the regional nations to discuss. It's of national interest to the United States, so this will undoubtedly remain a topic of conversation for some time to come'. Willard pledged to work 'continually' with the Philippines armed forces to ensure they were 'shaped just right to meet the needs of this very complex archipelago that's located in a very strategic area of the world'.⁶⁵

Thailand: based on the EEZ and the continental shelf principle, Thailand claimed most of the Gulf of Thailand. In 1979, it signed a cooperative agreement with Malaysia and, in 1997, with Vietnam, on areas with overlapping claims. Thailand remained a staunch US ally where 'US PACOM forces enjoy unmatched access and support'.⁶⁶ In 2010, Thai-US forces held the 29th annual Cobra Gold exercises. If Thailand's security faced serious threats, US assistance, even intervention, appeared to be assured. However, Thailand did not approach Sino-US dynamics in a zero-sum fashion.⁶⁷ For some years, Thai armed forces have been procuring military hardware from China and, in 2009, Bangkok ordered base technologies from Beijing for developing rockets and missiles.⁶⁸

Vietnam: among ASEAN members, Vietnam asserted the most extensive claims in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. Vietnam's historical

and continental-shelf arguments, contesting Chinese claims, bore the seeds of conflict. In the 1930s, France claimed both the Spratlys and Paracels (Truong Sa and Hoang Sa) on its colony's behalf; Hanoi maintained this claim. In 1974, Beijing evicted South Vietnamese forces from the Paracels, preventing a Vietnamese return after reunification.⁶⁹ Formally placing the Spratlys chain within its Khanh Hoa Province, Vietnam controlled 21 islands and reefs. With Hanoi's increasing strains vis-à-vis Beijing juxtaposed against growing military proximity to Tokyo, Delhi and Washington, Vietnam stood at the edge of volatile future.

PRC–ROC: the gravest threats to stability emanated from ASEAN's claims overlapping with those of China and Taiwan.⁷⁰ Beijing's claims to most of the South China Sea, and the Spratly and Paracel (Nansha and Xisha) archipelagos, flowed from a Republic of China (ROC) proclamation, along with an appropriate map, issued in 1947. After taking power in 1949, the PRC used the ROC's evidence to back up its claims, formalizing these in 1992 legislation. In 1993, Beijing presented a map of its 'historic claims' at a conference in Surabaya. It showed most of the South China Sea, and a stretch of Indonesia's EEZ off the 272-island Natuna archipelago, as Chinese waters.⁷¹ China thus implied claims to the Natunas' 210 tcf⁷² gas reserves. Beijing took control of seven islands and reefs in the Spratlys, placing the area under its Hainan Province. Taiwan continued to control Taiping Dao (Itu Aba) where it built an airstrip, and the Pratas Islands (Dongsha Qundao).

While China–Taiwan debates played out on a canvas with countervailing US–Japanese interests, things looked different with Chinese–ASEAN, especially Sino–Vietnamese, maritime disputes.⁷³ Both parties insisted historical evidence supported respective claims although during the three-decade-long Indo–Chinese Wars, Hanoi never asserted any claims against Chinese allies. Relations deteriorated after Vietnam's reunification, and in 1979, the two neighbours went to war as maritime disputes broke surface. Following that clash, China announced its claims to the Xisha and Nansha Islands were 'indisputable'.⁷⁴ Both sides militarized their claims, deploying naval units to the Spratlys. In naval clashes in 1988 and 1992, the Vietnamese were beaten. Talks of peaceful resolutions concealed a hedging strategy. Chinese installations on the Mischief Reef (Meiji Jiao) in the Spratlys,⁷⁵ and on the Woody and Duncan Islands in the Paracels, reflected post-UNCLOS militarization across the South China Sea.⁷⁶

In 2004, a Malaysian–Singaporean–Vietnamese–US consortium announced the discovery of offshore oil reserves of 181 million barrels 43 miles from Haiphong. Beijing announced, 'China is seriously concerned and strongly dissatisfied'.⁷⁷ By mid-2004, Vietnam had deployed about 1,000 troops, China, 450, the Philippines, 100 and Malaysia, nearly 90, on their respective islands.⁷⁸ Governments periodically dispatched naval and aerial patrols to reinforce their claims. In March 2009, China sent the 4,450 ton 'Fisheries Administration' vessel, the *China Yuzheng 311*, on a semi-permanent patrol. Rejecting accusations of muscle-flexing, spokesman Qin Gang insisted,

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'China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands of the South China Sea and their adjacent waters'.⁷⁹ Two months later, Malaysia and Vietnam made a joint submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, claiming joint ownership of most of the South China Sea's resources.⁸⁰ Beijing protested.

Military 'footprints' in disputed areas underscored the region's volatility. Given ASEAN's Sino-centric anti-communist origins, the advent of an assertive China in a region attracting a shift of strategic weight raised the risks of disagreements turning into confrontations.⁸¹ The Commander, PACOM, noted:

China's growing presence and influence in the region create both challenges and opportunities for the US and regional countries. China's rapid and comprehensive transformation of its armed forces is affecting regional military balances and holds implications beyond the Asia-Pacific region. Of particular concern is that elements of China's military modernization appear designed to challenge our freedom of action in the region.⁸²

Growing tensions among America and its allies – especially Japan, Australia and India – and a China determined jealously to guard its 'core interests',⁸³ created a backdrop against which Beijing's difficulties with Hanoi or Manila in the South China Sea could trigger a conflagration which could consume the region and its achievements in a flash.

Pacific prospects

China and ASEAN pursued diplomacy, rather than the military option, in asserting maritime claims. At their first summit in Kuala Lumpur in December 1997, President Jiang Zemin and his ASEAN hosts established a 'strategic partnership'. Vice President Hu and ASEAN leaders consolidated this at the second 'informal summit' in Hanoi. Later, Premiers Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao represented Beijing at the later, formal, ASEAN–China summits. In November 2002, the two sides signed a 'Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea' (DOC), pledging peaceful pursuit of claims.⁸⁴ They vowed to explore 'ways for building trust and confidence ... on the basis of equality and mutual respect', honour 'the freedom of navigation and overflight above the South China Sea', to resolve all 'territorial and jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means', and 'exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability'.

They promised to refrain 'from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features and to handle their differences in a constructive manner'.⁸⁵ Pending 'the peaceful settlement of territorial and jurisdictional disputes', the Parties undertook to exchange

views among military officials, ensure 'just and humane treatment of all persons' in danger or distress, voluntarily notify others of any 'impending joint/combined military exercises', and exchange information. The DOC reduced tensions but did not remove their causes nor impose a legally binding code of conduct.⁸⁶

At ASEAN's annual summits since then, leaders sat down with Wen Jiabao and counterparts from Japan, the ROK and India, seeking ways of deepening relations. Significant progress was announced.⁸⁷ In October 2006, China hosted a 'China–ASEAN Commemorative Summit' in Nanning, to mark the 15th anniversary of Sino-ASEAN relations. The leaders' Joint Statement reviewed progress of their 'strategic partnership' and set course for the next 15 years.⁸⁸ At the 11th ASEAN–China summit in November 2007, China endorsed ASEAN's 'leading role in the regional processes' while ASEAN extracted a 'commitment to an open and inclusive approach to regional community building'.⁸⁹ Beijing acknowledged ASEAN's centrality in shaping the regional security architecture and tacitly conceded the failure of attempts to exclude America. China and ASEAN also reaffirmed their 'determination to the early and full implementation of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC)', and an 'eventual adoption of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea'.⁹⁰ They also agreed on an 'ASEAN-China Defence Scholars Exchange Programme'.⁹¹

The 14th ASEAN Summit issued the 'Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on a Roadmap to an ASEAN Community', formalizing ASEAN's planned integration into an economic, cultural, and political-security community by 2015.⁹² The 12th ASEAN–China summit in October 2009 focused on economic issues – the completion of the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) accord, Beijing's contribution to the \$10 billion China–ASEAN Fund on Investment Cooperation, a \$15 billion credit to ASEAN including preferential loans rising to \$6.7 billion, and Beijing's gift of 300,000 tons of rice to the East Asia Emergency Rice Reserve. With growing links among officials, CEOs and students, reinforced with new and planned road, rail and air transport facilities, the leaders decided on 'the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on China–ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity for the year 2011–15' (sic).⁹³

ASEAN's exchanges with China, Japan and South Korea (ASEAN+3) concentrated on the economic and financial crises, pledging collaborative approaches to recovery.⁹⁴ Deepening economic, financial, commercial and cultural ties may have allayed some anxieties.⁹⁵ However, evidence of continuing concerns emerged at gatherings of analysts from ASEAN and its interlocutors, examining the dangers of great-power competition threatening ASEAN's cohesion.⁹⁶

Singapore's experience was instructive. With the region's strongest per-capita income and scientific–technical base, the island-state mirrored ASEAN's deepest insecurities.⁹⁷ Deng Xiaoping saw Singapore as a model for China's politically controlled economic growth. Singapore contributed to

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China's rise by making investments, building special economic areas, transferring technologies and sharing ideas. Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, summed up the dilemma thus: 'We absolutely refuse to choose sides. We will not choose sides between America and China or between China and India',⁹⁸ while noting that 'In the end, whatever the challenges, US core interest requires that it remains the superior power on the Pacific. To give up this position would diminish America's role throughout the world'.⁹⁹ Lee praised Chinese tenacity, patience, perseverance and organization but considered America's resilience and innovative diversity more promising over the long-term.¹⁰⁰ Worried about a revitalized China, Singapore boosted defence ties to Japan, Australia¹⁰¹ and India while becoming America's 'Major Security Cooperation Partner'.¹⁰² By 2010, Singapore was one of America's 'strongest security partners in the region', hosting many of the US transiting ships and deploying personnel, 'working with US forces in Afghanistan, and commanding the multi-national, counter-piracy, Combined Task Force in the Gulf of Aden'.¹⁰³

Beijing stressed the economic-commercial aspects of China's 'rise', and its need for a stable environment so as to reach a 'moderately prosperous' status by mid-century. China's economic security depended on trade- and energy-security which was shaped by the security of its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC). This compulsion reinforced Beijing's determination to secure its claims in proximate seas. This potentially volatile mix was, however, moderated by a 'common awareness of disastrous consequence after a naval war' among China, Japan, India and ASEAN.¹⁰⁴ Beijing 'must safeguard its 18,000 km of coastline, (and) over 3 million square km of sea area' under the 'terms of UNCLOS'. China's naval development was to secure this goal, not to 'have an intention to make a war against Southeast Asia but to prevent the national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests from aggressing and infringing by ocean ways (sic)'.¹⁰⁵

China's identification of threats 'in the new century' originating 'from the east water region', conflated contested claims in the South China Sea with Sino-US rivalry there. PLAN officers insisted China needed capabilities necessary for 'active defence' by conducting 'offshore defence' in an 'informationised' milieu. Technologically, PLAN's hardware was decades behind that of potential adversaries.¹⁰⁶ PLAN commanders aimed at 'gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations and enhancing its capabilities in integrated maritime operations and nuclear counterattacks'. PLAN was clearly not a 'global navy' and its modernization posed threats to nobody.¹⁰⁷ Few of China's ASEAN neighbours were reassured.

Delhi, too, addressed 'unfounded suspicions of India's attempts at regional hegemony'.¹⁰⁸ Once it became clear that 'the superpowers would reduce their presence' in Southeast Asia after the Indochina conflict, 'the region began to look upon India as a power that could play a balancing role'.¹⁰⁹ Manmohan Singh noted, 'the abundance of natural resources and significant technological skills in the ASEAN region provide a natural base for the growth of synergies

and integration between ASEAN and India', in both trade and investment. 'The challenge, however, is to create and maintain a regional and international environment that enables us to attain and sustain high rates of economic growth'.¹¹⁰ With ASEAN and India maintaining high growth rates, economic and commercial interests expanded. Like China, India, too, signed a free-trade agreement with ASEAN, both coming into effect in early 2010. Tenacious efforts enabled Delhi to forge strong ties with Singapore, Vietnam¹¹¹ and Myanmar. With the first two, China's relations were mixed; Myanmar's military leaders exploited Sino-Indian competition to secure maximum advantage for themselves.¹¹²

Delhi explained that with its 7,516-km coastline, 27 islands in the Lakshadweep chain and 572 in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, close to 200 large and small ports and a 750-strong merchant fleet, India's maritime security imperatives were 'compelling'.¹¹³ Analysts posited that Sino-Indian maritime competition had emerged as a key element of the region's strategic landscape because 'China's most likely strategic Asian competitor is India. Within the region, the maritime domain is the only domain where this competition is likely to be dominant simply because China is not littoral'. Despite booming trade, the unresolved border dispute, and China's 'encirclement of India' with Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh and Sittwe in Myanmar caused anxiety. China's nuclear cooperation with Pakistan deepened Delhi's concerns.¹¹⁴ A Sino-Indian security dilemma was 'already apparent'. Competition need not lead to conflict, but the dilemma's destabilizing potential was significant: 'what one side considers a genuine search of its own security, energy related or otherwise, tends to be interpreted by the other as a threatening move'.¹¹⁵ While the rivals struggled to realize their insistence that the world was large enough for them to grow peacefully to greatness, South-East Asian states feared for the future.

Since the 1990s, when China and India stressed a rediscovery of their maritime past, they had been building naval capacity to defend future interests. In 2004, Beijing launched its national guidelines on maritime development, calling for transforming China into a strong oceanic power.¹¹⁶ American analysts urged counteracting challenges to US primacy in the western Pacific from growing Chinese naval power.¹¹⁷ That dialectic led China to balance the pursuit of sovereignty, security, and developmental interests in the South China Sea.¹¹⁸ Beijing joined legal frameworks with ASEAN members, facilitating the 'shelving of disputes' for joint development of resources. So, most ASEAN states apparently acquiesced in the status quo as a basis on which to build a long-term settlement.¹¹⁹ The threat to this assumption lay in Beijing's fear of American strategic encirclement, and US belief that China posed the greatest challenge to its dominance.¹²⁰ PLA commanders saw threats from US action growing:

Especially, the few major powers are strengthening military alliances, building up and expanding the missile defense system, pushing for the

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militarization of space and damaging international non-proliferation mechanism, etc. All that further causes the imbalances of military power and are (sic) detrimental to the improvement of international security.¹²¹

China urged an end to America's 'Cold War mentality' manifest in alliances; the USA demanded greater Chinese military 'transparency'. This dialogue of the deaf, and ASEAN's responses to it, challenged strategic stability although all sides urged restraint.¹²²

A reverberating fault-line

This was not the case with Vietnam. Its maritime claims flowed from the Nguyen dynasty's records (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries), elaborated in two white papers – *Vietnam's Sovereignty Over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagos* – issued in 1979 and 1982. However, Vietnam's failure to distinguish between the two archipelagos diluted its claims.¹²³ Territorial disputes may have reflected more visceral discord. In 1975, Hanoi proclaimed its 'ownership' of the Spratlys, occupying 13 islands. In 1989, it took over three more islets. By 1999, Hanoi had stationed 600 soldiers on at least 27 Spratly reefs ignoring Chinese criticism.¹²⁴ The convergence of overlapping claims, nationalistic disputes, China's growing capacity to enforce its will, and Vietnam's anxieties lent the contest the potential of an incendiary flashpoint.

Hanoi built security-diplomacy with America, Japan, India and Australia, and began modernizing its forces with Russian aircraft and submarines, and Indian spares. It did crack down on increasingly nationalistic China-critics since 2008. Still, as ASEAN's chair in 2010, it initiated a protocol to the ASEAN Charter, outlining 'dispute settlement mechanisms'. ASEAN Foreign Ministers instructed officials to draft related instruments enabling members to report disputes to the ASEAN summit. The protocol would unify member-states in addressing intra-ASEAN disputes and in facing disputes with others, such as China, reducing threats of unfriendly great powers exerting pressures in bilateral exchanges, although these objectives remained tacit.¹²⁵

After establishing relations with America in 1995, Hanoi forged 'strategic partnerships' with Washington, Tokyo and Delhi. The linkages indicated Vietnamese insecurity and a convergence of strategic interest vis-à-vis China. Japan's activism became known when Tokyo dispatched three advanced destroyers on a five-day training mission to Ho Chi Minh City in March 2008, and two of the vessels became involved in accidental collisions on the Saigon River. The process began in 1998 when Vietnam's Defence Minister Lt. General Pham Van Tra made an unprecedented visit to Tokyo, calling on Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura, and the Director General of Japan's Self-Defence Agency, Hosei Norota. Hanoi sought partners to help its developmental plans and backstop its efforts to counter 'Chinese threats'; Tokyo found in Hanoi a client willing to rebuff

'Chinese hegemony'. Exchanges on security concerns led to Japanese aid in building Vietnam's economy, industry, transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, and military capability.

Japan mounted a campaign to build bridges with ASEAN. The 1997–98 economic crisis and the ouster of General Suharto hindered this initiative. But now, with Sino-Japanese tensions growing and ASEAN restored to its economic health, Tokyo's endeavours to forge a 'strategic link' succeeded. Convergence of Sino-centric maritime concerns led to defence collaboration, most formally in the Japan-ASEAN Defence Officials' Meeting, at the Deputy Defence Minister's level. Its 2009 and 2010 sessions helped ASEAN establish the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) around which it formed the 'ADMM-plus' with ministers from key ARF partners. Tokyo encouraged this course, promising the attendance of its defence minister. Robert Gates, too, agreed to attend.

ASEAN's exchanges with Australia, too, reflected shared anxiety in an era of strategic uncertainty. As part of ASEAN's efforts to deepen group integration while widening 'strategic partnerships' with friendly powers, senior officials held the 23rd ASEAN-Australia Forum in Singapore in March 2010. Their joint statement stressed 'ASEAN's Centrality' in fashioning a new regional security architecture.¹²⁶ This was notable given Singaporean aversion to Kevin Rudd's 'Asia-Pacific Community' initiative.¹²⁷ As ASEAN strove to counter the fluidity born of great powers moving in different directions, and retain its pivotal role in regional security terms, ASEAN members' varied responses turned Sino-Indian tensions over divergent maritime ambitions into a key concern.¹²⁸

Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam deepened defence ties with India, America, Japan and Australia. Singapore's locus in the moribund 'Quadrilateral Initiative' gave it prominence within this constellation. However, given the sharp edge to Sino-Vietnamese disputes, Delhi's military collaboration with Hanoi attracted most attention. After launching a 'Look East' policy, India signed a defence cooperation agreement with Vietnam in 1994. In March 2000, a new defence protocol transferred Indian military *materiel* to Vietnam, initiating port-calls by Indian naval vessels. High-level visits and military exchanges consolidated strategic convergence focused on 'containing China'.¹²⁹ Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Vietnam in 2001, and in 2003, issued a 'Joint Declaration on Framework of Comprehensive Cooperation'. This included security and military cooperation. His successor, Manmohan Singh, built on this inheritance.

In 2005, Delhi and Hanoi launched the annual Vietnam–India Security Dialogue at the Deputy Defence Minister level. After Defence Minister Pham Van Tra's five-day discussions in Delhi in March 2007, and underscoring the security-focus of relations, Prime Minister Nguyen Tun Dung, during a July 2007 visit to India, set out the framework of a 'strategic partnership'. Defence Minister A.K. Antony visited Hanoi in December 2007, promising to transfer 5,000 items of naval spares to upgrade the Vietnamese Navy's *Petya*

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frigates.¹³⁰ Antony and his host, General Phung Quang Thanh, agreed to increase naval visits, high-level exchanges, training facilities for Vietnamese officers in India, and Indian training support for Vietnamese peacekeepers. President Nguyen Minh Triet received the Chairman of India's Chiefs of Staff Committee, Admiral Sureesh Mehta, in February 2008. In November, President Pratibha Patil formalized the 'strategic partnership' during a five-day visit to Vietnam. Defence Minister Phung Quang Thanh visited India in 2009, signing several agreements with Antony. Prime Ministers Singh and Nguyen Tan Dung reviewed progress of the partnership in October 2009. The *entente* was consolidated at meetings in 2010, putting a tacit alliance in place.

While India provided training, hardware and diplomatic support, Vietnam relied on Russian *materiel* for force modernization. It planned to induct submarines to meet presumed threats from the PLAN. In April 2009, Hanoi sought to procure six diesel-electric *Kilo*-class submarines from Russia. A contract was signed in December for the boats and heavyweight torpedoes and missiles. Russia would finance and help build a submarine base and a service shipyard.¹³¹ Vietnam joined Singapore and Malaysia in commissioning modern submarines. Beijing recognized it was the object of this subsurface attention. PLAN Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo noted, 'If this continues at the current rate, in several years the ASEAN countries will create powerful naval forces. This is naturally becoming a challenge to neighbouring countries, including China'.¹³²

Moscow provided modern combat aircraft, too. Hanoi already flew a few Su-22M and Su-27SK fighters; after Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's December 2009 visit to Moscow, orders for 12 Su-30MKK fighters were reported. This combination of strategic divergence with China, security convergence with China's rivals, and the modernization of forces to backstop policy, gave Sino-Vietnamese disputes potency to trigger conflict. Vietnam's growing security relations with America were a key element in Southeast Asia's 'counter-China' concertina. The first US-Vietnam 'defence talks' were held in August 2010 when, in the wake of the *USS John S. McCain* conducting training exercises with Vietnamese warships, Vice Defence Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh hosted Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence Robert Scher. Scher noted, 'This dialogue ... represents the next significant, historic step in our increasingly robust defense relationship which is based on mutual trust, understanding and respect for independence and sovereignty'.¹³³ US-Vietnamese relations had come a long way.

After Secretary of State James Baker met Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister at the UN General Assembly in September 1990, America and Vietnam moved to normalize relations. Diplomatic ties followed in the mid-1990s, with Liaison Offices being replaced with embassies in 1995. Ambassadors were exchanged in 1997. Both Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright visited Hanoi. Cooperation over locating US missing-in-action (MIA) remains in Vietnam, and copyright and investment, produced agreements. The former adversaries broached security collaboration during the Vietnamese deputy

defence minister's US visit in October 1998. In March 2000, Secretary of Defence William Cohen toured Vietnam. Three months later, Washington granted nearly \$2 million to locate and defuse US ordnance left behind from the war. In November 2000, Clinton became the first serving US president to visit Vietnam. A year later, the two countries ratified a trade agreement offering preferential terms to Hanoi.

A series of high-level visits followed. In November 2003, Pham Van Tra became the first Vietnamese Defence Minister to visit America and discuss regional security concerns. Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's ground-breaking five-day visit in June 2005 underscored a meeting of minds. Despite the Bush Administration's focus on democracy and human rights elsewhere, Phan's American hosts were warm. He bought a number of US commercial aircraft and spent time with Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld. Bush attended an APEC summit, visiting Hanoi officially in November 2006. President Nguyen Minh Triet visited America for six days in June 2007, consolidating ties. A year later, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung returned to Washington, focusing on implementing recent agreements.

One was on an annual Political, Security and Defence Dialogue at the vice-ministerial level. Starting in 2008, these engagements offered an effective tool for shaping a cooperative security discourse. These conclaves and intensifying engagements between PACOM and Vietnamese forces created a palimpsest of activities crystallizing China-focused US–Vietnamese covert collaboration¹³⁴ of a variety which America and China had forged against the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.¹³⁵ Beijing's response was unhappy. Indications of the potential flashpoint in the South China Sea came during the Sino-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue in Beijing in May 2010. Accord on trade and investment, energy and economic management, health and science notwithstanding, on security issues, disagreements persisted.

Commander PACOM, Admiral Willard, met General Ma Xiaotian, Vice Chief of PLA General Staff, to revive military-to-military exchanges. The two sides disagreed on America's explanation of its military links to Taiwan, and its view of the North Korean 'threat'. Pyongyang had threatened to wage 'all-out war' if it were punished for the sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan*.¹³⁶ Also worrying for America, China asserted it now considered the South China Sea at par with Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang as a 'core security issue', on which it would not 'brook any interference'.¹³⁷ The message was stark – Beijing would pursue its interests in the South China Sea as it saw fit. While America professed neutrality on the region's territorial disputes, Robert Gates stressed US determination to remain a 'Pacific nation' and a Pacific power, ensure freedom of navigation and preserve the security of SLOCs.¹³⁸ His comments on the South China Sea reassured ASEAN states:

The South China Sea is ... not only vital to those directly bordering it, but to all nations with economic and security interests in Asia. Our policy is clear: it is essential that stability, freedom of navigation, and free and

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unhindered economic development be maintained. We do not take sides on any competing sovereignty claims, but we do oppose the use of force and actions that hinder freedom of navigation. We object to any effort to intimidate US corporations or those of any nation engaged in legitimate economic activity. All parties must work together to resolve differences through peaceful, multilateral efforts consistent with customary international law.¹³⁹

Gates also promised to help build US partners' defensive capabilities. Washington's re-engagement with the Indonesian and other ASEAN forces reflected that emphasis. General Ma discerned 'A cold-war mentality', which was 'often shown by efforts to strengthen military alliances via new technologies, the threat to use force in international relations, and interference in other countries' internal affairs'. Ma noted, 'Regional hotspot issues come up over and again (sic)'. Beijing believed that given the 'complicated security situation, nations concerned should remain calm and exercise restraint and avoid escalation of tension, so as to jointly maintain regional peace and stability'.¹⁴⁰

Several ASEAN defence ministers, while expressing concern over South China Sea disputes, sounded appreciative of the US, not the Chinese, line.¹⁴¹ Americans and their allies demanded military transparency from Beijing; Chinese military officials questioned the inconsistency of this position.¹⁴² Conflicting perspectives on the South China Sea placed ASEAN in the cockpit of a brewing confrontation.¹⁴³ ASEAN's focus balanced internal and regional concerns. In Hanoi in July 2010, foreign ministers discussed tensions flowing from the sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan* and planned elections in Myanmar later in the year. Their insistence on ensuring ASEAN's centrality in regional security discussions underscored profound collective anxiety.¹⁴⁴

Hillary Clinton attended ASEAN- and ARF-related meetings, while marking the 15th anniversary of US–Vietnamese relations. The festivities coincided with the deployment of the carrier *USS George Washington* off central Vietnam to demonstrate Washington's support for Hanoi's maritime position.¹⁴⁵ Hosting counterparts from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand at the US-Lower Mekong Forum, Clinton reinforced relations with Indo-Chinese partners, offering aid to their health, education and environmental sectors.¹⁴⁶ By tying ally Thailand to three former adversaries, Washington wove a friendly network south of China's borders.¹⁴⁷ To enable the European Union to join the TAC, boosting ARF's liberal–democratic tendencies, Clinton and her ASEAN colleagues signed the TAC's newly designed Third Protocol.¹⁴⁸

Clinton discussed bilateral, regional and international issues with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem, stressing nuclear cooperation, non-proliferation and security collaboration, while Gates revived ties to *Kopassus*.¹⁴⁹ Noting Washington's desire to reach the 'next level', Clinton said, 'We see this relationship not only as important on its own merits, but as part of a strategy

aimed at enhancing American engagement in the Asia Pacific and in particular Southeast Asia'. They discussed challenges affecting regional security, including Myanmar, North Korea, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and welcomed 'Vietnam's constructive leadership and its excellent contributions to ASEAN, including its very important role as ASEAN chair'.¹⁵⁰ While acknowledging 'robust' exchanges on human rights, Khiem expressed satisfaction with Washington's approach to Vietnam.¹⁵¹ America would not allow Vietnam's human rights record to stand in the way of strategic collaboration.

At ASEAN's meeting with 'dialogue partners', Clinton reminded her hosts that in 2009, she had announced 'the US is back'. Now, 'I am here to confirm that we are back and we are here to stay!'¹⁵² She pointed out that while historical, geographical and cultural ties mattered, ASEAN also received more US investment than China did.¹⁵³ At the ARF, Clinton underscored US determination to secure the safety of South China Sea SLOCs, urging negotiations on the bases of multilateral agreements and the UNCLOS – although America had not signed the Convention.¹⁵⁴ Clinton's offer to 'facilitate' mediation and stress on 'US national interest' led Yang Jiechi to warn her against 'internationalizing' the South China Sea disputes:

China and some ASEAN nations have territorial and maritime rights disputes because we are neighbors. And those disputes shouldn't be viewed as ones between China and ASEAN as a whole just because the countries involved are ASEAN members. Channels of discussion are there, and they are open and smooth.¹⁵⁵

Yang proposed that regional states:

- bear in mind the 'overall situation and interests when dealing with sensitive regional issues', and always safeguard regional peace and stability;
- adopt a 'new security concept, seeking cooperation instead of confrontation, and respecting each other's core interests and security';
- respect each other, 'strengthen mutual trust, improve and develop long-term, healthy and stable relations';
- 'exercise restraint when disputes arise', and settle these peacefully;
- make use of multilateral fora like the SCO, ARF and the Six-Party Talks to 'promote common interests and security'.¹⁵⁶

Presenting this as the only acceptable framework, Yang asked, 'What will be the consequences if this issue is turned into an international or multilateral one? It will only make matters worse and the resolution more difficult'.¹⁵⁷ That warning came in the context of increasingly robust assertions of the Chinese national interest.¹⁵⁸

ASEAN foreign ministers urged their leaders to invite America and Russia to join the EAS, the apex forum for regional security discussions.¹⁵⁹ Clinton

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announced she would represent America at the 2010 EAS and that Obama would attend the 2011 summit.¹⁶⁰ The implication that this would dilute Beijing's influence at the EAS by putting China alongside two other great powers, particularly America, was clear.¹⁶¹ If this balancing game would persuade China and America to restrain their rivalry and cooperate in addressing transitional challenges was not. ASEAN's leaders secured their dialogue partners' endorsement that ASEAN did indeed have a central role in fashioning the region's strategic future.¹⁶² Given recent anxieties, this represented success.¹⁶³

Growing US–Vietnamese intimacy against the backdrop of China's unhappiness with both did not escape Beijing. China endorsed Vietnam's economic growth and market liberalization. At meetings between leaders of the two communist parties they only traded mutual praise. With trade booming, relations had swung on an upward trajectory. In 2004, the two neighbours demarcated their maritime boundary in the Beibei Gulf, an accord Beijing sought to use as a template for addressing South China Sea disputes. In July 2010, the two sides completed demarcating their 1,300 km-long land borders. Beijing felt:

The desire for mutual economic benefit surpasses the dispute over sea territories and it also lays a solid foundation for solving the dispute peacefully ... The two countries can find ways to solve disputes peacefully and avoid being taken advantage of by other countries.¹⁶⁴

China warned, under 'pressure to maintain influence and guard against a rising China, the West is eager to cozy up to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries'. Western media's portrayal of China as an elephant ready to trample on Vietnamese interests, while explicable, was incorrect – 'China does not include Vietnam into its sphere of influence. The two countries are making an effort to build normal nation-to-nation relations'. Beijing's expectations were simple – 'Vietnam should also be careful about not becoming a chess piece for the US as it pursues a broader regional agenda'.¹⁶⁵ With lines clearly drawn, the direction Hanoi took in choosing sides in the deepening Sino-US competition could decide the region's fate.

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A new Cold War?

Military readiness

On 27 May 2010, Admiral Gary Roughead, America's Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), and General Norton Schwartz, US Air Force (USAF) Chief of Staff, jointly rolled out 'AirSea Battle',¹ the new operational concept of the US Navy and Air Force, designed to deter and, if deterrence failed, defeat in combat, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces in the western Pacific theatre. Comparable in scale, scope and ambition to the generic predecessor called 'AirLand Battle' adopted by US and NATO forces to deter or defeat a feared Soviet invasion of Western Europe,² the new doctrine was the end-product of a process initiated by General Schwartz and Admiral Roughead in September 2009 when, instructed by Secretary of Defence Robert Gates to replace inter-service rivalry with operational integration, they signed a classified memorandum to that end.³

From the beginning, the concept was aimed at countering the PLA's growing capacity to deploy anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) forces against the US Pacific Command (PACOM) in likely battle-spaces close to China's shores, curtailing PACOM's operational freedom.⁴ From the US military perspective, early in the twenty-first century, China had assumed the role played by the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.

The concept emerged from the DOD's own think-tank, the Office of Net Assessment (ONA), headed since its establishment in the early 1970s by perhaps America's pre-eminent strategist, Andrew Marshall. When senior US commanders like Admiral Jay Johnson, CNO, stressed the threats to US dominance emanating from changes in the security environment, including action taken by 'peer-rivals' and 'near-peer competitors', principally China, pressure built for innovative approaches to retaining America's primacy.⁵ Admiral Johnson declared:

Over the past ten years, it has become evident that proliferating weapon and information technologies will enable our foes to attack the ports and airfields needed for the forward-deployment of our land-based forces. I anticipate that the next century will see ... (our) foes striving to target

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concentrations of troops and materiel ashore and attack our forces at sea and in the air. This is more than a sea-denial threat or a Navy problem. It is an area-denial threat whose defeat or negation will become the single most crucial element in projecting and sustaining US military power where it is needed.⁶

Command-level concerns and back-room work at the ONA converged on meeting the challenges posed by the rise of China's military power. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath slowed the pace of developing new ideas as counter-insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan consumed blood, treasure, time and intellectual investments. The Obama Administration's decision to wrap up combat operations in Iraq in 2010 and start a conditional draw-down from Afghanistan in 2011 widened the aperture for post-COIN strategizing. Since the 'Taiwan Strait crisis' of 1996, when President Clinton deployed two carrier strike groups to waters off Taiwan after the PLA mounted exercises near the island, China loomed large in most DOD calculations of near-to-medium-term threats. The frequent appearance of *sha-shoujian* (assassin's mace) in Chinese military discourse indicated plans to employ weapon systems and methods potentially capable of deterring a superior adversary like the USA by realistically threatening to cripple its forces at the onset of a conflict.⁷ America had to counterbalance this rapidly emerging threat.

After Gates approved the ONA's proposals, a small group of USAF and naval officers consulted America's operational commanders around the world, establishing the parameters the two services had to meet to realize the radical concept. The synergies in joint application of aerial and maritime force would generate:

not only those capabilities able to be integrated to give us better fighting power, better endurance, better mobility, (but) we're also trying to identify gaps in capabilities, see where the Air Force or Navy capabilities can fill those gaps such that we are optimized as a joint force.⁸

At this embryonic stage, 'AirSea Battle' evolved under the supervision of General Carrol Chandler, Commander, Pacific Air Forces and, since August 2009, USAF Vice Chief of Staff. With a framework established, DOD engaged the Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), a think-tank with close personnel links to the US national security establishment, to put flesh on the concept's bones.

CSBA analyses, conducted by specialists who had worked on the project at ONA or had contributed to other DOD studies, concluded that unless China (and Iran) 'divert from their current course of action', or America offset their military build-ups, it was 'practically certain that the costs incurred by the US military to maintain access to two areas of vital interest', Western Pacific and the Persian Gulf, 'will rise sharply, perhaps to prohibitive levels, and perhaps

much sooner than many expect'. Given the apparent Chinese (and Iranian) intent to create 'no-go zones' in proximate maritime reaches, the USA faced a strategic choice: 'to risk a loss of military access to areas vital to its security or to explore options for preserving access'.⁹ 'AirSea Battle' was born.

In its presentations on the concept just before 'AirSea Battle' was formally rolled out by the USAF and Navy, the CSBA reported how potent A2/AD capabilities in the hands of America's adversaries would impose increasing risks and costs on US power-projection operations. The Western Pacific Theatre of Operations (WPTO) was 'the most stressing potential case' where the 'AirSea battle concept must address high-end military operations' to maintain a 'stable military balance'. 'AirSea Battle' addressed the challenge by joining USAF and Navy capabilities 'to execute highly integrated operations across the range of A2/AD contingencies'.¹⁰ The argument followed seamless logic:

- East Asia and the Western Pacific are an area of enduring vital US interest. The US has longstanding security commitments across the region. The most stress was caused by the PLA's advanced A2/AD network and associated capabilities 'threatening regional stability and security'. Unless America acted now, the WPTO military balance would become unfavourable and unstable in a decade.¹¹
- The PLA posed a challenge manifest in its precepts: 'We should not mechanically follow the US theory'; 'we should not try to meet a new challenge by running after others'; 'we should try to create our own superiority'; 'combine Western technology with eastern wisdom. This is our trump card for winning a 21st century war'; 'the other side may be strong, but they are not strong in all things ... and our side may be weak, but we are not weak in all things'.¹²
- The PLA's emphasis on *Shashoujian* – secret weapons and methods employed suddenly and powerfully enough to deter or defeat a stronger enemy – caused particular concern. The PLA's focus on ASAT weapons, space-based Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA), electro-magnetic weapons, cyber-warfare, electronic warfare (EW), over-the-horizon (OTH) radars, ballistic and cruise missiles, integrated air-defence systems, advanced combat jets, UAVs, submarines and sea mines posed a serious threat.¹³
- With an arsenal combining short-, medium- and intermediate-range missiles, long-range ICBMs, and various combat aircraft and cruise missiles, the PLA was pushing the zone of US military immunity eastward, away from China's shores. Forward-deployed US forces were increasingly vulnerable to the PLA's pre-emptive attacks, eroding US ability to reassure allies and partners, deter adversaries, and defeat enemies. America must fashion an 'offsetting strategy'.¹⁴
- 'AirSea Battle' would preserve a stable military balance and maintain crisis stability in East Asia by demonstrating America's ability to effectively intervene

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- in the event of a military conflict, increasing confidence across the region that China would fail to realize its objectives through aggression or coercion.¹⁵
- The WPTO geography demanded an integrated air-and-maritime approach. The USA operated a handful of large, almost undefended bases, either too close to China and difficult to defend, or too far away and less useful militarily. Vast distances placed a premium on range and endurance.¹⁶
 - America must be able to reassure all regional allies and partners who had to be defended from the sea. Success would heavily depend on Japan's active role as an ally. US inability, real or perceived, to defend its allies and partners could lead to instability, including coercion or aggression.¹⁷
 - The PLA would seek to disrupt US military networks by destroying or jamming US satellites along with concerted cyber- and EW attacks. It would fire salvoes of precision-guided missiles at US and allied air bases, aircraft carriers and logistics facilities. With US carriers unable to freely launch sorties, the PLA would secure air superiority and naval freedom of manoeuvre, achieving its goals.¹⁸
 - With air, surface and undersea attacks against deploying US forces, the PLA would destroy their sanctuaries and logistics depots. Mounting air, cruise and ballistic missile attacks against US bases, the PLA would prevent rapid deployment of US forces to forward bases and littorals. By initiating hostilities, China would rob America of a choice of time and place. With air, cruise and ballistic missile attacks against bases and carriers, the PLA would erode US ability to mount and sustain large numbers of sorties. The PLA would damage or destroy America's complex battle networks with ASAT, cyber and EW attacks.¹⁹
 - To meet these threats, America would wage 'AirSea Battle' in two stages: first, withstand initial attacks and limit damage to US and allied forces; execute a blinding campaign against enemy battle networks and ISR systems; execute a missile suppression campaign against long-range strike systems; and seize the initiative in the air, sea, space and cyber domains. Next, it would sustain and exploit the initiative in all warfighting domains; conduct 'distant blockade' operations; sustain operational logistics; and ramp up industrial production.²⁰
 - The USAF would restore naval freedom of manoeuvre with persistent strikes on mobile missile launchers, degrading PLA maritime ISR. US naval sub- and surface combatants, including carrier-borne strike systems, would attack PLA surveillance and air-defence units, enabling USAF penetrating strikes. USAF bombers with maritime strike weapons and mines would support USN strike, intercept and blockade operations. Naval BMD would defend USAF forward bases. USAF tankers would refuel naval aircraft; carrier-borne manned and unmanned aircraft would suppress PLA air threats, aiding USAF forward air refuelling tasks.²¹

The US military establishment had now openly identified China as the most likely rival in a future conventional conflict, and prepared both conceptual

and war-fighting measures to secure victory in combat to ensure continuing American dominance. While Washington prepared to wage war against China, it also built up relations with and combat capabilities of its regional allies and partners. In this military-diplomatic realm, however, America's success appeared to be uneven.

Mixed fortunes of America's allies

Japan: Prime Minister Hatoyama's unanticipated resignation forced by his failure to honour his campaign pledges on the relocation of the Futenma Marine Aviation Facility drew attention to the fragility of political consensus on the costs of the Japan–USA alliance. Hatoyama's successor, Naoto Kan, insisted the May 2010 accord announced at the Foreign and Defence Ministers' meeting would be implemented, but in recognition of the anger felt on Okinawa, refused to set a firm deadline. Tokyo sought ways of removing Futenma's heliport functions from the crowded Ginowan district to the Marines' Camp Schwab in Nago district by 2014, but any announcement of this step before Okinawa's gubernatorial polls in November 2010 appeared overly fraught, and was avoided.²²

Close cooperation with Washington continued but Kan had to consider the implications of the DPJ's loss of control over the parliament's upper house in July 2010 elections. The party took just 44 seats in these polls, compared to the 60 it won in 2007, and the 50 it got in 2004. Particularly damaging to its populist image was the fact that DPJ candidates won only eight of the 29 constituencies where only one seat was contested. The DPJ's partner, the New People's Party, won no seats, and no independent candidate backed by the ruling coalition won either. As a result, the DPJ and its allies were reduced to 110 upper house seats whereas a majority demanded at least 122.²³ In contrast, the LDP took 51 seats.

In that volatile domestic political milieu, Japan stood up to China on some issues while making amends on others. At a trilateral meeting among the foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea, Katsuya Okada confronted Yang Jiechi, pointing out that China was the only permanent member of the UN Security Council not only not reducing its nuclear arsenal, but increasing it. When he urged Beijing to cut its nuclear stockpiles, Yang asked how Japan, under a US nuclear umbrella for decades, could say this.²⁴ The two men also argued over which party was responsible for 'incidents' in the East China Sea when Chinese naval helicopters flew close to Japanese destroyers in what Tokyo claimed were Japanese waters.²⁵

However, they also agreed to work towards reducing tensions and establishing 'hot line' procedures between the ministries of defence to ensure lines of communications remained open during crises.²⁶ Meeting up again on the sidelines of the ARF in Hanoi in July 2010, they discussed the East China Sea disputes and planned talks about these.²⁷ Official-level exchanges in Tokyo, aimed at producing a draft treaty allowing joint development

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of energy resources in the East China Sea, did not, however, bear fruit.²⁸ If Sino-Japanese relations proved mixed, the Japan–USA alliance, too, seemed adrift. While the rhetoric remained steadfast and military cooperation continued, political commitment appeared less assured than it was under the LDP.²⁹

But some changes did appear. On the anniversary of Japan's defeat in 1945, on 15 August 2010, for the first time in a quarter century, not a single cabinet minister visited the Yasukuni Shrine dedicated to Japan's war dead. Instead, Kan joined Emperor Akihito at a memorial service in Tokyo. At the ceremony, Kan said, 'During the War, Japan inflicted significant damage and pain on many countries, especially the people of Asian countries. I deeply regret that and express my sincere condolences to the victims and their families'.³⁰ Akihito, whose father Hirohito let the war be waged in his name, said, 'Here I look back on history and ardently hope that the calamities of war will never be repeated'.³¹ Just days earlier, Ambassador John Roos had become the first US official to attend commemorations marking the August 1945 American nuclear attack on Hiroshima.³² Reconciliation was not evident, but an acknowledgement of history was.³³

The fundamentally competitive strand in Sino-Japanese dynamics returned to the fore when, in early September, the Japanese Coastguard detained a Chinese fishing trawler and its crew after the trawler reportedly rammed two Japanese vessels in the waters near the disputed *Senkaku/Diaoyu* islets in the East China Sea. Tokyo accused the crew, especially the captain, of operating illegally in 'Japanese waters', refusing to obey orders given by a Japanese official agency carrying out its lawful duties, and endangering the lives of Japanese Coastguard personnel. Beijing postponed official talks on addressing disputed energy reserves and their joint exploitation in the East China Sea, and demanded the immediate return of the vessel and its crew.³⁴

Japan insisted on putting the crew on trial, but with Chinese officials, including Premier Wen, warning of 'serious consequences', Tokyo first released the vessel and the crew and, later, backtracking from its initial insistence on following its domestic 'rule of law', repatriated the captain as well. Meanwhile, protests against Japanese manufacturers and other businesses in Chinese cities demonstrated popular anger. China imposed tacit restrictions on the export of 'rare-earth' minerals, crucial to high-end electronics and other manufacturing, to Japan. Washington's role again pointed to America's dilemmas in the region. The USA urged negotiations between the disputants, offering to facilitate such talks – an offer Beijing rejected – while pledging military support to its ally.

America did not 'take a position on the sovereignty of the *Senkakus*', said the Department of State spokesman although his use of the Japanese name indicated US preference; 'We're watching that tension very, very carefully', said Admiral Mullen, 'Obviously, we're very, very strongly in support of our ally in that region, Japan'.³⁵ Meeting Wen on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Obama did not broach the dispute.³⁶

With turbulence in the Korean Peninsula demanding restraint and Sino-US interactions requiring a more benign aura with efforts to lend purpose to Hu's US visit in early 2011, America may have hoped for calmer Sino-Japanese relations. These were dashed when Tokyo approved the 'National Defence Program Guidelines, FY 2011–20'. Identifying security environmental threats to itself, Japan noted an increase in territorial and other disputes, 'Global shifts in the balance of power' brought about by 'the rise of emergent powers and relative change in the US influence', concerns over cyberspace 'stability', and North Korean nuclear and missile programmes. It was the direct reference to China, however, which attracted attention: 'Military modernization by China and its insufficient transparency are of concern for the regional and global community'.³⁷

Beijing was outraged. 'A certain country has no right to act as a representative of the international community and make irresponsible remarks on China's development', said the FMPRC spokeswoman. 'The fact is that China's development since its reform and opening up has brought huge opportunities of common prosperity to the world, including Japan'.³⁸ Against a fluid backdrop marked by some uncertainty over the solidity of the USA–Japan alliance,³⁹ Sino-Japanese relations underscored structural tensions. Historically competitive impulses, dramatic changes in China's economic growth and consequent fungible power, a perceptible shift in the region's power relations causing uncertainties, and a desire to fight for the top slot in Asia combined to force Japan out into the open. This candid rivalry fashioned by a ruling party widely seen as friendly to China revealed elemental challenges to Sino-Japanese amity. Until a firmer set of power relations with predictable choices and outcomes ended strategic fluidity, this bipolarity would remain a defining feature of the Asia-Pacific's insecurity complex.

Australia: Kevin Rudd, the Mandarin-speaking, Asia-Pacific community-building prime minister, was ousted in June 2010 in an intra-party coup by his deputy, Julia Gillard, over domestic policy differences which had little to do with strategic considerations.⁴⁰ The political drama followed the Rudd Administration's announcement in May 2010 of a 40 per cent 'super tax' imposed on profits earned by Australia's large and powerful mining firms. Mineral stocks tumbled, wiping out \$15 billion from their market value.⁴¹

Mining conglomerates mounted a well-funded campaign against Canberra's plans to extract windfall revenues. Stressing their opposition to any revenue losses for their industry several unions, staunch Labour Party supporters, switched sides. With factional fights underway, Rudd insisted he would stay on. But when Gillard, his hitherto-loyal deputy, issued a challenge over party leadership, Rudd, fearing for the Party's fate at the general elections scheduled for August, stepped down. Mining stocks immediately rose. However, there were few indications of how the 'coup' affected Canberra's national security perception, or how a new administration might seek to address these.

Gillard had not been noted for expressing strong views on foreign or strategic security policy issues. With her focus on impending elections, a loss of

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popularity following the ‘coup’, and the opposition’s increasingly robust campaign, domestic concerns absorbed the Australian elite’s attention. The elections proved indecisive, with Labour falling from 83 seats to 70 while the Liberals and their allies commanded just a few seats more.⁴² Neither major party looked capable of pulling together the 76 seats they must have before claiming the majority needed to take office. Gillard immediately began negotiating about the formation of a coalition with Green and independent MPs. Even with these outsiders’ support, however, an erosion of the authority her party commanded was apparent from comments repeatedly made by Tony Abbott, the Liberal Party leader.⁴³

Labour kept control but in any case, Australia would remain anchored to its alliance with America, and retain close strategic links to Japan, India and Singapore. Gillard’s invitation to Rudd, and his prompt agreement, to take over the Australian Foreign Office would ensure continuity in the foreign and national security policy arenas. The 25th US–Australian defence and foreign ministerial meeting in November 2010, at which Rudd and Defence Minister Stephen Smith hosted Hillary Clinton and Robert Gates in Melbourne, underscored that continuity. The allies stressed their commitment to

- enhancing democratic freedoms;
- maintaining global and regional security;
- enhancing an international rules-based order;
- building stable, prosperous and open markets.⁴⁴

Although the ministers mentioned China in only general terms when speaking in public, the fact that on all these points the allies had major differences with Beijing was not coincidental. Still, whether the impetus of Rudd’s imaginative diplomatic initiatives and military build-up planned in the heady days of his leadership would survive his fall remained moot. When the WikiLeaks website began revealing over 250,000 classified US diplomatic cables including one reporting Rudd’s advice to Clinton to deploy forces against China if things went ‘wrong’, Rudd reversed Julia Gillard’s critique of WikiLeaks founder, fellow Australian Julian Assange. ‘Mr Assange is not himself responsible for the unauthorized release of 250,000 documents from the US diplomatic communications network’, Rudd insisted. ‘The Americans are responsible for that’.⁴⁵

Such forceful candour may have been triggered by Rudd’s pique at being described by US emissaries to Canberra in secret reports as an ‘accident-prone control freak’. But this did not dilute the implications of his directness. With its economy rapidly recovering from the global downturn, Australia had the capacity to shape its own security discourse and that in its environs. However, with visionary leadership discarded in a domestic political drama, Canberra’s role in shaping the regional strategic milieu looked less clear. Would it revert to its status as an active but secondary player on the Asia-Pacific security stage, or pursue its national interests with the vigour and

ambition evident in the Rudd years? Would Rudd the Foreign Minister be as effective as Rudd the Prime Minister had been perspicacious? Asia and the world would have to wait for an answer to those questions.

India: with its economy growing robustly and the global downturn a blip on its charts, India surged ahead as an increasingly influential actor on the strategic stage. The moral clarity so prominent in Delhi's earlier pronouncements had been replaced with an unabashed pragmatism commensurate with growing power and an appreciation of what it could do.⁴⁶ Delhi's quest for a place at the top table was partly – but only partly – driven by 'an unrelenting rivalry' with China. Indians recognized the anxiety their strategic proximity to America caused in Beijing, encouraging it to 'trip' India before the Sino-Indian military asymmetry closed.⁴⁷ Expectations that China's GDP growth rates would tumble while India's would rise, disputes over Tibet and unresolved border issues, and China's role in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar impacted on Sino-Indian security perceptions and calculations. Delhi's long-term goals vis-à-vis China were to preclude an arms race with Beijing, avoid entanglement in Sino-US competition, and avoid being constrained by Beijing's actions – in short, to be able to 'walk softly but carry a big enough stick to keep the dragon at bay'.⁴⁸

Keeping Beijing at bay while ploughing its own furrow, Delhi built up its national economic substance, scientific–technological bases, and military muscle. It aligned itself to friendly great powers, pre-eminently, America. Their 'strategic partnership', manifest at the inaugural 'Strategic Dialogue' in Washington, demonstrated the range, breadth and depth of interactions. Co-chaired by Secretary of State Clinton and her Indian counterpart, S.M. Krishna, the Dialogue included several ministers and dozens of officials from the two sides, exploring collaboration in 'advancing global security and stability', as well as in 'trade and investment, science and technology, infrastructure investment, environmental sustainability, climate change mitigation, energy security, education, agriculture, food security, healthcare and empowerment of people'.⁴⁹

China's centrality to this strategic partnership was underscored by Admiral Mullen. During a visit to Delhi, he stressed the 'aggressive' challenges posed by China's growing military power and America's inability to engage the PLA in any meaningful 'relationship and dialogue'.⁵⁰ It was in that context that Mullen sought to take Indo-US military relations – already the most extensive such links for Indian forces⁵¹ – to the next level. 'The region is still too dangerous, the challenges we face together are still too great for us not to become better friends and for our relationship to become more routine'.⁵²

In July 2010, the two partners concluded negotiations on reprocessing by India of US-sourced nuclear material, India being only the third such party after the EU and Japan.⁵³ This formalized the 2005 accord on nuclear cooperation as the core of strategic collaboration. Hardware procurement, joint training, technology transfers, shared R&D, nuclear cooperation and diplomatic

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concert underscored India's integration into the US alliance system. And yet, a close ally of both the partners noted:

There are people who feel that maybe they can also use India to counterbalance China. To me, that is much too simplistic ... India is too old, too wise, too spiritual, too worldly, to be anything but itself ... India will always be India. India is not going to be made use of by anybody, except in its own self-interest.⁵⁴

Recognition of where Delhi's pursuit of self-interest had brought it came in the second half of 2010 when, in quick succession, leaders of the P-5 great powers came calling, seeking both political-strategic and economic-commercial benefits of collaboration. President Obama's visit in November 2010 was designed to cap US efforts to shore up the strategic partnership, but some clouds darkened prospects. America's policies on Afghanistan – especially their impact on relations with Pakistan – coloured Delhi's perceptions. India's relations with Iran as the Afghan endgame approached would similarly influence Washington's views.⁵⁵ Still, the visit laid to rest ghosts of doubts haunting Delhi and Washington that Obama was paying less attention to India than Bush had. Obama acknowledged that India had already 'arrived' as a global power:

Of course only Indians can determine India's national interests and how to advance them on the world stage. But I stand before you today because I'm convinced that the interests of the United States and the interests we share with India are advanced in partnership ... India and America are indispensable partners in meeting the challenges of our time ... The United States not only welcomes India as a rising global power, we fervently support it, and we have worked to make it a reality.⁵⁶

Obama's direct support for a permanent UN Security Council seat for India, acknowledgement of India's regional pre-eminence and its nuclear status, and a request that Delhi not only 'look East; we want India to "engage East"', underscored US sensitivity to Indian sensibilities, hardening the diplomatic carapace around Indo-US strategic linkages. Economic, commercial, scientific-technological, agricultural and cultural bonds reinforced the partnership.⁵⁷ In leadership discussions and in analytical commentary surrounding the summit, a China focus to the Indo-US partnership was apparent.⁵⁸ However, how deep the consonance between America's global primacy and India's regional interests reached was less clear-cut.

The potential for occasional disruptions was evident in the furore over the patting down of the Indian ambassador to America, Meera Shankar, by aviation security personnel at the Jackson airport in Mississippi, as the envoy boarded a flight after addressing a conference at a local university. Just days

later, India's envoy to the UN, a Sikh diplomat, Hardeep Puri, was temporarily detained by security personnel at a Houston airport in Texas when he refused to doff his turban at a security check.⁵⁹ This was the fourth such incident in three months, and showed up some of the sensitivities which could cause unexpected strains. 'This is unacceptable to India', said External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna.⁶⁰ So, while security convergences drove strategic collaboration, other divergences could balance those trends. India would seek to expand its autonomous space without compromise. The potential for friction persisted.

Wen Jiabao followed Obama to Delhi, praising India as a 'great neighbour'.⁶¹ Beijing set the scene by challenging competitive views with a vision of paradigm-shifting amity:

For the first time in a century, the course of history will be defined by the interaction between the world's two most populated countries. While the West would like to play one against the other, China and India have been advocating a new international system that is open, balanced and inclusive. Competition between the two should make way for joint efforts to tackle the challenges for the developing world in seeking common development. Instead of keeping score against each other, India and China should tap their potential and strive for mutual benefits and more contributions to global progress and prosperity.⁶²

Wen's exchanges with Singh realized some of that hope. They reaffirmed that the world had enough space for the two neighbours to grow simultaneously.⁶³ They stressed shared interest in maintaining regional and global security and stability, collaborating in various multilateral fora, and raising relations 'beyond their bilateral scope' to 'global and strategic significance'.⁶⁴ In a dramatic display of burgeoning trade relations standing at \$60 billion in 2010–11, the two leaders set a target of \$100 billion for 2015, with Chinese concessions aimed at reducing India's growing deficit.⁶⁵ Despite the effusiveness of Wen–Singh talks, mutual wariness was not entirely dispelled.⁶⁶ The fact that Wen flew from Delhi to Islamabad to reassure India's regional rival suggested Beijing would not cede the running in South Asia to an Indian monopoly. Fluidity seemed systemically ingrained.⁶⁷

Russia: the Obama Administration's efforts to transform relations with Russia from the difficulties manifest in mid-2008 to a friendly framework revived military-to-military relations in 2009, and produced the new START Treaty in 2010. The shift in atmospherics was paralleled in operational terms, too. In June 2010, the FBI arrested 10 men and women alleged to have been spying for Russia, and seeking to penetrate US policymaking circles to learn about American 'weapons, diplomatic strategy and political developments'.⁶⁸ The man accused of managing the ring's finances jumped bail in Cyprus and disappeared, but the others were captured. Living apparently 'normal, suburban lives', the five couples arrested from townships on America's eastern

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seaboard had contacted members of the US national security establishment, but whether they had collected any classified information damaging to the national security was less clear.⁶⁹

The 10 were soon swapped with four convicted US agents – including two former colonels – held in Russia, in a tightly choreographed exchange at the Vienna airport in a scene reminiscent of Cold War precedents.⁷⁰ In a dramatic display of shared strategic interests trumping tactical concerns,⁷¹ the two governments swiftly resolved an issue which could have impeded ratification of the new START Treaty and hinder the ‘reset’ in relations Obama had ordered.

The treaty, at the heart of Obama’s blueprint of a new approach to Russia, would hopefully lead to a strategic partnership enabling the two powers to jointly pursue shared goals, and eliminate mutual anxiety over contested interests.⁷² But its ratification required the investment of much political capital by the Obama Administration in the months before and after the 2010 mid-term elections. In Russia, President Medvedev’s ruling party commanded more than the parliamentary majority ratification required, but Moscow announced it would ratify the treaty simultaneously with the US Congress. To secure ratification, US officials felt the need repeatedly to drive home the treaty’s advantages.⁷³

This perseverance underscored the Administration’s belief in the importance of ensuring the treaty’s locus as the core of a new strategic partnership considered essential to US efforts to manage transitional turbulence. Moscow saw advantage in stabilizing, indeed enhancing, strategic interactions with America at a time of systemic uncertainty especially affecting its eastern and southern frontiers. This resonance gave strong impetus to the consolidation of the ‘reset’ in relations. Evidence of this shift came in August 2010 when the Russian Air Force conducted an unprecedented joint exercise, ‘Vigilant Eagle’, with Canadian and US counterparts in the North American Aerospace Command (NORAD). US F-22 *Raptors* and E-3B airborne early-warning AWACS aircraft joined Russian MiG-31 and Su-27 fighters and A-50 airborne warning and control aircraft, crossing each other’s airspace in an exercise which indicated a remarkable turn-around in relations.⁷⁴

However, even in an era of convergence, differences remained. This became clear in July 2010 when Secretary of State Clinton and her Polish counterpart Radoslaw Sikorski witnessed the signing of a protocol initiating the implementation of a 2008 agreement on the deployment of ground-based BMD interceptors to Polish territory. The agreement aimed ‘to protect our NATO Allies from the threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction’,⁷⁵ understood to target Iranian missile systems.

Moscow did not challenge the US–Polish decision to begin installing BMD interceptors, but questioned its necessity. Russian leaders were ‘convinced that there are no threats for Europe that would justify the deployment of a missile defense system near Russian borders’.⁷⁶ This view reflected a broader opposition to the systemic status quo informing Moscow’s diplomatic overview. Foreign Minister Lavrov told Russian parliamentarians:

A confrontational paradigm, the so-called zero-sum mentality, is now a thing of the past. The system of global administration that emerged after the Second World War is no longer up-to-date. It is obsolete. The world has become polycentric and new centers of influences are emerging in the world and we need to look for common denominators in international affairs ... Even those who try to score some political points by creating new dividing lines in Europe have now realized this.⁷⁷

Specific disputes surfaced in the summer when, a month ahead of the anniversary of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Hillary Clinton visited Ukraine, Poland, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. In Tbilisi, she reassured her hosts of America's 'steadfast commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity', and that a 'reset' of US-Russian relations would not be at Georgia's cost. Clinton noted, 'We continue to object to and criticize actions by Russia which we believe are wrong and on top of the list is the invasion and occupation of Georgia'.⁷⁸ Not coincidentally, on the anniversary of the initiation of hostilities, President Medvedev arrived in Abkhazia, one of the two Georgian breakaway regions Moscow had recognized as independent after the war.

Medvedev lunched with troops of a 1,700-strong Russian contingent based near Sukhumi under a 2009 agreement which made the deployment permanent. He told the troops, 'Your mission remains the same – you must make sure no one sticks his nose in here. Neighbors must accept Abkhazia's independence, and our treaties with her, but then our former partners sometimes forget how to behave'.⁷⁹ Three days later, General Alexander Zelin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Air Force, announced the deployment of a battery of S-300 air-defence missiles to Abkhazia. 'Its role will be anti-aircraft defense of the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in cooperation with the air defense systems of the army'.⁸⁰ Given the missile's capability against low-altitude targets with small radar cross-sections, including aircraft, cruise missiles and many tactical ballistic missiles,⁸¹ the deployment of the S-300 defined the boundaries of Russia's sphere of influence and underscored its determination to defend these from US-aided adversaries.⁸²

Sino-Russian relations, in contrast, showed some vigour. In September 2010, Medvedev travelled to China where Hu and he opened a pipeline linking the world's largest energy producer to its largest consumer. They not only agreed to deepen their 'strategic partnership' but also called on Asia-Pacific neighbours to boost efforts to maintain regional peace and security in the face of 'growing challenges'. They committed themselves to 'an open, transparent and equal framework' consonant with 'a new security concept based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation'.⁸³ At least on paper, then, Russia accepted China's 'New Security Concept' which had, since 2002, contested the validity of the US-led alliance-based Asia-Pacific security architecture.

On the more prosaic but urgent question of gas prices, Moscow and Beijing remained apart by around \$100 per 1,000 cubic metres. Russia wanted China

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to pay the same price as Gazprom Charged European countries; China demanded a discount. Putin announced that Moscow and Beijing had agreed to pay each other in yen and rubles in bilateral trade rather than in US dollars.⁸⁴ While the value of Sino-Russian trade relative to global commerce was modest, the partners' move away from the Greenback symbolized a shift. In November, Wen Jiabao visited St. Petersburg, where he and Putin presided over the signing of 12 documents on cooperation in aviation, energy, railroad construction, customs, intellectual property rights, culture and trade. Their joint communiqué effusively described the Sino-Russian partnership. Wen promised that 'China will firmly follow the path of peaceful development and support the renaissance of Russia as a great power', and that their two countries would 'never become each other's enemy'.⁸⁵

Russia also obtained the formal support of China and India in the pursuit of its 'core interests' in the Caucasus,⁸⁶ a major success after Moscow's failure to secure the SCO's endorsement of its war against Georgia in August 2008. Although each of the three partners pursued differentiated objectives vis-à-vis America, their endorsement of a shared approach to systemic evolution hinted at a consensus on how the global order was changing and how they could jointly advance their own interests in this turbulent period:

The Ministers shared the perception that the world is undergoing major and swift changes. They expressed their support for a multi-polar, equitable and democratic world order, based on principles of international law, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making by all states.⁸⁷

There could be few bolder expressions of agreement among three of America's most significant interlocutors on the need for modifying the international security order. This was notable given the effort Washington had devoted to cultivating Delhi and Moscow with tacit convergence on the strategic approach to China.

The Obama Administration's domestic challenges flowing from the losses suffered in the mid-term elections threatened its ability to have the START agreement ratified. As the lame-duck Congress struggled to complete its year-end agenda, focusing on urgent fiscal and monetary matters, the possibility of the treaty's ratification before the installation of the newly elected Republican-dominated House of Representatives in the New Year appeared to fade. Officials again pleaded for swift ratification, offering assurances that the treaty concealed 'no "secret deals" with Russia on missile defence'.⁸⁸ Reminding the Congress that the last US inspectors verifying compliance with the previous arms-control treaty had left Russia on 4 December 2009, officials urged immediate ratification.⁸⁹

This plea was reinforced with agreements between America and NATO on the one hand, and Russia on the other, at NATO's Lisbon summit weeks after the elections. NATO not only adopted a new Strategic Concept and a planned NATO-wide BMD architecture, but also extended an offer to Russia to

participate in the latter. Having secured NATO unity ahead of the NATO–Russia Council’s deliberations, Obama noted the centrality of verifications measures, especially the return of inspectors to Russia’s nuclear arsenals, to future progress. This, he pointed out, possibly for the benefit of Congressional leaders, could not be done without START ratification.⁹⁰ The NATO–Russia Council summit, attended by President Medvedev and NATO leaders, decided to cooperate on a range of issues. Most notably, they agreed to resume NATO’s theatre BMD exercises in Europe, and identify opportunities for Russia to cooperate with NATO’s new territorial BMD operations, by June 2011.⁹¹

Given recent tensions, this was considered a significant success. However, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly, while focusing on Russia’s socio-economic, domestic political and demographic challenges, Medvedev pointed out the limited nature of Russian patience. Pleased with the response from NATO leaders to his ideas on European BMD coordination presented in Lisbon, Medvedev noted Moscow’s cooperative approach to countering missile threats across Europe, and support for ‘a modern partnership, one based on the indivisibility of security, mutual trust, transparency and predictability’. That consensus made Russia ‘moderately optimistic’ about the prospects of a new European security treaty.

But time was of the essence. ‘One of the following two things will happen within the next ten years: either we reach an agreement on missile defence and create a full-fledged cooperation mechanism, or we will see another escalation in the arms race’.⁹² To meet other contingencies, Russia was investing 20 trillion rubles on military modernization by 2020.⁹³ That muscular strand to national security interests came to the fore in December 2010 when Russian combat aircraft approached the largest-ever US–Japanese naval exercises conducted in the wake of North Korea’s shelling of a South Korean-occupied islet in November. While Washington did not respond immediately, Tokyo despatched Japanese fighters to intercept the uninvited Russians and escort them away from the flotilla below. The US Senate’s ratification of the new START close to the end of term of the outgoing Congress restored cautious hope for US–Russian cooperation.⁹⁴

Medvedev may have derived equal satisfaction from his Delhi trip, underscoring Russia’s ‘special and privileged strategic partnership’ with India.⁹⁵ He and Singh boosted joint efforts in ‘military-technical, energy, and high technology sectors of space and tele-communications’, pledging to raise bilateral trade to \$20 billion by 2015.⁹⁶ They noted,

The changes taking place in the international system provide an opportunity to build an international order that is inclusive and democratic, based on the supremacy of international law, and adhering to the goals and principles enshrined in the UN Charter.⁹⁷

Medvedev and Singh stressed the importance of the India–Russia–China grouping in securing Asia-Pacific stability as enunciated at a ministerial

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meeting in Wuhan.⁹⁸ A stronger endorsement of a multipolar systemic structure succeeding US primacy would be difficult design. The two partners signed 30 agreements covering the spectrum of shared interests.⁹⁹ The most eye-catching of deals was in military technology, specifically on redesign, development and production of a 'fifth-generation fighter aircraft'. Based on the Sukhoi T-50/PAK FA, whose prototype had been flying for a year, the FGFA would be modified by an Indian–Russian design team to meet individual needs. Comparable to the US F-35 *Lightning* in stealth, super-cruise, manoeuvrability, highly integrated avionics, situational awareness, internal weapons-load and network-centric warfare capabilities, its design contract cost Delhi \$295 million. With first flights planned in 2017–18, India would receive 250–300 fighters in 2020–30 while Russia would procure 200–250 units, each costing \$100 million. The partners would share the initial project cost of \$11 billion; total costs could reach \$30 billion.¹⁰⁰ These defence deals would make India the third leading military power after America and China.¹⁰¹ Delhi was expanding strategic space.

A perennial peninsular conundrum

2010 ended with a series of dramatic developments rocking North-East Asia. First, the DPRK invited three US physicists to visit a hitherto-denied uranium-enrichment facility at its Yongbyon nuclear complex.¹⁰² Three days after the team-leader's report had shaken Korea watchers, Pyongyang stunned its critics again. Responding to South Korean military drills on the Yeonpyeong Island near the disputed western maritime border between the two Koreas, DPRK artillery mounted a barrage, killing two ROK marines, two civilians and wounding 16 others. Seoul responded with a smaller barrage. Although the two forces had clashed on many occasions, this was the first such artillery duel since the Armistice. Accused of responding sluggishly, the South Korean defence minister resigned. His successor, national security adviser to President Lee, General Kim Kwan-jin, pledged to 'definitely conduct' aerial and missile counter-attacks and 'completely eliminate, with all of its forces, the root cause of the threat'.¹⁰³

North Korea was widely condemned and Washington began demanding that Beijing take action against Pyongyang, tacitly threatening to forge an anti-China front in North-East Asia if it did not.¹⁰⁴ Admiral Mullen demanded that China fulfil its 'unique responsibility' to control North Korean 'aggression' given its 'unique influence' over Pyongyang:

The Chinese have enormous influence over the North, influence that no other nation on Earth enjoys. And yet, despite a shared interest in reducing tensions, they appear unwilling to use it. Even tacit approval of Pyongyang's brazenness leaves all their neighbors asking, 'what will be next?' Now is the time for Beijing to step up to that responsibility and help guide the north, and indeed, the entire region, toward a better future.¹⁰⁵

When China urged an emergency meeting of the Six-Party envoys to discuss the crisis, Washington, Seoul and Tokyo rejected it. Beijing's response remained balanced, urging restraint on all sides.¹⁰⁶ This was Hu Jintao's message to Obama in a telephone call in which he said that without proper handling, things could spin out of control on the peninsula: 'We need an easing, not a ratcheting up; dialogue, not confrontation; peace, not war'.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the US Navy mounted its largest ever naval exercise with Japan directly after holding similar drills with South Korea,¹⁰⁸ and the foreign ministers of South Korea and Japan arrived in Washington for urgent talks on North Korean conduct. They agreed on a joint approach to Pyongyang's 'provocative' acts, closer cooperation with China and Russia, reinforcement of earlier UN resolutions, and support for ASEAN's regional security role.¹⁰⁹ The absence of alternative proposals of action if Pyongyang failed to meet these demands demonstrated the infelicity of the framework adopted by the allies, and their limited ability to adapt themselves to this painful reality.

Attempts to press China were overblown as Beijing had privately conveyed its anxiety over the DPRK's nuclear and missile 'threat to the whole world's security'.¹¹⁰ Its insistence on the maintenance of the status quo notwithstanding, Beijing even appeared to accept the Peninsula's eventual unification under Seoul as long as reunited Korea was not hostile to China.¹¹¹ Beijing had been urging Washington to engage Pyongyang directly, conceding its own modest influence there, while America had stressed the need for a multilateral approach.¹¹² What neither side acknowledged was the symptomatic nature of Pyongyang's occasional outbursts of its deep insecurity, and of the disputed framework on which the general absence of hostilities stood.

Towards the end of the Korean War, Armistice negotiations in 1953 led to the separation of forces along the Military Demarcation Line, but there were no agreements on maritime demarcations. On 30 August, General Mark Clark, the Commander of US/UN forces, unilaterally proclaimed the 'Northern Limit Line' (NLL) marking the southern boundaries of the DPRK's naval access to the Yellow Sea.¹¹³ Pyongyang rejected the NLL's legitimacy as a maritime boundary.¹¹⁴ Seoul's occupation of islands and conduct of military drills near the NLL have, in Pyongyang's eyes, therefore, always been unilateral and US-imposed. The Korean War's contested and unresolved strategic and tactical outcome, and efforts by Seoul and its allies to legitimize its perpetuation, ensured inherent volatility. Criticism of China for Pyongyang's nuclear and missile tests, and for the latter obtuse attempts at signalling to and deterring perceived enemies, might serve public relations goals but did not address the fundamental inconsistencies structural within the peninsular milieu.

As US-Japanese naval drills followed US-ROK ones in late 2010, Washington announced fresh naval manoeuvres with the South Korean Navy in the Yellow Sea. These exercises, taking place at a time when America and China appeared to be edging back to a 'normal' relationship, including high-level military contacts, must have appeared threatening to the DPRK. North

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Korea not only rejected Seoul's stress on 'self-defence', but warned, 'Should an all-out war break out again on this land, it will not be confined to the boundaries of the peninsula'. The DPRK would 'deal merciless retaliatory blows at the provocateurs and aggressors and blow up their bases and thus honourably defend the dignity and security of the nation'.¹¹⁵ There was little reason to doubt Pyongyang's intent.

The fact that frequent shows of strength by the US, South Korean and Japanese armed forces rarely deterred the DPRK from taking what in its view must be appropriate steps to secure its survival, and similar failings of repeated UN resolutions, condemnations and sanctions, must raise questions about the efficacy of the US approach to the Korean conundrum. With Seoul determined to conduct live-firing exercises on the Yeonpyeong Island and Pyongyang threatening violence if it did, diplomacy picked up in December.

Chinese envoys extracted another promise from Kim Jong-il for North Korea's return to the Six-Party forum; Moscow cautioned Seoul and Washington to cool the military temperature, while China and Russia jointly urged restraint on all sides. Notably, Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico, the only US politician maintaining regular contacts with the DPRK, 'privately' visited Pyongyang when North Korea withdrew threats to retaliate against South Korean drills.¹¹⁶ It also invited IAEA inspectors back to its declared nuclear facilities, and promised to sell 12,000 fuel rods to another state rather than reprocess enough plutonium from these to fabricate six-to-eight nuclear weapons.¹¹⁷

As 2010 drew to a close, Korean denuclearization still remained a distant dream. If the world's most powerful coalition represented by the 'sole super-power' and its allies consistently failed to affect the behaviour of an almost totally isolated and virtually bankrupt state, then the nature, application and utility of power in international security relations demanded reappraisal. Richardson's apparent success suggested that the paradigm had shifted without those in power noticing. Korean volatility posed potential dangers to Asia-Pacific, indeed wider, security interests, but the transition from a period of fungible power to an era when the very nature and meaning of power stood transformed posed no less an intellectual challenge for the leaders of this emergent world.

A fluid new world order

As the Obama Administration passed half-way mark struggling with the outcome of mid-term elections, the future Asia-Pacific security architecture remained another country in the making, but certain patterns were becoming discernible.

Sino-US bipolarity: America and China identified each other as the source of the most serious threats to respective national security interests. The Chinese had noted America's overwhelming numerical and technological military superiority which appeared to constrain Beijing's strategic autonomy,

identified chinks of vulnerability in that superior force, and devised weapons, systems and methods to exploit these, and secure 'victory of the weak over the superior'. And now, with the 'AirSea Battle' concept reshaping the framework for the application of its coercive capacity against the PLA, America had trumped China's potential gains, restoring its own dominance. Whether this dialectic process had secured stability via Chinese acquiescence, or would trigger further instability as the PLA sought to overcome the effects of 'AirSea Battle', remained uncertain, but the fact that a new trans-Pacific bipolarity had emerged as the defining strategic feature of the twenty-first century security landscape was no longer open to question.

Admiral Mullen publicly admitted that his position on China had 'moved from curious to being genuinely concerned', especially because Beijing's decision to 'disinvite' Robert Gates and refuse to revive regular military contacts removed 'the opportunity to listen and learn from and about each other'.¹¹⁸ Parallel to naval-air drills in the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea with Seoul's forces, PACOM also spearheaded Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2010 exercises in the western Pacific. Thirty-two ships, five submarines, over 170 aircraft and 20,000 personnel from US, Australian, Indonesian, Japanese, South Korean, Malaysian and Singaporean armed forces conducted extensive joint manoeuvres over several weeks. These included live-fire gunnery and missile launches, maritime interdiction and vessel boardings, anti-submarine warfare (ASW), undersea warfare, air defence drills, explosive ordnance disposal, diving and salvage operations, mine-clearance, and an amphibious landing – testing interoperability and ability to mount a sea-borne offensive. Partners India, Brazil and New Zealand sent observers to this the world's largest multinational naval exercise.¹¹⁹

Following tensions around the Korean peninsula, the USA spent much of the last quarter of 2010 conducting major naval-air drills with Japan and South Korea. China was not amused and North Korea showed few signs of being impressed. Washington insisted this was not aimed at Beijing, but to make clear to Pyongyang that its provocations would accrue costs.¹²⁰ Military manoeuvres were only a part of a choreographed enterprise. America mounted a diplomatic offensive across Asia in the summer of 2010. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg pointed out that Clinton and Gates had been to South Korea for the '2+2' ministerial meeting; Clinton attended the ARF and EAS in Hanoi; Gates visited Jakarta; Steinberg himself travelled to Mongolia and Japan, holding a 'US-Japan-Australian trilateral' in Tokyo; Assistant Secretary of State William Burns visited several Southeast Asian countries around the same time. In short, senior American officials touched many East Asian bases around China, reinforcing the alliance system while also pursuing cooperation with Beijing where possible.¹²¹ So, competition and cooperation were mixed in an eclectic crucible precipitating indeterminate uncertainty.

America the persistent: as President Obama himself and more frequently his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and her Pentagon colleague Robert Gates, asserted, America was a 'resident Pacific power' and would remain so. They

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insisted Washington sought to work together with all key regional players and redefine the theatre's security configurations, but they also noted US determination to maintain its regional leadership. So, perhaps not as hegemonic as in the past, but America clearly wished to maintain its status above that of *primus inter pares* into the indefinite future.

All relevant US official statements, budgetary allocations, aid disbursements, alliance-building efforts, and, crucially, force deployments, underscored a decision to sustain America's pre-eminence within the region's security milieu.¹²² Washington's efforts to set out the framework, especially with Japan, India, Australia, and its ASEAN allies and partners, for the evolution of the emergent regional security architecture, were aimed at securing this near-hegemonic stature in perpetuity.

US endeavours to maintain its leadership role were not restricted to the military realm. Even in the economic field, a new organization took shape to introduce significant trans-Pacific commercial and investment integration. Launched by the Chilean President Ricardo Lagos, and the Prime Ministers of Singapore and New Zealand, Goh Chok Tong and Helen Clark, as the Pacific Three Closer Economic Partnership (P3-CEP) on the sidelines of the 2002 APEC leaders' summit in Mexico, this non-APEC body grew into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) among Australia, Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam, tied together under the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement. The TPP aimed at removing 90 per cent of all tariff among member countries by the beginning of 2006, and eliminating all by 2015, the same time at which ASEAN had planned to integrate member-states into a community.

The two inter-linked 'communities' would presumably provide Washington with a trans-Pacific political-economic network supportive of its leading position and regional role. In December 2009, US Trade Representative Ron Kirk notified Congress that Obama intended to launch a regional trade negotiations round with a group of Asia-Pacific states which would formalize the TPP Agreement to serve as a model for shaping a 'high-standard, broad-based regional pact'. In letters to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate President Robert Byrd, Kirk said such an agreement would expand US exports, saving and creating good jobs at home. Australia hosted the first round of talks in Melbourne in March 2010, America hosting the second in San Francisco in June.¹²³ The combination of security and defence collaboration on the one hand and economic and commercial integration on the other – independently of APEC – suggested a corollary generating second-order effects of hemming China in with a network of strategic alliances and economic partnerships over the medium-to-long term.

Washington's anxieties, fears and mistrust colouring perceptions of China were once again on display in August 2010 when the DOD issued its annual report on Chinese military and security affairs to the Congress, continuing a series ordered by the Congress in 2000. The document, describing China's military modernization in some detail, in effect explained the reasons behind

America's decision to roll out the 'AirSea Battle' operational concept.¹²⁴ In a reflection of America's success in building new strategic partners in China's neighbourhood, the Commander-in-Chief of Indonesia's defence forces, Admiral Agus Suhartono, announced that the Indonesian military was working on conducting regular joint patrols of the South China Sea with Vietnamese forces to defend those stretches of the Sea which their two countries claimed. He hinted that if successful, these could serve as a template for joint patrols with other ASEAN states facing similar disputes with China.¹²⁵ Beijing could not ignore this emerging exercise in strategic encirclement taking shape around China's borders and shores, and acted accordingly.

China resurgent: with criticism of China ranging from its treatment of Tibetan and Uighur autonomists through its handling of foreign trade and investment, and an increasingly robust assertion of national territorial and other interests, to its detention of the Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo,¹²⁶ Beijing was defensive and angry while insisting on the righteousness of its position throughout 2010. On 11 January, the third anniversary of its first direct-ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) test, Beijing conducted a BMD test, announcing, 'The test was defensive in nature and targeted at no country. The test would neither produce space debris in orbit nor pose a threat to the safety of orbiting spacecraft'. However, Western and Chinese sources hinted that under the cover of a missile-interception drill, the PLA had carried out another ASAT test,¹²⁷ confirming its capacity to neutralize hostile space-based command, control and ISR systems on which US expeditionary forces were so heavily reliant.

Following the Sino-US Security and Economic Dialogue in Beijing in May 2010, at which China served notice that it considered the South China Sea as important a security issue to its core interests as Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan,¹²⁸ it faced up to US efforts to pin it down, encircle it, and constrain its strategic autonomy. Beijing warned its neighbours:

The US will not put regional interests first. This is something that Southeast Asian countries have to bear in mind. Regional stability will be difficult to maintain if the countries concerned allow themselves to be controlled by the strategic guidance of the US.¹²⁹

China pointed to its proposal for 'shelving disagreement and joint development' as 'the only option' for its regional neighbours.¹³⁰ Whether Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia – ASEAN member-states with the most extensive maritime/territorial disputes with China – agreed remained unclear, but there were some signs that China's concerns were not being entirely ignored. Still, Beijing felt constrained to point out both the risks it saw in US involvement in regional territorial disputes, and the irony in Washington urging all actors in the South China Sea to abide by the terms of the 1982 UNCLOS when America itself had not signed up to that Convention.¹³¹

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Sino-US tensions hit a plateau in early 2010, and despite mutual efforts to lower the temperature, stayed there. At the annual Defence Ministers' conclave in Singapore, Robert Gates gave details of the 'routine' and long-established pattern of US arms sales to Taiwan which, in January 2010, had led to the suspension of high-level Sino-US military-to-military contacts. Gates thought Chinese reaction made 'little sense':

- 'Firstly, US arms sales to Taiwan are nothing new. They have been a reality for decades and spanned multiple American administrations'.
- 'Secondly, the United States has for years demonstrated in a very public way that we do not support independence for Taiwan. Nothing – I repeat, nothing – has changed in that stance'.
- 'Finally, because China's accelerating military build-up is largely focused on Taiwan, US arms sales are an important component of maintaining peace and stability in cross-strait relations and throughout the region'.¹³²

Gates suggested that against that backdrop, China should urgently renew military contacts with America so as to meet the stated expectations of both Presidents Obama and Hu, and 'reduce miscommunication, misunderstanding, and miscalculation. There is a real cost to the absence of military-to-military relations'. He offered to 'work towards' building ties which would be 'positive in tone, cooperative in nature, and comprehensive in scope'.¹³³

This extended hand of understanding also carried supplementary messages – America would defend its own interests and those of its allies and partners, with force if necessary; it was deploying sophisticated BMD systems across the region; it was helping its allies and partners in boosting their own military capabilities; and, it was reviewing, consolidating and strengthening its forward-deployed military footprint across the Asia-Pacific region. General Ma Xiaotian, PLA Deputy Chief of General Staff, speaking on Beijing's behalf, replied that the threats to security emanated from America itself:

A cold-war mentality still exists, as is often shown by efforts to strengthen military alliances via new technologies, the threat to use force in international relations, and interference in other countries' internal affairs. Regional hotspot issues come up over and over again. We believe that in the face of the complicated security situation, nations concerned should remain calm and exercise restraint and avoid escalation of tension, so as to jointly maintain regional peace and stability.¹³⁴

Ma noted Beijing strategic priorities: safeguarding China's security and development, including completion of national reunification, maintaining territorial integrity and countering foreign-aided separatism; maintaining a peaceful environment beneficial to all by securing peaceful resolution of regional problems; building a harmonious regional community by strengthening 'strategic mutual trust' and promoting multilateral defence and security

cooperation; fostering a sense of integrated, common and cooperative security, and building comprehensive, equal, trusting and mutually beneficial partnerships. Reiterating Beijing's defensive military stance, Ma stressed China's abhorrence of hegemonism, and pledged China would never adopt it. Ma identified three obstacles to building Sino-US military relations:

the first is the sale of arms to Taiwan, the second is the intense spy and patrol behaviours (sic) of US planes and ships in South China Sea and East China Sea, and the third is the "2000 National Defense Authorization Act," adopted by the US Congress in 2000, as well as the "DeLay Amendment," adopted a year later. So, we feel that, if anyone has been setting up barriers to cooperation, it is certainly not us.¹³⁵

But the fact that he saw the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 World Exposition in Shanghai as opportunities 'for the world to better understand China'¹³⁶ hinted at Chinese unease that they were being misunderstood. Still, the Chinese side rejected US interest in Secretary Robert Gates visiting Beijing to revive high-level military contacts.¹³⁷ There were few stronger signs of misunderstanding than in the aftermath of the sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan* in March 2010. China's unwillingness to endorse the international investigation's conclusion that a North Korean submarine had sunk the *Cheonan* with a torpedo, and inability to condemn this act, further vitiated Sino-US relations. The fact that Kim Jong-il visited Beijing in the incident's wake and was received by Hu Jintao without any public recrimination about the corvette's sinking did not help matters.

China went along with America and other UN Security Council members in endorsing a 'presidential statement' condemning the incident and expressing grave concern without naming North Korea, but urged restraint rather than accept the need for retribution. Washington's focus on maintaining order by enforcing norms, and Beijing's interest in securing stability while seeking an acknowledgement of the inconsistent application of norms kept the two sides apart. In the month since Washington announced joint naval exercises with South Korea in the East Sea and the Yellow Sea starting in July 2010, Beijing issued five protests – a record. America ignored China's insistence that any deployment of combat platforms, especially aircraft carriers, to the Yellow Sea, close to China in maritime terms, would hurt relations. Beijing's explanation of its critique of US action, especially 'Exercise Invincible Spirit', hinted at strategic insecurity:

- Would the USA 'allow China to stage military exercises near its western and eastern coasts? If the United States does not wish to be treated in a specific way, it should not forcefully sell the way to others'.
- 'The ultimate level of strategic thinking is to subdue the enemy without fighting. Preventing crisis is the best way to resolve and overcome the crisis. China's current tough stance is part of preventive diplomacy'.

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- ‘The drill area selected by the United States and South Korea is only 500 km away from Beijing. China will be aware of the security pressure from military exercises conducted by any country in an area that is so close to China’s heartland’.¹³⁸
- The UNSC’s presidential statement requiring all parties to remain calm and restrained was aimed at safeguarding security on the Korean Peninsula. ‘On the other hand, the joint military exercise by the United States and South Korea on the Yellow Sea has created a new crisis’.
- Without resolving existing challenges to restoring and improving Sino-US military-to-military relations first, America was imposing yet another obstacle.¹³⁹

In July 2010 in Hanoi, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi left Hillary Clinton in little doubt about the anger the deployment of a US aircraft carrier to the Yellow Sea would cause. If difficulties like this were avoided, Yang expected China and America could ‘enhance communication and coordination on major international and regional issues, respect each other’s core interest and major concern, and advance bilateral ties in a positive, cooperative and comprehensive manner’.¹⁴⁰ Yang did not link the two propositions in a zero-sum formulation but the implications were clear. Without formally acknowledging Beijing’s concerns or admitting it was responding to these, Washington initially cancelled the *USS George Washington*’s deployment to the Yellow Sea.¹⁴¹

However, not to be seen to waver before Beijing’s remonstrations, Washington eventually ordered the carrier to the Yellow Sea, as well as to the Sea of Japan.¹⁴² The dialectic of military manoeuvrings became apparent when, in response to the US–ROK Exercise *Invincible Spirit*, which included sorties by F-22 *Raptors* around Korea, the PLAAF mounted a major drill in which 100 J-10 fighters conducted air interception over the Shandong Peninsula.¹⁴³ Beijing’s concern over what it saw as a deteriorating regional security milieu translated into defensive military measures:

Currently, the international trend is experiencing deep and complicated changes, and competitions have become fiercer regarding the international order, national strengths and geopolitics. Modernization is the core of the construction of the PLA army ... it should strengthen preparations for warfare and focus on boosting the core capacity of fighting regional battles under the information background.¹⁴⁴

Beijing insisted its defence budget, at 1.4 per cent of GDP, was around half of that of other major powers, and that:

China has and will always take the road of peaceful development and pursue a purely defensive national defence policy. China will neither enter into an arms race nor militarily threaten any other country. China will neither seek hegemony nor engage in military expansion. The fundamental

task of the Chinese military is to protect the nation's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.¹⁴⁵

The combination of defensive anxiety and nationalist assertions could be confusing for both domestic and foreign audiences. When China's GDP surpassed that of Japan,¹⁴⁶ giving it the world's second largest economy after America's, Beijing remained cautious and even concerned that heightened expectations could prove damaging. Officials pointed to the nominal nature of GDP growth, stressing China's meagre per capita income standing at \$3,600, compared to Japan's \$38,000. They noted it would require steady growth until 2050 for China to attain the levels of developed economies.¹⁴⁷ Even on the much-analyzed issue of building aircraft carriers for the PLAN, influential voices urged consideration of the costs, complexities and challenges of maintaining a carrier fleet.¹⁴⁸

Chinese political and military elites acknowledged the importance of maintaining stable and peaceful relations with America, and pledged action to that end.¹⁴⁹ However, perceived rejection and anxiety over US ambivalence to China's rise partly explained Beijing's apparent confusion:

It is easier said than done for the US to adapt itself to China's development. Lip service is far from enough to boost the development of Sino-US relations. If Washington cannot find a way to recognize and accept China's peaceful rise onto the world stage, bilateral ties will be like a roller-coaster full of ups and downs. However, no one would like to see the negative effects rocky relations would bring to China, the United States and possibly the world as a whole.¹⁵⁰

Tensions between the systemic top-dog determined to retain its dominance and an assertive new underdog struggling to locate itself within the security order without compromising its 'core interests' were not new. In fact, such tensions had been predicted and analyzed for a decade before Barack Obama became president.¹⁵¹ However, given the fragility of the world's natural environment and the intensity of trans-national 'non-traditional' security threats, the depth and extent of global financial/economic challenges and the semi-symbiotic linkages between the American and Chinese economies, the deepening polarization in the regional security discourse crystallizing into adversarial blocs, and the lethality of arsenals on all sides, the fallout from any Sino-US conflict would likely devastate much of the planet. Beijing, perhaps in its self-preservation-focused mindset, appeared to understand this, but still faced the challenges confronting the underdog in a dynamic security environment:

China won't follow a path to war like Japan did in World War II, but that does not mean that China will surrender to US strategic containment. China should on one hand speed up defensive modernization, and on the

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other hand, continue to rise peacefully using its economic power ... Taking on China as a competitor may serve as an incentive to the US. If the US takes China as an enemy, the result would be disastrous.¹⁵²

While a more assertive expression of interest by China caused some of its neighbours to team up with America – Indonesia and Vietnam offering instances – Chinese diplomacy did notch up a few successes in the region, too. For three weeks in October and November 2010, specialists from the Royal Thai Marine Force Corps teamed up with a 115-strong contingent of Chinese Special Forces at Sattahip in Thailand to exchange and share skills in 12 specific areas of professional expertise.¹⁵³ This was the first foreign deployment of the Chinese Marine Corps, and reflected a deepening of Sino-Thai military links, notable because of Thailand's longstanding alliance with America.

Perhaps a bigger prize for Beijing arrived in early December when General Ricardo David, commander of the armed forces of the Philippines, the other American ally in Southeast Asia, visited China. Manila hinted at the prospect of substantial arms procurement plans David had taken to Beijing.¹⁵⁴ In discussions with Generals Liang Guanglie and Chen Bingde, David said, 'We must maintain peace and unhampered tranquillity in the South China Sea', assuring his hosts, 'The Philippines is committed to resolve disputes in the South China Sea in the most peaceful way together with China and ASEAN countries'.¹⁵⁵ While David was in Beijing, the Manila press reported the 'discovery' of a PLA-built new lighthouse on the Subi Reef (Zhubi Dao), also claimed by Manila and Hanoi, in violation of the DOC. When excitement over this 'betrayal' grew, Major General Juancho Sabban, Commander of the Philippines' Western Command, 'categorically denied the reports', insisting the structure had been built before China signed the DOC in 2002.¹⁵⁶ With Beijing engaging ASEAN neighbours in talks over maritime disputes, these military links suggested China's diplomatic efforts were finally beginning to pay dividends.

A glimpse into the murk

As 2010 wound down and President Hu Jintao's New Year visit to America approached, US officials began focusing on both the advantages of Sino-US cooperation and the gap that remained in mutual perceptions.¹⁵⁷ Chinese leaders repeatedly stressed Beijing's peaceable, non-revisionist and domestic development-focused ambitions for their country and the defensive nature of their military modernization programmes.¹⁵⁸ Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg's visit to Beijing, and the resumption of defence policy coordination talks between General Ma Xiaotian and Under Secretary of Defence Michele Flournoy in Washington, hinted at efforts to revive normalcy. Both sides stressed the global implications of bilateral relations, including military ones, and pledged to improve trust and understanding. However, the admission that

exchanges had been 'candid and pragmatic'¹⁵⁹ indicated significant residual differences. Still, the decision that Robert Gates would be in Beijing in January 2011, and Chen Bingde, PLA CGS, would visit Washington later in 2011, suggested restoration of relations to their pre-crisis levels.¹⁶⁰

With America, South Korea and Japan continuing large-scale exercises and North Korea threatening retaliation, the risks of confrontation forced a flurry of diplomacy. Steinberg and his Chinese hosts examined the Korean crisis as well as bilateral issues. State Councillor Dai Bingguo, having extracted Pyongyang's pledge to return to talks, briefed Steinberg.¹⁶¹ PLA commanders sought to similarly reassure Robert Gates during his trip. These discussions eased the preparations for Hu Jintao's visit to Washington. But Korea was a flashpoint symptomatic of deeper, structural, trans-Pacific dissonance. Beijing's approach, however helpful, did not indicate what the final outcome of the potentially dangerous Sino-US dialectic might be. That would depend on both powers.

As Hu Jintao sat down with Barack Obama at the White House in January 2011, the questions were – would America expect China to conform to a set of strategic parameters set by Washington and its allies, or would the two powers work out a new framework of collaboration on the basis of consultative equality? Would America acknowledge that with few practical levers substantially to constrain the growth of Chinese capability and consequent erosion of US primacy, it would have to adapt itself to a shared approach to system management? Would China accept that it could no longer advance its own image as that of a perennial victim, and acknowledge the burdens of responsibility that came with enhanced power? Would the transition to this perhaps 1:0.75 para-bipolarity be managed calmly, with vision and statesmanship? Or would brinkmanship popular with domestically focused populist politicians win the day?

Within the region, would America persist and succeed in forging a 'ring of steel' around China? Would China's neighbours vigorously join that enterprise? Would Beijing moderate the assertions of its interests sufficiently to allay neighbourhood concerns at the heart of polarization, or respond even more robustly and energize a downward spiral? In other words, would America and its allies seek to contain China and trigger dangerously defensive insecurity, or adapt themselves to the reality of a transformed Asia-Pacific strategic landscape? Would Washington reject China's unelected, authoritarian, one-party political system and seek to subvert it, or consider it in a similar light, for instance, to Saudi Arabia, and be diplomatically critical of the system's harshness as appropriate while working to secure and promote shared interests? In short, would America and China adjust their claims on the system by rebalancing their mutual interactions, or would they wage a *status quo vs. revisionist* war to resolve their fundamental differences?

With both America and China facing possible leadership transitions in 2012–13, these questions assumed a sharper profile. Whether the two men could address, far less answer, these to mutual satisfaction was not clear. And

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yet, the system in its pristine post-Cold War near-clarity no longer had the air of permanence. America's military dominance could not be eroded but its economic substance looked more fragile. China's military–technological leap was dramatic but of a regional variety. Washington still mustered almost global endorsement and acquiescence if not committed support, while Beijing had few effective allies capable of standing up to the coalition coalescing around China's rims. As China asserted its claims, its neighbours fashioned a US-led security shield.

Neither America nor China appeared willing or able to break out of the dialectics precipitating an Asia-Pacific polarization into unfriendly blocs. America's domestic political alignments appeared fluid while China's political system remained brittle. Strategic competition in the context of semi-symbiotic economic, commercial and financial linkages looked inappropriate and, any victory, pyrrhic. With 'AirSea Battle' and Chinese responses to it tilting the emphasis and operational orientation towards pre-emptive strikes as each side sought to secure advantage, strategic stability could no longer be assured, but strategic volatility was. This combination of structural instability and a lack of definition was the essence of the security milieu emerging across the region. This was the new world Barack Obama's America both helped to create, and confronted, as he prepared to face the compulsions of the electoral cycle.

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