



Geopolitics and Strategic Competition

A New Era?

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Agenda

Part 1. Return of Geopolitics

1. **1990-2008: Post-Cold War era**
2. **2008-2019: Return of Geopolitics in the 21st Century**
3. **Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region**

Part 2. US-China Strategic Competition

1. **Argument *for* the inevitability of US-China war**
2. **Argument *against* the inevitability of US-China war**
3. **Conclusion**



1. 1990-2008: Post-Cold War era

▪ After the Cold War- “The End of History”

- Victory of the Western Bloc over the Eastern Bloc

Capitalism over Communism

Liberal Democracy over Non-democracies



▪ After the Cold War- “The End of Geopolitics”

- No more World War or Cold War among Great Powers



Traditional Security Issues

- Territorial disputes
- Arms race, military tension
- Alliance, Balancing...etc.
- Inter-state Tensions



Non-traditional Security Issues

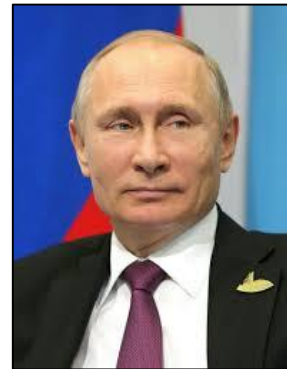
- Environmental problems
- Terrorism, Ethnic violence
- Human rights, R2P...etc.
- Intrastate, within-state problems

2. 2008-2019: Return of Geopolitics



▪ Revival of the Revisionist Powers

- **Russia:** war with Georgia, then annexing Crimea
- **Iran:** nuclear crisis and Arab Spring
- **China:** maritime claims in South China Sea, then East China Sea...



▪ Return of Geopolitics, but with more complexity



Traditional Security Issues

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Non-traditional Security Issues

- Environmental problems
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3. Geopolitics in Indo-Pacific Region



▪ Changes and Trends: Then and Now

2000

- USA: booming economy, huge surplus
- China: 5th largest economy @ 10% growth, “Charm offensive”
- Japan: 2nd largest economy, pacifist
- India: Joining the world economy
- Indonesia: Politico-economic crisis
- South China Sea: Peaceful
- ASEAN: A model organization
- South Asia: Insurgencies, conflicts, military dominant
- Oceania: Regional integration
- Burma: Military rule, Closed
- North Korea: Kim’s sabre rattling

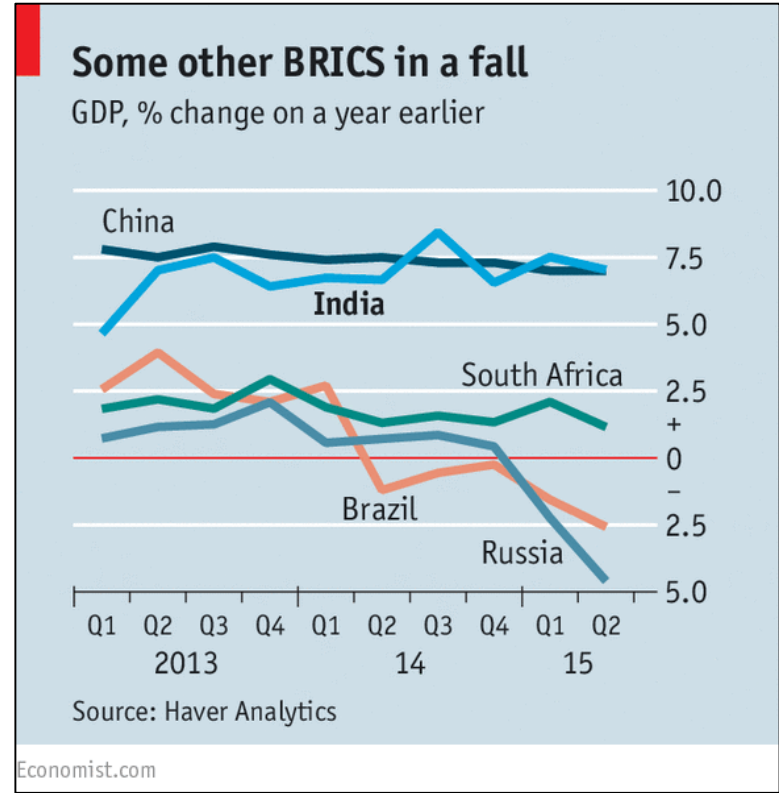
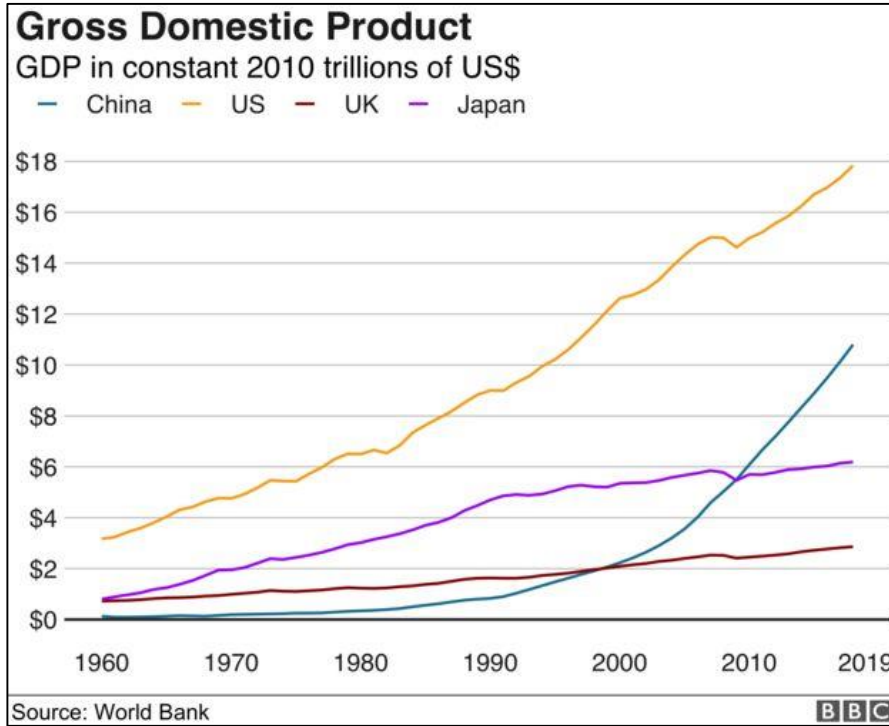
2019

- USA: economic recovery; huge debt
- China: 2nd largest economy @ 5% growth rate, “Harm offensive”?
- Japan: 3rd largest economy, nervous
- India: Rising power; \$2.5 trillion economy
- Indonesia: democracy, \$1 trillion economy
- South China Sea: Face off, threat of war
- ASEAN: A divided house?
- South Asia: Democracy restored, conflicts contained, growth takes off
- Oceania: Regionalism falling apart?
- Burma: Democracy, Open for business
- North Korea: Kim’s sabre rattling (?)



3. Geopolitics in Indo-Pacific Region

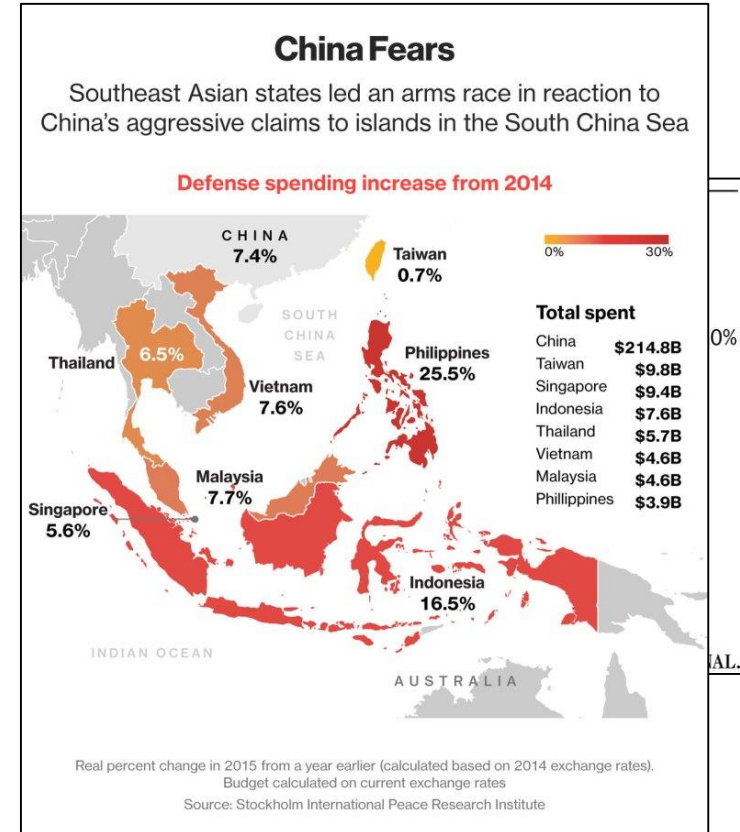
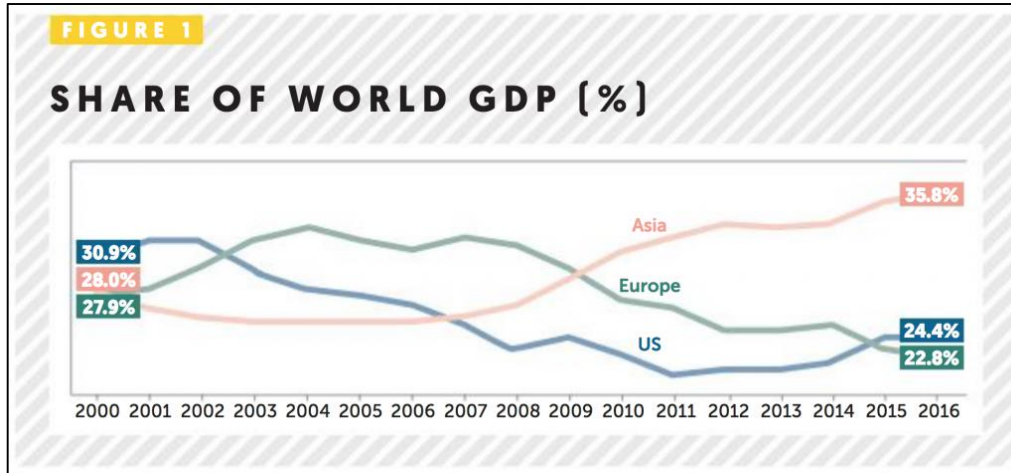
▪ Rise of China, India





3. Geopolitics in Indo-Pacific Region

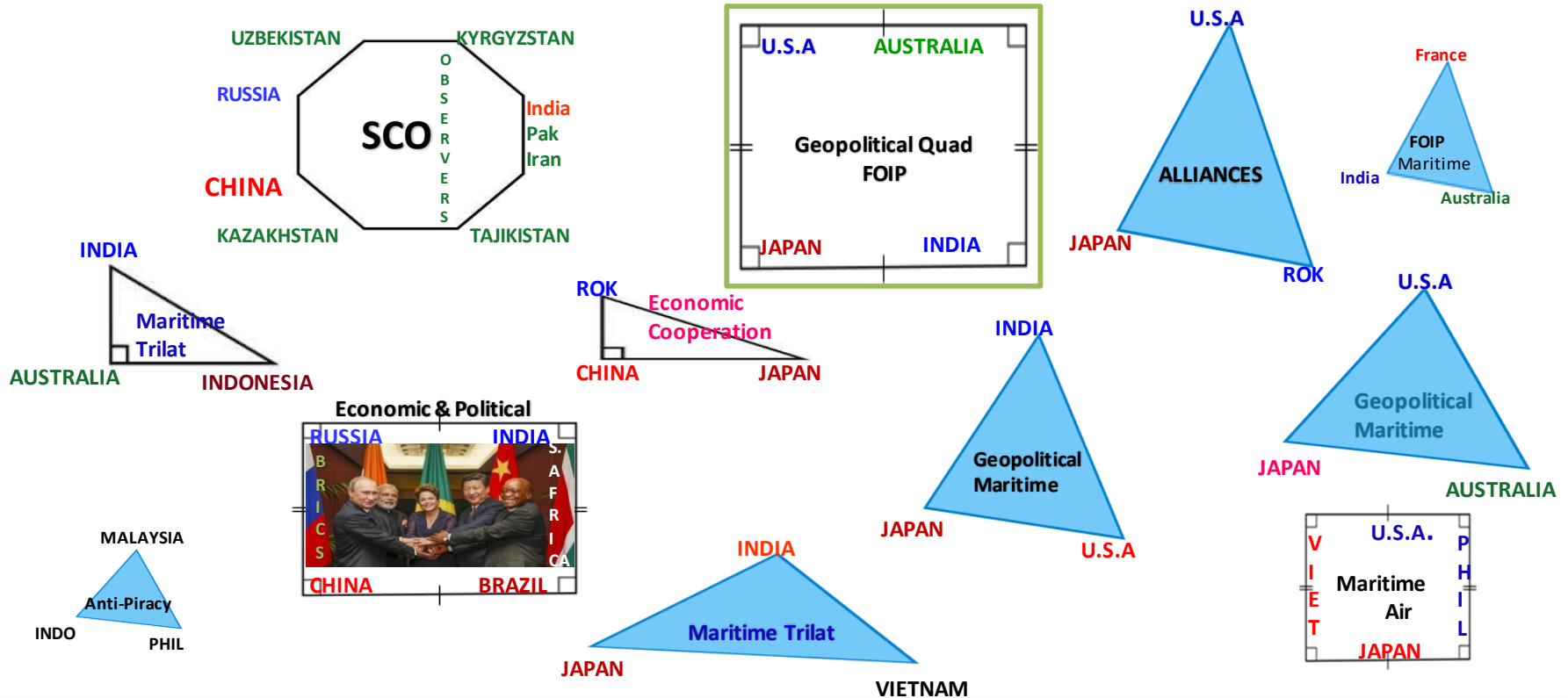
- Rise of China, and the rest of all in Asia.
 - Get rich, and spend money to buy arms!





3. Geopolitics in Indo-Pacific Region

- Complex overlapping of cooperation and competition





Thucydides Trap: is US-China war inevitable?





1. **Argument *for* the prospect of US-China War**
2. **Argument *against* the prospect of US-China War**
3. **Interim Conclusion**
4. **Caveats**
5. **Conclusion**



1. Argument for the Prospect of US-China War

▪ The Thucydides Trap

“When one great power threatens to displace another, war is almost always the result.”

▪ Graham Allison (2016)

“War between the US and China is more likely than recognize at the moment. Historical record proves it.”

▪ Logic:

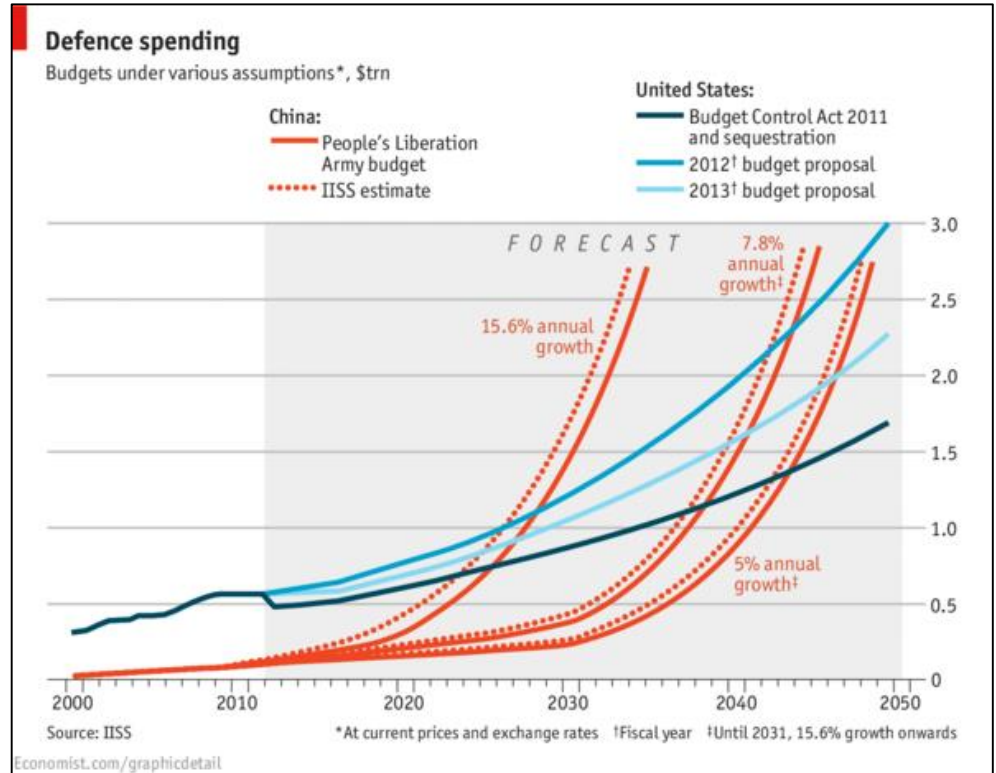
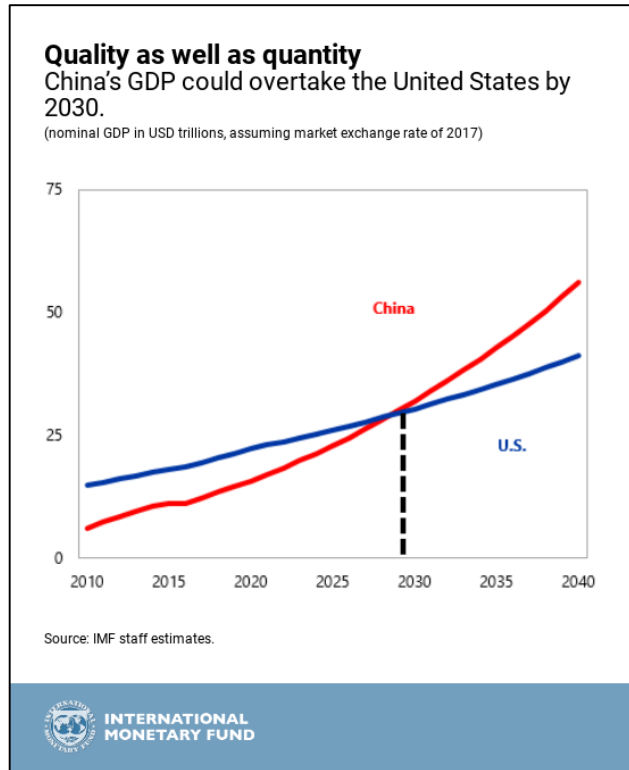
- Hubris of Rising Power
- Fear of Dominant Power

No	Period	Ruling Power	Rising Power	Domain	Result
1	Late 15 th century	Portugal	Spain	Global empire and trade	No war
2	First half of 16 th century	France	Habsburgs	Land power in western Europe	War
3	16 th and 17 th centuries	Habsburgs	Ottoman Empire	Land power in central and eastern Europe, sea power in the Mediterranean	War
4	First half of 17 th century	Habsburgs	Sweden	Land and sea power in northern Europe	War
5	Mid-to-late 17 th century	Dutch Republic	England	Global empire, sea power, and trade	War
6	Late 17 th to mid-18 th centuries	France	Great Britain	Global empire and European land power	War
7	Late 18 th and early 19 th centuries	United Kingdom	France	Land and sea power in Europe	War
8	Mid-19 th century	France and United Kingdom	Russia	Global empire, influence in Central Asia and eastern Mediterranean	War
9	Mid-19 th century	France	Germany	Land power in Europe	War
10	Late 19 th and early 20 th centuries	China and Russia	Japan	Land and sea power in East Asia	War
11	Early-20 th century	United Kingdom	United States	Global economic dominance and naval supremacy in the Western Hemisphere	No war
12	Early-20 th century	United Kingdom supported by France, Russia	Germany	Land power in Europe and global sea power	War
13	Mid-20 th century	Soviet Union, France, UK	Germany	Land and sea power in Europe	War
14	Mid-20 th century	United States	Japan	Sea power and influence in the Asia-Pacific region	War
15	1940s–1980s	United States	Soviet Union	Global power	No war
16	1990s–present	United Kingdom and France	Germany	Political influence in Europe	No war



2. Argument for the Prospect of US-China War

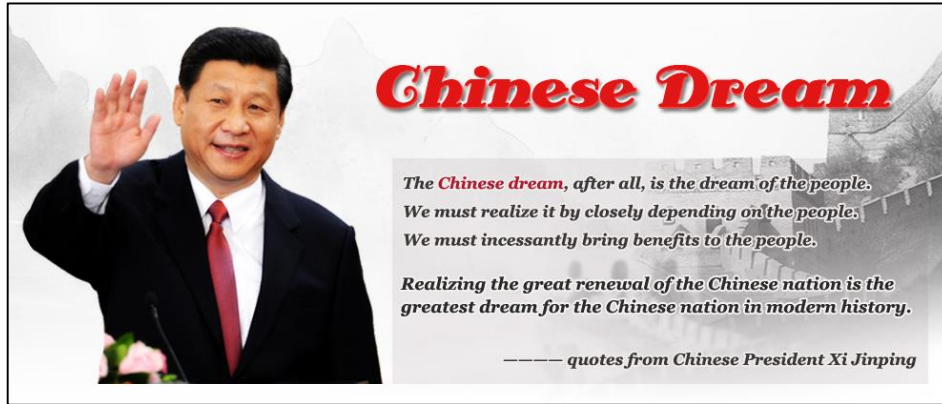
- Evidence: China's rapid economic and military rise- CAPABILITIES.





2. Argument for the Prospect of US-China War

- Evidence: China's Goal and Strategy- INTENT/BEHAVIOR (* as perceived outside)



1. Pursue a Regional Hegemony in a Slow and Stealthy Manner.

2. Do not provoke the US and the coalition of balancing forces.



3. Adopt the tactics of

- Salami-Slicing in South China Sea, instead of outright takeover
- Utilizing Economic Tools, instead of military forces
- Divide and Rule, instead of provoking the united front



3. Argument against the Prospect of US-China War

- Evidence: despite rising, China cannot match the US power at the global level.

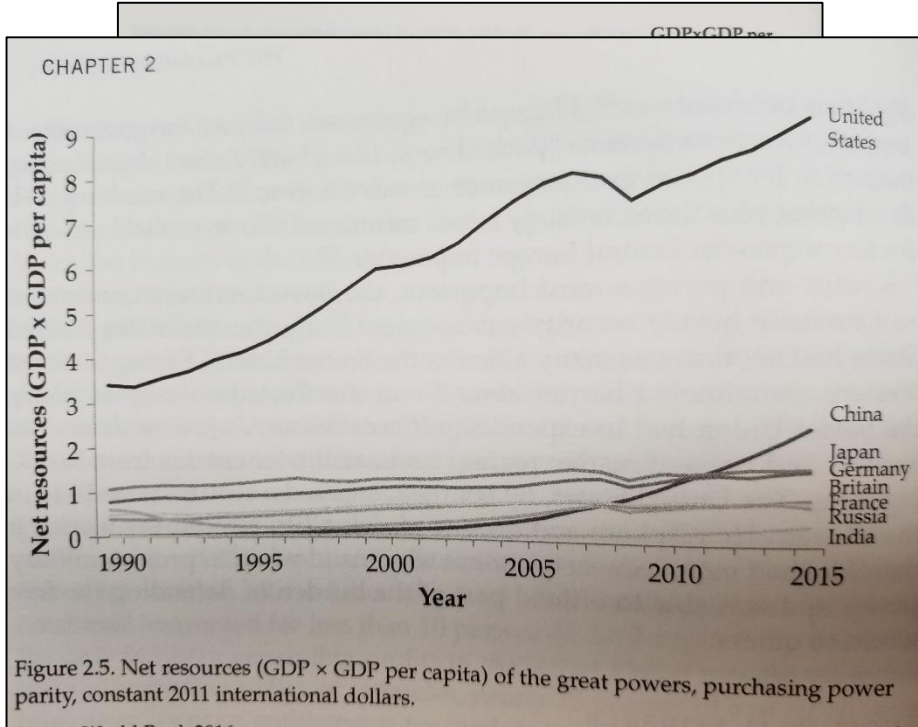
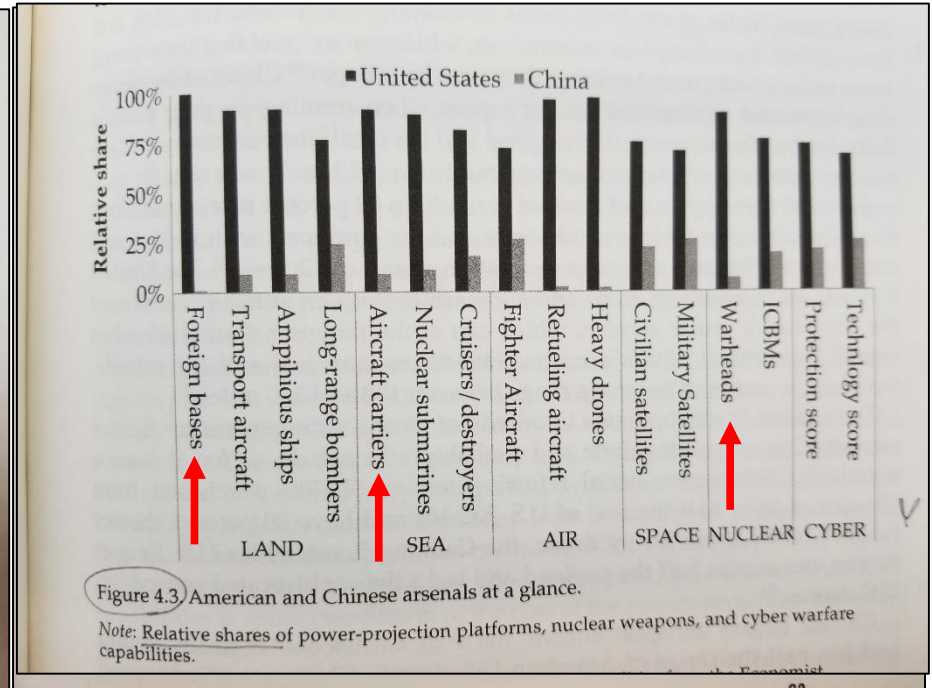


Figure 2.2. Chinese and Japanese relative shares of power resources in 1990.
Source: Maddison 2003; Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972.



(Source: *Unrivaled*, 2018)



3. Argument against the Prospect of US-China War

- Evidence: despite rising, China cannot match the US power at the regional level.

- Geography and Security Costs



- Obstacles to Chinese Naval Expansion

- The US from the 1890s to today
- The Imperial Japan in the 1930-40s
→ 80~ 99 percent of **naval tonnage** in America and Asia respectively
- China today
→ less than 30 percent of Asia
- **Asian nations' A2/AD capabilities against China (Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan...)**

(Source: *Unrivaled*, 2018)



3. Argument against the Prospect of US-China War

▪ Stopping Forces in the Road to War

1. “There is nothing new under the sun- except nuclear weapons.”

2. Democratic (or Capitalist) Peace + Economic Independence

3. China’s Internal Challenges- Economy

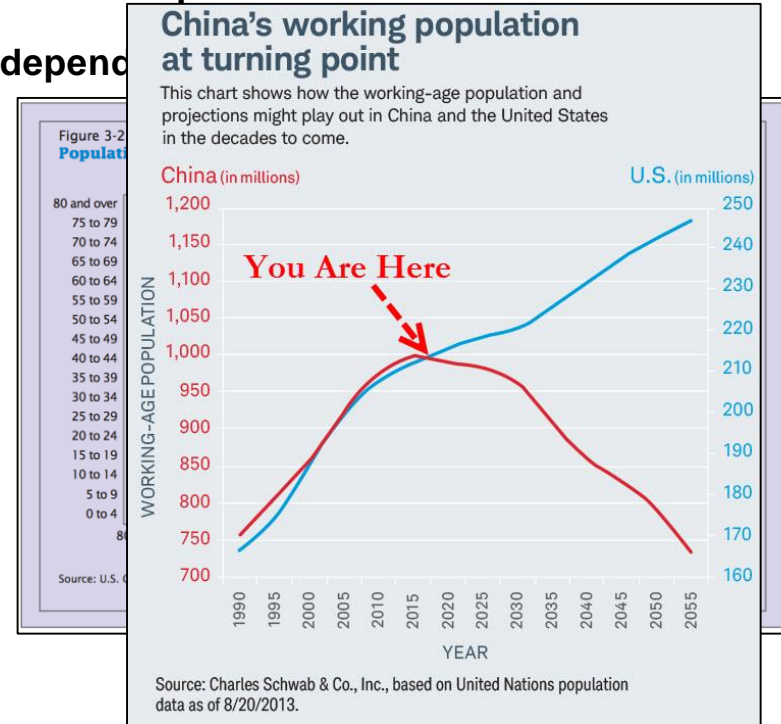
- Economic Slowdown (“Middle-Income Trap”)
- Over-production / over-investment
- Widening Inequality

4. China’s Internal Challenges- Political

- Increasing Protests
- Potential Legitimacy Crisis
- Separatist Movements

5. China’s Internal Challenges- Demographic

- “China will become old before getting rich.”





4. Interim Conclusion

- **Theory of Hegemonic War (or Thucydides Trap)**

~~“If power transition (even relatively defined) occurs,~~
war is more likely to occur between rising power and dominant power.” ?

- **We are living in Unipolar Era**

- Not the era of power transition
- US unrivaled
- but need to cooperate with others
- China is big and rising
- but inefficient and slowing-down
- Future trends in favor of the US

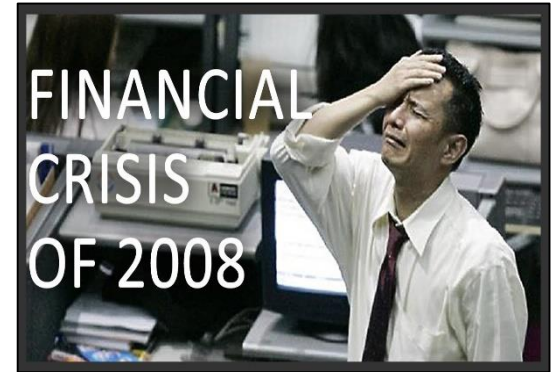
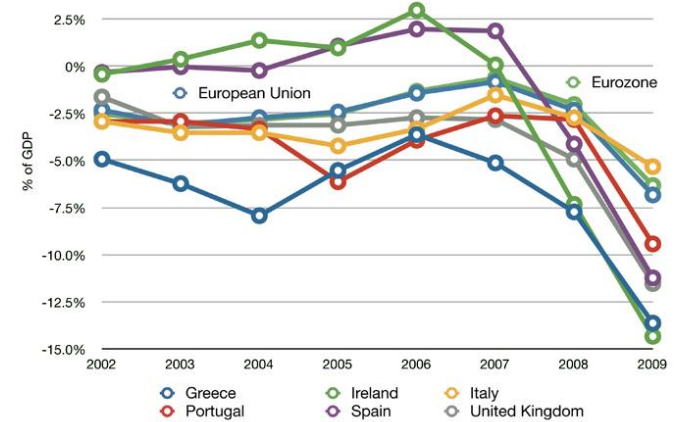
- **Then why the assertive foreign policy of China since 2008?**

- Territorial Disputes in South China Sea
- Territorial Disputes in East China Sea
- Confronting US over North Korea, Iran
- Standoff on Climate Change
- Launching of BRI, AIIB...

5. Caveats



Remember the year 2008...



5. Caveats



- **Theory of Hegemonic War (or Thucydides Trap)**

~~“If power transition (even relatively defined) occurs,~~
war is more likely to occur between rising power and dominant power.” ?

- **Misperception**

- Reality: Long-lasting Unipolarity with US power unrivaled
- Misperception: Emerging Bipolarity with China's rise
- Overconfidence of China → Emboldened to challenge the US
- Paranoia of the United States → Stimulated to contain China → Security Dilemma !

- **Miscalculation**

- Reality = Perception: Long-lasting Unipolarity with US power unrivaled
- Overconfidence of the US → Emboldened to stand firm against China
- Paranoia of China → “Use it or Lose it” mentality → Security Dilemma !



6. Conclusion

- Theory of Hegemonic War

~~“If power transition (even relatively defined) occurs,
war is more likely to occur between rising power and dominant power.”~~

- Thucydides Trap: Is US-China War Inevitable?

- No. The US is too powerful and far away for China to challenge.

- Unipolarity makes the hegemonic war between the US and China highly unlikely.

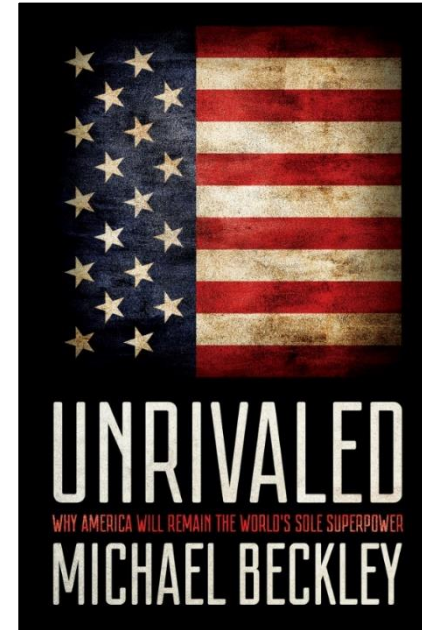
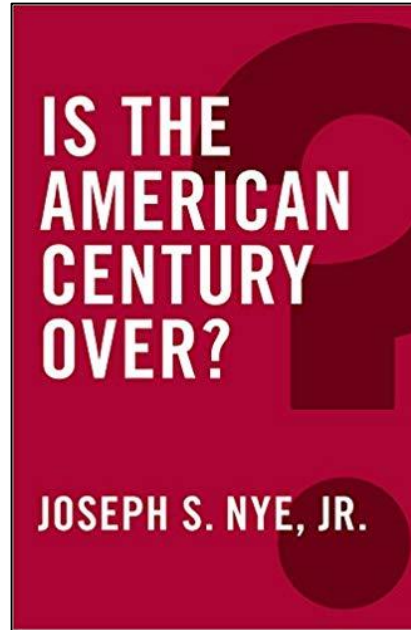
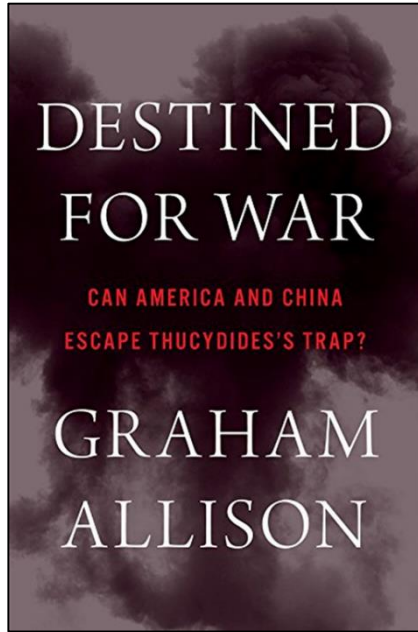
- But with the conditions

- Widespread misperception about power transition should be corrected.

- Until then, no hubris for China + no exaggerated fear for the US

- In the long run, no hubris for the US + no exaggerated fear for China

Book Recommendations



“The rise of China recalls Thucydides’ other warning that belief in the inevitability of conflict can become one of its main causes.” – Joseph Nye



- *Questions for Discussion*

1. Security assessment

- “How will geopolitics affect Thailand?”

2. Future Forecast

- “What are the policy implications of this new era of strategic competition?”

3. Course of Action

- “What policies should countries adopt in order to survive and thrive in an age of competition?”