

new geo-political order and asean security

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Objectives & disclaimer

To exchange personal views on the emerging geopolitical dynamics in the region.

To discuss the implications of political tensions accompanying the geopolitical dynamics in Asia Pacific Region and their impact on regional /Asean security

US-China rivalry may spill over and negatively impact Asean security

asia -pacific region



summary of thoughts

Political uncertainty ahead

Worsening of US-China political relations

States are likely, if not already, to make strategic adjustments on how to relate and position themselves in new geopolitical dynamics

Assessment of interests, geography, geo-politics, culture, strategy and treaty engagements will determine policy adjustments, hedging and recalibration.

The adage that “there are no permanent foes or permanent friends in international politics” remains valid. Corruption of Lord Palmerston’s speech “Nations have no permanent friends or allies, they only have permanent interests. We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and these interests it is our duty to follow.” Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston (20 October 1784 - 18 October 1865) twice Prime Minister in the mid-19th century.

Adjustments tend to emphasise security over economics.

While no side wants entangling relationship, some have treaty obligations.

Quad- lateral Security Dialogue- manifests an alliance between Japan ,India, Australia and US against China that may not sustain.

Political fallout & new power dynamics

- US likely to strengthen containment policy by involving allies-military exercises in the SCS, strengthen economic and military relations with Taiwan to upset China
- US may draw Russia to its side by pushing Japan to rethink its security policy towards Russia. Some are advocating a US-Japan-Russia Alliance to stop China. Such alliance will result in new geopolitical configurations in the region.
- Current trade spats between US and China will intensify-will it turn into currency war, something to think about.
- Failure to contain China may bring early closure to Trump's regime and strengthen the hands of President Xi-Jinping.

continuation

Rising nationalisms dampen relations. Neo-cons and hardliners on both sides. John Bolton, John Mearsheimer, Stephen Bennon. On China's side- PLA. Madam Fu-Yin.

No open war but a war of attrition.

China is not likely to succumb to "The Thucydides Trap" however intimidating some of the US policy gestures are. China will not gamble its future in a war it cannot currently win militarily.

Graham Allison, "Destined for War"; Michael Philbury, "The hundred-Year Marathon".

Rivalry produces tensions

In the South China Sea. US accuses China of militarizing the SCS by building artificial islands on seven major features- Subi Reef , Cuateron Reef, Mischief Reef, Gaven Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Johnson South Reef and Hughes Reef.

US angry with China for not complying with the PCA Arbitral Award (2016) on SCS which China labeled as “a political provocation under the cloak of law.”

US accuses President Xi of reneging promise to President Obama not to militarise the SCS.

China was not the first state to build artificial islands in the Spratlys.

Washington’s policy “to sail, fly and operate wherever international law permits” is largely viewed in China as an excuse to provoke.

US-China relations

Tensions in the SCS-will continue. US will push for its FON Programme and China will upgrade military facilities in SCS.

China will dominate the SCS. No easy solution to overlapping claims.

Possible skirmishes at sea and in the air in SCS. Between US and China despite CUES and MOU on air collisions avoidance.

Prospects of ADIZ in SCS. An option on China's card.

US and its Allies will continue to intimidate China; sailing close to artificial islands, for example. US asserted FON twice in 2019.

Prospects for the Code of Conduct are dim as China NOT likely to agree to any kind of binding agreement. No incentive for China to conclude the Code of Conduct.

Tensions in south china sea



Acknowledgement of power status

China wants US to acknowledge its power status as first among equals. *Primus inter pares*.

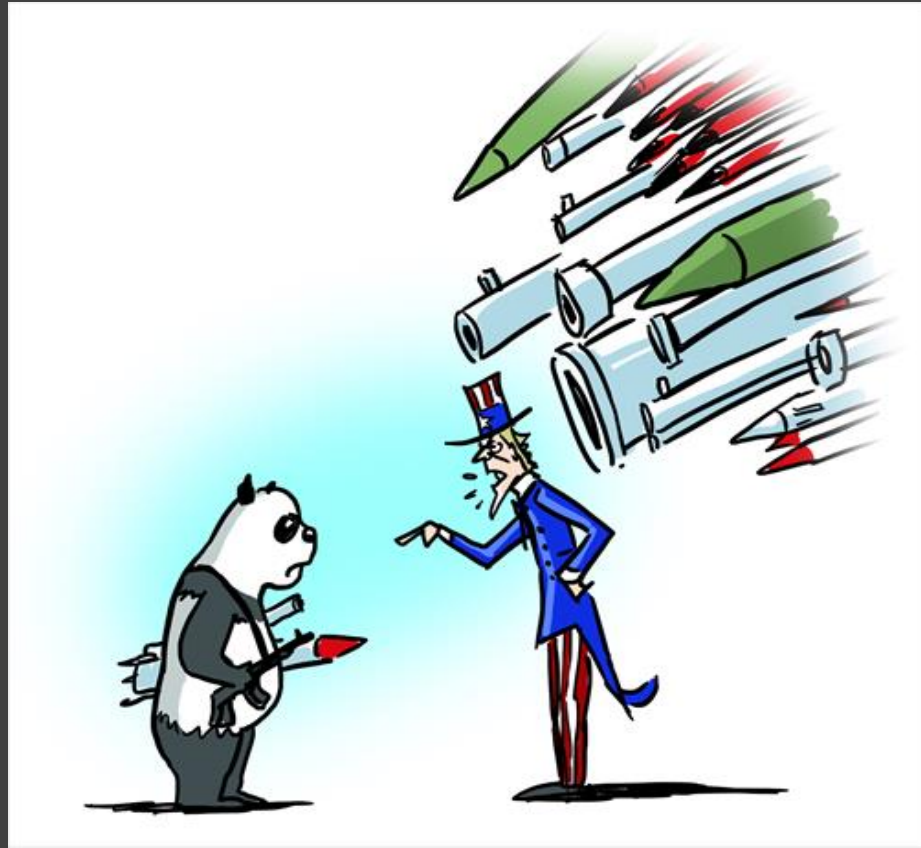
US claims China has a long way to go before it can be at par with US.

US wants China to respect international law and embrace the US-imposed rules-based international system

Asia Pacific is larger than US and China.

There are other important stakeholders: Japan, Russia, ASEAN and India. (Australia?)

They can influence regional geopolitical dynamics beyond the US-Sino rivalry.



China's narratives

US primacy no longer appears to be the exclusive framework in the region and its refusal to accommodate China's growing influence is troubling. Asia Pacific is large enough to accommodate power contenders. (Hugh white)

From China's perspective, the US policy of containment is counterproductive and the current trade war is unjustified and has backfired

Containment of China : Perception or real?



A regional arms race?

Further evidence of policy hedging against political uncertainty takes the form of military insurance.

States in the region are rushing to rearm themselves.

According to SIPRI, military spending in Asia and Oceania-which groups Southeast Asia with Australia and New Zealand-has reached \$US477 billion in 2017 making it the second largest region in terms of military spending in 2017. Five of the top fifteen largest global defence spenders are in this region: China (rank 2), India (rank 5), Japan (rank 8), South Korea (rank 10) and Australia (rank 13).

continuation

The largest relative increases in military spending between 2008 and 2017 were made by Cambodia (332 per cent), Bangladesh (123 per cent), Indonesia (122 per cent) and China (110 per cent). There were other significant increases (higher than 40 per cent, but less than 100 per cent) in Viet Nam, the Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Nepal and India.

Only five countries in Asia and Oceania decreased spending over the decade: Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Fiji, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

Military spending in US \$ million and % shares of Govt spending

Singapore	10198.4	17.2
Indonesia	8178.1	4.8
Thailand	6334.5	1.0
Philippines	4377.9	6.9
Malaysia	3494.8	5.0
Myanmar	1708.5	12.4
Cambodia	463.5	9.0
Brunei	346.7	8.6
Timor Leste	25.4	1.7

A regional arms race and regional security

A regional arms race or normal modernisation of the force structure

Does the arms race impact regional security?

Will more arms mean more peace for the region.

Regional insecurity and Asean

Regional insecurity can divide ASEAN

Centripetal forces versus centrifugal forces. Push and pull forces.

- Consensus building among 10 member states can be nightmarish
- Intra-ASEAN trade is weak-around 26 % of Asean trade with the external world.
- Intra- ASEAN challenges- over human right issues, inequality within ASEAN, etc.,

Challenges in managing external powers like the US and China -taking sides in their rivalry will create greater uncertainty

Arms race

Leadership

Digital age

Vulnerabilities to cyber attacks by state sponsored agencies

Political and commercial espionage will be on the rise

A break up of ASEAN will be a tragedy to regional security.

One other consequence to the political uncertainty in the region is coping up with security in the new digital age. There is evidence of states sponsored cyber attacks on critical infrastructure/data . The absence of rules on cyber activities increases vulnerability to political espionage, for example, and regional security.

Besides the digital domain-the new battleground- how to manage the introduction of new technologies like the AI/autonomous weapons and robotics

Way forward-some recommendations

China and the United States should and must cooperate to ensure a peaceful and productive twenty-first century. A realignment of the bilateral relationship is necessary, but it should be based on a correct understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts.

If U.S. elites continue to believe that their country is entitled to global hegemony, the United States will accelerate its own decline. The world is too big, and too many developing countries are rapidly catching up, for a country of 325 million people to be its sole ruler.

ASEAN should strengthen intra-Asean security mechanisms.

Enhance Asean unity and centrality and enhance military diplomacy mechanisms within ASEAN.

Establish regionwide rules on cyber security especially among ASEAN countries- Geneva Convention(1949); Tallinn Manual (2017)

Minimise activities on political, military and commercial espionage.

Embrace international law and rules-based international order.

the end

THANK YOU

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