

THE RETURN OF UNITED STATES (US) POLICY OF CONTAINMENT ANDEVOLVING SINO-US CONTEST FOR MARITIME SUPREMACY

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Abstract. Maritime affairs, strategy, gunboat diplomacy, naval policy, and maritime policy can be found in the lexicon and available literature on naval affairs. Contrary to the abovementioned terminologies used by notable experts in the field including Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan authors have used the term “maritime/naval foreign policy.” Deliberate use of the term is aimed to compel people to pay attention and widely use it in the literature. The qualitative research method is deemed appropriate for the completion of this study. The hypothesis formulated in this paper is that naval might cannot be viewed alone as a means to achieve political, military, territorial, and economic objectives. This academic study emphasizes major powers’ navies are intrinsically superior to indigenous organs commanding seas and have foreign policies. The paper emphasizes that navies of hegemonic powers enjoy autonomy and influence decision-making processes and outcomes at home and abroad. The primary purpose of navies is to grow parasitically on state resources, build maritime empires outside the sphere of influence of political leadership, civilian bureaucracy, and rival armed forces, and often avoid providing information or if necessary, provide information on a need-to-know basis to the ruling political elite based in the center. This study emphasizes the United States (US) desire to remain a preponderant power, preserve status-quo and prevent threats to liberal international order by containing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) through the formation of mini-alliances resulting in PRC’s naval foreign policy. Beijing’s naval foreign policy core objective is to enter distant areas and secure the supply of energy shipments to the mainland by securing sea lanes of communications (SLCs). The enthusiastic policy is backed by deployments of aircraft carriers, amphibious naval forces, and the Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ).

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Maritime, Saber-rattling, China, United States, America.

1. Introduction: Navy’s Role in Foreign Policy

Literature on sea power, sea battles produced, and analysis of American Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* by experts in the field uses terms such as maritime affairs, maritime strategy, gunboat diplomacy, naval strategy, naval policy, maritime policy, etc. Contrary to preexistent terminologies available in literature this study uses the term Maritime/Naval Foreign Policy here to compel people to pay attention and widely use it in the literature. The hypothesis formulated in this paper is that naval might cannot be viewed alone as a means to achieve political, military, territorial, and economic objectives. Navies, particularly of major powers, engage with hostile powers to change their behavior, and influence decision-making processes and decision outcomes. The traditional role of the navies is to project national power, thwart external threats and defend national frontiers. This academic study emphasizes major powers’ navies are intrinsically superior to indigenous organs commanding seas and that the navy of hegemonic powers enjoy autonomy and influence the decision-making process and the decision-making process and decision outcomes at home and abroad. The primary purpose of navies is to grow parasitically on state resources and build a maritime empire outside the sphere of influence of political leadership, civilian bureaucracy, and rival armed forces and often avoid providing information or if necessary provide information on a need-to-know basis to the ruling political elite based in the center. Naval empires are analogous to private islands: ordinary taxpayers’ civilians, bureaucracy, constituent services, and government officials are not allowed to visit vessels, surface



ships, aircraft carriers, and other naval facilities. The network of facilities includes dry docks, piers, and refueling stations. It's not about increasing the number of warships and facilities. Amphibious forces provide the hegemon's navy to raise and sustain land forces whereas aircraft endow it to set up and preserve the indigenous air force. The state-of-the-art firepower and technology at the disposal of the admiral (Chairman Joint Chief of Staff) give him a potent weapon at its disposal. Naval palatinate non-hereditary empire acquires and retains lead position. It maximizes personal gains domestically e.g., by increasing the navy's portion in the country's budget, increasing influence in the decision-making process, and gaining access to modern warfighting hardware. Navies justify their gains by carrying out-of-area/overseas operations, maintaining an overseas presence through aircraft carriers, and building overseas naval bases.

2. American Navy's Ambitious Naval/Maritime Policy

Naval power played a significant role in expeditionary missions particularly in colonial conquests of Africa and Asia in the past two hundred years. Mahan's work explains the rise of the British Empire. Mahan's naval strategy had a profound impact on the United States of America (USA). Washington raised and sustained naval force. The US naval forces enabled it to gain a dominant position in an anarchical international system, sustain alliances, and access and gain control of significant maritime routes. The US played globally an influential role in times of peace, crises, and conflicts because of its powerful navy. Without a robust navy, it would have been a continental power in North America. The US Navy played a pivotal role in invading Latin America and the Caribbean during the second half of the 19th Century. Cuba has occupied from 1906 to 1909 again in 1912, and from 1917 to 1922. Dominican Republic in 1903, 1904, and 1914, and from 1916 to 1924. US military invaded and occupied Nicaragua in 1909-1910 and from 1912 to 1933, Guatemala in 1920, Costa Rica in 1921, and El Salvador in 1932, (Vine, 2020). US military continued expeditionary missions by intervening Korean Peninsula in 1950 (Thompson & Nalty, 1996), and Vietnam (Statler, 2007). The US Navy's aerial photography and patrol aircraft played a key role in 1962, in bringing into the limelight the deployment of Soviet Missiles in Castro's Cuba. Naval blockade or quarantine prevented the Soviet Union from supplying and deploying additional missile forces in Cuba (Cuban Missile Crisis, n.d.). Inference drawn is the navy's Atlantic Command's coercive role played a pivotal role in influencing the behavior of Soviet Union leadership. US President J.F. Kennedy's political use of the Navy achieved foreign policy objectives without resorting to the use of force. The Navy's political use had been a central element of the prolonged policy of containment against the Soviet Union. Presently, Washington is using it to slow down the rise of China as a regional hegemon in South East Asia. occupying Somalia from August 1992 to March 1994 (Stewart, 2015), Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 (Katzman & Thomas, 2017), and Iraq in 2003 (Meierding, 2020). US domination and control of seas led to invasions and military interventions. It proved to be a menace as it led to the killings of innocent civilians at the hands of US occupation forces and insurgents. Further, US military adventurism resulted in the rise of transnational terrorist groups including the Islamic State in Iraq and Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Shabab and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-Somalia (Somalia: Extremism and Terrorism, 2022). Perhaps it is in this background Spykman rightly asserted "hegemony access to the sea can become a menace to far distant shores...."

David Vine an anthropologist claims as of July 2021 the US had over 750 military bases around the world (Vine, Lists of U.S., 2019). Germany alone hosts 119 US military bases followed by South Korea with 73 (Hussein & Haddad, 2021). Inference drawn is overseas naval bases and a huge naval force raised the US to the status of superpower in the Cold War era. In the post-Cold War gigantic naval force raised it to the status of the global hegemon and build a maritime empire stretched across the globe.

3. American Navy is Reviving Cold War Era Rivalry

The US Navy's disruptive role is not confined to toppling the government and providing breeding grounds for transnational terrorist groups alone. It is playing a key role in dividing the world on ideological basis analogous to Cold War era blocs politics. A distinct feature of the budding Cold War is the US navy's assertive behavior and policy of intimidation. America is rebalancing its traditional approach to Asia. The rebalancing policy requires Pentagon to develop alliances with



China's immediate neighbours, and deploy sixty percent of its naval and air combat forces to Asia (Zhengyu, 2019). Pentagon's rebalancing strategy for Asia is considered to be a part of a long-term policy of containment, encirclement, and defeating of China's anti-access and area denial (AC/AD) capabilities. The deployment of warfighting capabilities in Southeast Asia bestows the US to cut off sea lanes of communications (SLCs) or blockade China-bound energy imports (Ahmed, Qais, Kakkar, & Muhammad, 2022).

On March 5, 2018, USS Carl Vinson, US aircraft carrier port of call to Danang, Vietnam, signaled directions and the growing significance of Hanoi in Washington's foreign policy and vice-versa. On March 25, 2019, US Coast Guard cutter Bertholf and the navy's destroyer Curtis Wilbur transited through the Taiwan Strait. Port of call plays a twofold role e.g. It signals foreign policy priorities. Secondly, it can be used to send signals to adversaries of growing strategic partnerships. Therefore, transit sparked a response from the Chinese foreign ministry urging overseas balancers to avoid harming bilateral relations, regional peace, and stability (Ali, 2019). The shadow games or clock-and-dagger operations are an integral part of the pre-conflict non-war version of geo-political rivalry. The intentions of these visits can be interpreted as underlining US-Vietnam and US-Taiwan strengthening strategic partnerships, and US growing influence in the PRC's sphere of influence. Inference drawn is the US is expanding its network of micro alliances in collaboration with South East Asian nations including former foe Vietnam. US naval presence in the South China Sea is inevitably encouraging provocative behavior, and militarization and endangering regional peace and stability. On November 24, 2020, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien assured the Philippines and Vietnam of American support over controversial claims in the South China Sea stating that "we have got your back," (China Accuses 'Dangerous', 2020). President Biden's Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's statement underscores PRC is America's next target. Blinken asserted that "we will remain focused on the most serious long-term challenge to the international order- and that is the one posed by the People's Republic of China," (Blinken Says China, 2022). The arrival of the enemy at the gates will naturally exacerbate Beijing's preexistent security dilemma. American navy's persistent presence and activities cannot go unnoticed resulting in anxiety. PRC foreign ministry's warning can result in the issuance of stern statements consequentially, the strategic temperature will increase. Bilateral saber-rattling will usher in a new era of competition for supremacy, competing for foreign policies, and misperceptions leading to a revival of the new perilous Cold War.

4. The American Navy's Coercive Naval Diplomacy: The Development of China-Specific Micro Military Alliances

The significance and role of SLCs in connecting and dominating the world stage and global economies are increasing. Littoral states with robust amphibious naval forces will better defend their national frontiers and affect the outcomes of foreign policies in an anarchical international system. Since the end of World War II (WW-II), the American navy dominates vital SLCs. In the 21st Century, the world is moving towards multi-polarity, particularly in the third decade. In the post-9/11 era, the US global dominance and hegemony are slowly and gradually being challenged. Safeguarding American interests by preventing the rise of peer competitors is considered imperative to preserve its hegemonic position. The National Security Strategy (NSS) published by the then-President Trump administration and incumbent President Joe Biden's administration highlighted China as a long-term security threat to the US. Washington understands applying coercive naval diplomacy to contain Beijing is neither sufficient nor an easy task. The NSS affirms the traditional policy of waging a "communication war" to portray a rival/ peer competitor as evil is presently employed against the emerging PRC. The primary purpose of communication war is to seek requisite support from allies.

US policymakers have been successful in convincing South East Asian countries that emerging China is a threat to their sovereignty. Traditional Western allies have been persuaded Beijing poses threat to liberal international order and the Western way of life. "China threat theory," serves a particular objective to provoke relations between Asia-Pacific Countries, NATO members, and China. The theory brings into the limelight military modernization, sea power, and increasing defence budget to portray China as a threat to international peace and liberal world order. "A modern, vitalized,



and militarized China...is going to be a threat not only to Japan but also to the position of the Western Powers in the Asiatic Mediterranean. China will be a continental power of huge dimensions in control of a large section of the littoral of that middle sea. Her geographic position will be similar to that of the United States regarding the American Mediterranean. When China becomes strong, her present economic penetration in that region will undoubtedly take on political overtones. It is quite possible to envisage the day when this body of water will be controlled not by British, American, or Japanese sea power but by Chinese air power," (Spykman, 1942). The second leg of traditional hegemon's containment of China is based on employing substantial measures "micro alliances" at the tactical level around China are created. The creation of a web of webs are illustrated by Mike Pompeo's assertion that Chinese Communist Party's "exploitation, corruption and coercion," requires counterbalancing (Rasheed, 2020). Washington's continuous investment in these groupings is replacing geo-economic strategy with the geo-strategic framework. Developing micro-military alliances around PRC during peacetime is part of coercive naval diplomacy. American strategic planners are taking measures to prevent China from taking control of SLOCs. Micro-military alliances serve the US's long-term objectives to exploit the strategic vulnerability by interdicting China's energy imports crucial source of funding PLAN's expansion and overseas presence during crises. Inference can be drawn that the US has deployed its combat forces in closer proximity to employ a forward defence strategy against China. This strategy supports offensive operations to attack high-value targets in mainland China if war breaks out in the future. Exacerbating Beijing's suspicions and security dilemma and resulting in countermeasures. It is naturally making the South China Sea a new battleground for major powers' competition.

5. The QUAD

US strategy and investment in the containment of China policy can be understood in the light of two distinct theories first, offensive realism. John J. Mearsheimer's structural theoretical framework emphasizes states can never be satisfied with their security. A hegemonic position in the international system is perceived as a level of security satisfaction by the states. Achieving hegemony becomes the ultimate objective (Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of*, 2001) for states. Secondly, Thucydides' trap term coined by Graham T. Allison. The theory contends an emerging power's ability to replace a pre-existent hegemon in the international system makes conflict inevitable. Hegemon struggles to preserve the status quo as the change in the system is viewed as a personal loss (Allison, 2017). Presently, China inherits the potential and capabilities to replace America as the sole hegemon in the international system. Naturally, containment of China is deemed appropriate. US, Australia, Japan, and India together formed QUAD, a micro naval alliance with the most advanced naval warfighting amphibious capabilities. It is synonymous with Asian NATO to contain China and preserve US dominance in Asia-Pacific. US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on October 22, 2019, in his speech categorically asserted QUAD's role is, "ensuring that China retains only its proper place in the world," (Pompeo, 2019). The US navy is playing a key role in evolving anti-PRC micro-military alliances and shaping the geostrategic environment in South East Asia. The evolving arms race, military buildups, and alliance formations in Asia-Pacific underpin the dawn of the 21st Century Cold War. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian in February 2022 termed it "a deliberate move to stoke confrontation and undermine international solidarity and cooperation...." Lijian termed QUAD as an "outdated Cold War mentality...." (Quad a "Deliberate", 2022).

6. AUKUS

US evolved a micro naval alliance comprising Atlantic and Pacific states e.g., Australia, United Kingdom, and United States (AUKUS). It is a new naval alliance to deter PRC's growing influence in South Pacific (AUKUS: Is An, 2021). The AUKUS is evolved in an attempt to maintain US hegemony and status-quo in South Pacific archipelago. It aims to keep China out of the region. However, American attempts to prevent China's rise is deepening mistrust, confusion and preexistent security dilemma. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's statement regarding US strategy, "walking further and further down the path of error and danger," (Hawkins, 2023) supports the above claim. Washington's desperate attempts to contain or slow down Beijing's influence are leading to global competition on land, cyber-space, outer space, and oceans. Thucydides' trap



(Ahmed, Muhammad, Owais, Ullah, & Usman, 2022) is that the hegemon feels threatened by the rise of emerging power. The situation results in the outbreak of war/ conflict. A theoretical framework based on offensive realism also explains the US security policies. It provides an explanation for the evolving and preexistent security structures and the budding global strategic competition. These theoretical frameworks portray Beijing's military capabilities as a substantial threat to the US-created liberal order and national security. The Western naval alliance led by the US Navy is tailored to push China back and limit it to the region. Consequentially, the tasks of US traditional naval presence and naval superiority will be achieved. China contrarily a revisionist state wants to change the US-dominated Asia-Pacific Order thus stakes for both sides are high. Escalating strategic rivalry in Asia-Pacific is dangerously increasing the cost of potential war and the risks involved.

7. NATO's Expansion to South East Asia

Previously, the US regarded PRC as a threat. Contrarily, Western allies had differing and divided viewpoints. In 2021, transatlantic cohesion resulted in changing scenario. First, US-led NATO allies firmly declared China's military capabilities, cyber, hybrid, and asymmetric activities as a threat to the West's security and established liberal international order (NATO Says China, 2021). A dangerous triangle involving US-NATO vis-à-vis China is evolving. The West has marked rising China as a strategic competitor, a mortal enemy and it is decided to expand NATO to Southeast Asia. In July 2022 NATO officials decided to expand the world's strongest alliance to South East Asia (Inagaki, Fildes, & Sevastopulo, 2022) in pursuit to contain PRC's rise. The world's strongest military alliance enjoys support from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Japan. The NATO and the Indo-Pacific countries' coherent approach and increasing defence budget underline the alliance's assertive approach and bellicose intentions to contain rising China. The Southeast Asian theater would have the US, the European countries, and the regional states aligned against the PRC. Keeping in view the attempts to expand the Western block it is proposed to rename the alliance as North Atlantic Pacific Alliance (NAPTO).

8. Chinese Maritime Foreign Policy Objectives

In 2012, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi headed CCP's 18th Party Congress. Xi expressed his determination to make PRC maritime great power. After becoming President Xi Jinping reiterated this goal in 2017 (Chubb, 2019). PRC's strong economic base, technological supremacy, robust military, diplomatic clout, and strategic autonomy endow it to have a global outreach. It necessitates articulation of transnational foreign policy to determine China's position as a peer competitor rather than a second-class citizen in the US-dominated liberal international order. Authors believe Beijing's core naval foreign policy objectives include the following,

1. Modernize and sustain PRC's amphibious naval forces to narrow the gap vis-à-vis advanced militaries.
2. Enter distant areas, expand PLAN, and maintain global presence by gradually acquiring overseas naval bases.
3. Create new military bases in the South China sea to restore the Balance of Power (BOP) Vis-a-Vis US in the South China Sea, cement regional control, and compel hostile US naval forces to withdraw from the Chinese sphere of influence.
4. Ensuring Chinese national security, and protection of SLOCs and preventing Taiwan from declaring independence.
5. Establish a Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ).
6. Convince adversaries' cost of war will increase in case of deterrence breakdown.

This study underlines Chinese government is making clear, substantial, and sustained efforts to raise and sustain a blue water navy. The PRC is taking necessary steps to protect its national sovereignty, and ensure the defence of sea lanes of Communications. PLAN is the nucleus of this evolving strategy. The succeeding paragraphs highlight PLAN's role in achieving national security objectives. The return of the American policy of containment proves to be a force multiplier for PRC's naval modernization and expansion.



9. Chinese Navy's Role in Achieving Maritime/Foreign Policy Objectives

The Chinese Whitepaper published in 2019, underlined the US, created and dominated the international system. The established international order favours US national security and defence policies and endows it to enjoy hegemony. Conversely, it pushes major power competition (China's National Defense, 2019). The PRC has two policy options to commit suicide by accepting the status quo as a second-class citizen of the international community. Second, to prove its relevance for the established international system. It requires China to embark on a new career, and endeavor to cautiously enforce perceived and proclaimed jurisdiction in the South and East China Sea. New policy inherits the implementation of the balance of power (BOP) strategy against the US. Certainly, it requires the PRC navy to orchestrate policy (mentioned in this paper as maritime/naval foreign policy).

First, a feature of evolving naval foreign policy is to ensure PLAN's transformation from brown-water to green to blue-water navy. The second aspect is to maintain its presence in the Indian Ocean and other distant areas. This aspect is viewed by rivals as an interest, and a demonstration by Beijing to play a global role and ensure naval expansion or overseas outreach. However, American naval experts believe PLAN's unending out-of-area operations, overseas naval facilities, and dispersed fighting capabilities increase their survivability against potential attacks. Survival instinct and maneuverability increase threats to the US mainland in case of future war breakouts. Critics believe PLAN's naval modernization and navy's foreign policy's top priority is to change the US-favoured Southeast Asian regional order. Consequentially, revisions in status-quo will perpetually prevent US policy of intimidation, complete control, and abuse of military power in South East Asia vis-à-vis China. A question rises: can PRC achieve maritime/ naval foreign policy objectives at the cost of American interest? The succeeding section underlines PLAN capabilities and naval foreign policy.

10. Power Projection: Pursuit for Restoring Balance of Power and Creating Regional Sphere of Influence

Beijing believes PRC's national interests can be best achieved by developing and deploying a strong navy and maritime/naval foreign policy. A Pentagon report published in 2020 affirms PLAN's efforts enabled it to become the world's largest navy (Military and Security, 2020). PLAN incorporated qualitatively improved military hardware including multirole platforms, fifth generation J-20 stealth fighter aircrafts deployed on aircraft carriers, destroyers, anti-air, anti-ship, anti-submarine weapons, frigates, amphibious forces, warships (Sutton, 2019) submarines, unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) and aircraft carrier destroyer missile forces (Gatopoulos, 2020). PRC aims to continue the modernization process to sustain its naval power. The ambitious program's core objective is to project PRC's military might and enhance deterrence credibility. The program comprises short-term policy objectives i.e., to raise six aircraft carrier strike force by 2035. Long-term planning includes bridging the quantitative/qualitative technological and military gap vis-à-vis the US. Additional features include playing its role in contributing to world peace and regional stability by developing and deploying futuristic nuclear-powered aircraft carriers to enter distant areas. Djibouti base is likely destination for Chinese aircraft carriers the US Africa Command Head General Stephen Townsend briefed the Congress House Armed Services Committee in 2021. Gen. Townsend stoked Committee Members by aiding PRC in looking for additional naval bases in the region (Vandiver, 2021).

PLAN's strategy is defensive in nature yet it is cautiously achieving naval foreign policy objectives backed by power projection capabilities to e.g., enhance deterrence credibility, thwart external threats posed to PRC's sovereignty, consolidate control on the regional sphere, expand regional influence, and gain regional autonomy. The key takeaway gleaned from the above passage is power projection is a tool for creating a regional sphere of influence by forcing the overseas hegemon (US) to peacefully withdraw from the Chinese sphere of influence. However, the US, Western allies, and regional states have alleged PRC's coastguard and militia forces of intimidating, imposing their will, subduing regional neighbours, and encroaching in neighboring countries' strategically important waters (Lin, 2019).

11. Entering Distant Areas

Aircraft carriers play manifold roles in entering distant areas, power projection, and if required warfighting. In 1922, the Japanese empire commissioned its first aircraft carrier. The US followed the suit and commissioned Lexington and Saratoga aircraft carriers in 1927. Lexington played a key



role in defending Moresby port and sinking Shoho Japanese Career. Aircraft from Saratoga sank Career Ryujo in Eastern Solomons (Brimelow, 2020). During and in the Post World War II (WWII) era, till day aircraft careers endowed the American navy to dominate and command seas.

Verifiable data affirms a decade ago; China did not have a single aircraft carrier. The Navy's supportive role pushed Beijing to evolve a world-class naval force. Presently, PLAN's aircraft carrier fleet includes Kuznetsov-class design, Soviet-era Liaoning, domestically-built Shandong (Gatopoulos, 2020) and the Fujian uses electromagnetic catapults. The fourth aircraft carrier is probably nuclear-propelled under construction (China Launches Third, 2022). PLAN, today, has evolved into the world's largest navy. Inevitably PRC introduced changes in naval formation and strategy. Defence White Paper 2019 certified the abovementioned claim. Earlier, the PLA navy's mission was "defense on the near seas" but it has transformed into "protection missions on the far seas." Qualitative advancements and ever-growing large size endow the PLA navy to maintain a presence in the red sea through its naval bases in Djibouti. Gawadar port extended PLAN's reach to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf (Chaziza, 2020). PLAN's entry into distant areas including the Caribbean and Latin America (Woody, The US Military, 2022) elucidate its growing interest to stretch military muscles, acquire foreign bases and desire to expand its influence. In March 2021 Admiral Craig Faller feared PLAN is projecting power, establishing and sustaining basing infrastructure in the hemisphere. Head of US Southern Command Gen. Laura Richardson expressed apprehensions in August 2021 over the Chinese navy's entry into, power projection, and constant presence in Latin America (Woody, The US Military, 2022). US military top brass is closely monitoring Chinese naval developments and regards it as a long-term strategic rival. Therefore, PRC's naval foreign policy objectives have caused unease in US decision-making circles. PRC's entry into the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean, solidified position in South East Asia, and presence in Central America and the Pacific Ocean is a cause of concern for the US. Phil Davidson, former Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command interpreted the abovementioned moves as PLAN's long-term strategy is to achieve great power status by mid-century (Grady, China's Navy Could, 2022). PLAN's presence in distant areas is regarded as Indian Ocean Fleet and the Pacific Fleet (Bo, Yanpei, & Till, 2020). The worrisome aspect of PLAN's entry into distant areas includes its firepower/combat capabilities are increasing difficulty for the enemy to destroy PRC's counterforce assets in surprise or decapitating attack. Dispersed firepower complicates enemy war planning, and increases PLAN's potential to punish aggressors in future wars. Consequentially, increased deterrence credibility is exacerbating unease in enemy policymaking circles. It intensifies opponents' pre-existent security dilemma and requires an increase in the defence budget, procurement of additional weapon systems, and modifications in war planning. Pentagon is closely monitoring Chinese developments around the world. A report published in 2021 claims that China plans to establish military facilities, particularly on the African continent. Potential sites include Kenya, Tanzania, and Angola (Why is US, 2021). US plans to preserve status-quo/hegemony, a policy of containment by creating a web-of-webs around mainland China and the development of military bases in the Chinese sphere of influence led to the evolution of Chinese naval foreign policy. PLAN's developments entering distant areas, the establishment of overseas naval bases, and power projection salient features of this policy are closely linked with American developments.

12. PLAN's Djibouti Naval Base

Commander of US Africa Command Gen. Stephen Townsend briefing the House Armed Services Committee on PLAN's Djibouti naval base asserted the base is a launching pad "to project power across the continent and its waters." He added PLAN is "around the continent, they are looking for other basing opportunities," (Pickrell, 2021). Townsend's strategic assessment underlines PRC's navy as a long-term systemic threat to US presence and diverse interests.

Twofold objectives of naval presence in Djibouti are to maintain a presence in the Indian Ocean, the African Continent, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Red Sea. The central objective of this naval base is perhaps to secure SLCs and Chinese-bound energy shipments. In addition, the base enables PLAN forces to keep an eye on American activities in the region.



13. Persian Gulf

In November 2021 American intelligence agencies stoked Biden Administration that PRC is constructing a suspected military base in United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Lubold & Strobel, 2021). US top-ranking officials' direct involvement includes President Joe Biden's conversation with UAE Crown Prince. Jake Sullivan US National Security Advisor and Brett McGurk, the White House Middle East Coordinator visits to UAE resulted in the halting of construction work on a Chinese suspected military facility. Intelligence estimates were based on satellite imageries of Port Khalifa. Cosco Chinese Shipping Corporation was alleged for constructing the facility (Borger, 2021). A conclusion can be drawn that Washington is keeping a close eye on Beijing's activities. Further, the US would use its influence to prevent Chinese expansion. The incident underlines the unfolding rivalry between two major powers. Global competition inherits seeds of dividing international members into different camps. The use of coercion, crisis, crisis management, diplomacy, soft power, and proxies are significant features of a budding rivalry. Direct involvement in crisis and mismanagement of the crisis would inherit the potential of the use of force

14. Eyeing on Asia-Pacific

Critics believe by developing and deploying aircraft carriers Beijing has expressed its intent, preliminary capabilities and its planning to extend its reach to Asia-Pacific (China's Next Aircraft, 2021). Most probably, Beijing will use the freedom of navigation in open seas pretext analogs to Washington's claim, to maintain its presence in the Western Pacific Ocean. The bigger picture includes the development of the PRC's strategic partnerships with countries in South America, to carry out joint naval exercises, develop naval bases to maintain a permanent presence, and create a sense of vulnerability in the minds of decision-makers in Washington. In January 2022 Coordinator for Indo-Pacific on National Security Council Kurt Campbell issued a warning that the Chinese can strategically surprise the US in the Pacific. This prophecy is partially fulfilled as China signed a Security Cooperation agreement with the Solomon Islands. The Accord allows the deployment of Chinese police and PLAN's ships visit provide it a toehold in South Pacific (Woody, 2022). In May 2022 then-Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Pacific Island states in pursuit to sign additional strategic and economic accords (Wilson & Weiwei, 2022). Beijing's long-term objective is to establish military/naval bases in America's backyard in the Pacific Island countries similar to the US naval bases in South East Asia. The PRC's entry into Western Hemisphere is changing the great geometry and strategic equation of the region. President Biden's national security strategy document regards China as America's peer competitor. The PLAN's gradual entry into the Pacific is invalidating the 1992 "Defense Planning Guidance" prepared by the American Department of Defense (Defense Planning Guidance, 1992). The document calls for preventing the rise of a peer competitor. Authors believe the magnitude of the American threat requires China to reply with imitation games by scrapping the Monroe Doctrine (Monroe Doctrine (1823), n.d.). However, Beijing will not restrict itself rather it would help a regional player to become a regional power in the Western Hemisphere. Consequentially, scrapping John J. Mearsheimer's theory. It asserts that the hegemon prevents the rise of peer competitors in its sphere of influence and distant regions (Mearsheimer, 2013).

Beijing's renewed approach towards Washington is marked with assertive behavior. Critique on US military exercises in the Western Pacific, testing of weapons during US official's visit to China, construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea (Grady, 2020), Foreign Minister Wang Yi's critique over US meddling in the Middle East (Zhou, 2022), and Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin warning that US was spreading disinformation to smear China's policies (China Criticizes US, 2022) are clear-eyed examples of Chinese self-confidence and readiness to assume the role of security guarantor in its sphere of influence. Strategic planners in Washington are wary of Beijing's unfolding strategic behavior because of the latter's capability to challenge American hegemony and reshape the liberal international order. Biden administration's National Security Strategy document termed it revisionist foreign policy of China. US document claims Beijing desires to become the leading power in the global system as Xi's China foremost objective. Biden administration has drawn a potential priority list and future intentions of the Xi administration. It includes creating Indo-Pacific as a Chinese sphere of influence (National Security Strategy, 2022).



China's outreach to distant places and active engagement is shrinking US regional hegemony. PRC's gains provide impetus to US strategic planners to view these gains at America's cost. Unfolding shifts in global strategic stability marks the beginning of a new Cold War.

15. Atlantic Ocean

American intelligence community revealed PRC aims at establishing a military base on Atlantic Ocean Coast in the Western African country Equatorial Guinea (Sofuoglu, 2021). The potential military base though does not pose border proximity to the US mainland. It is 4851.78 nautical miles/ 8991 kilometers away while the flight time of an average airplane is 9.85 hours. Yet, it is projected as hostile to the US mainland by the leading US think tanks (Lin, Blanchette, Bermudez Jr., & Dizolele, 2021), Media Houses, and serving and retired military personnel. The base is viewed as a launching pad against the US, a symbol of rising China, PRC's power projection, and dual-use facility. The US maintains over 750 military bases worldwide. Yet, National Security Advisor Jon Finer coerced Equatorial Guinea leadership to prevent the establishment of PLAN's naval base. Commander of US Africa Command General Stephen Townsend briefed US Senate that "the most significant threat" from PRC would be "a militarily useful naval facility on the Atlantic coast of Africa... a port where they can rearm with ammunitions and repair of naval vessels," (Phillips, 2021). Washington also coerced African countries to refuse Beijing the establishment of naval/military bases (US Coerces others, 2021). The main concern for Pentagon is base will expand Chinese economic engagement in the region improve its soft image, and facilitate naval expansion and stationing of warfighting capabilities. In the long-term Chinese foothold will pose a considerable challenge to American regional hegemony.

16. Extending China's Reach and Maintain Military Presence in the South China Sea

Construction of new-artificial islands in the South China Sea is a landmark policy of PLAN to increase its presence, solidify regional control and thwart threats to mainland China. PLAN is alleged of deploying military hardware to convert new Islands into military bases. Western literature available on the subject matter claims that PRC has completely militarized three of the artificial islands including Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, and Fiery Cross (China has Fully, 2022).

In May 2018 H-6K long-range bomber landed on an Island (China Bomber Makes, 2018). PLAN's activities have raised eyebrows in opponents' strategic, intelligence, naval, and diplomatic circles. Western media e.g., Washington Post on June 6, 2022, claimed PRC is constructing a military base "Ream Naval Base," in Northern Cambodia (Nakashima & Cadell, 2022). Western media deliberately manipulates information and censor reports to project a self-soft image while depicting PRC as a threat to liberal international order. From Beijing's perspective, PLAN's naval base in the Gulf of Thailand inherits the potential to put a check on the increasing presence of hostile forces including QUAD, Indo-Vietnam strategic partnership, and Indian expanding influence e.g., Brahmoos Supersonic Cruise Missiles sale to the Philippines (Peri, 2022). Modi administration's economic rise pushed India to encroach Chinese sphere of influence, arms South East Asian nations with sophisticated military weapons, and adopt aggressive approaches and anti-China policies. Indian growing strategic ties with Indonesia under the navy's banner (Sharma, 2022) is substantial proof. Contrarily, Western media refrained from highlighting Beijing's considerable security concerns and New Delhi's policy of encircling the PRC. Indian growing presence and aggressive encroachment in the Chinese backyard as a part of a geopolitical contest required countermeasures from China. Ream Naval Base's proximity with Thailand, Indonesia, and the strategically significant "Strait of Malacca," is a rational response. Naturally, PLAN will secure SLCs and oil shipments bound for PRC. American development of five military bases in the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, including Fort Magsaysay, Basa Air Base, Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base, Antonio Bautista Air Base, and Lumbia Air Base (Lamothe, 2016) is part of attempts to preserve status-quo in the South China Sea. Ream Naval Base increases Chinese capacity and capabilities to track movement and poses a credible threat to the US Fifth Fleet in the region in times of crisis. It serves as a bulwark against Washington's hegemonic designs and prospective belligerent actions from Philippine-based military bases.



17. Rejection of Tacit Agreement on Rival's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ)

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) provided data for May 2022 including photos and videos regarding the PLA's operations in the Philippine and East China Seas. The JMSDF endeavors to prove the PLA and J-15 aircraft over 300 sorties with light air-to-air missiles flew from the Liaoning (Dahm, 2023). These fighter aircraft are rejecting rivals' Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). Parallel to the rejection of tacit agreement on Taiwanese ADIZ by H-6k nuclear-capable bombers and surveillance missions (Siebens, 2020). People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is alleged of entering into South Korean and Japanese ADIZs as well (Trent, 2020) manifesting evolving change in status-quo. PLAAF entry into opponents' ADIZs endows it to gather critical intelligence information and decouple hostile coalition partners.


18. Conclusion


The key takeaway gleaned after careful assessment of naval developments is America and its Western allies believe the international liberal order is in danger because of rising China. Various options adopted by US revolves around its traditional policy of containment. The measures taken by America including the development of new micro military alliances, NATO's expansion to Southeast Asia, and equipping the Southeast Asian countries with advanced weapons are viewed dangerous by PRC. The West ignores hostile forces deployed around Chinese mainland are viewed by Beijing as a part of strategic containment to prevent China's rise. Further, American militarization and long-term sustained military presence in the South China Sea through the forward deployment of fighting capabilities and making PRC-specific micro-military alliances is heightening Sino-US tensions.

America and its Western allies want to control important maritime trade routes in the South China Sea to block PRC energy imports and exports of industrial production in crisis situations or in the event war breaks out. US wants to seek a position to prevent China from creating a maritime regional sphere of influence, disrupting the backbone of the Chinese economy, and ensuring to inflict maximum damage to China in case of deterrence breakdown. Coercive diplomacy, assertive military posture, and evolving military alliances challenge Beijing's maritime claims. It exacerbates the Chinese prevalent security dilemma. The future is viewed as perilous hence Chinese countermeasures to US policies are a natural response. Yet, Beijing is held responsible for the militarization of Southeast Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and the Atlantic Ocean. The Sino-US competing maritime objectives inherit the potential to have serious geopolitical implications.

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