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Trends in Southeast Asia

THE GEOPOLITICS OF XI JINPING'S CHINESE DREAM: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The **Trends in Southeast Asia** series acts as a platform for serious analyses by selected authors who are experts in their fields. It is aimed at encouraging policy makers and scholars to contemplate the diversity and dynamism of this exciting region.

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The Geopolitics of Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream: Problems and Prospects

By David Arase

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Viewing China's current relations with neighbours in the East Asian littoral from geopolitical and macrohistorical perspectives enables us to evaluate China's current prospects for advancing its "peaceful rise".
- Today the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) articulates a Chinese Dream that envisions a new age of Asian predominance to match China's memory of past golden ages. To realize this dream, China seeks geopolitical predominance in the East Asian littoral.
- Judging from the foreign policy goals and behaviour pursued by Xi Jinping, China appears likely to govern the region according to its core interests even when this may require other states to give up their lawful sovereign rights and prerogatives.
- Ever since the East Asian core region birthed Chinese civilization, this core has experienced cycles of political consolidation and disintegration. Although large swathes of the continental periphery were incorporated into the core, geopolitical factors that remain relevant today prevented the conquest of the maritime periphery.
- Peninsular and archipelagic states in East Asia's maritime periphery are again individually hedging or counterbalancing against Chinese efforts. This aids U.S. rebalancing strategy and frustrates China's effort to remove U.S. strategic influence from the region.
- Faced with mounting resistance, China must attempt to overcome this resistance with stepped up forcefulness or modify its ambitions. Domestic political constraints may make it difficult for Beijing

to compromise, even though pushing harder for geopolitical predominance promises only greater costs and risk without improving prospects for ultimate success.

The Geopolitics of Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream: Problems and Prospects

By David Arase[1]

GEOPOLITICS AND GEOSTRATEGY

By now it should be clear that Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by 2049 involves an ambitious geopolitical agenda. This discussion begins with a macrohistorical overview of East Asian geopolitics to provide a slightly different perspective on the motivations and constraints that shape China's desire for great power predominance in East Asia today. It then summarizes the main features of current Chinese geostrategy and concludes by noting certain dilemmas and limitations.

Geopolitics refers to the contest among states to control geographic space in order to gain security against potential enemies, increase power and influence over others, and assure access to markets and resources. The geopolitical strategy of a state traditionally relies upon military power and alliance arrangements, making geopolitics an arena traditionally dominated by great powers.

In the study of geopolitics it is axiomatic that major developments in the balance of power cause states to alter their geostrategies and

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change the geopolitical status quo. There is no greater development in the balance of power than when a state is added or subtracted from the number of great powers, and today we see China asserting a great power identity and challenging the post-cold war unipolar structure of global politics. Offensive realists argue that when a state reaches for great power status, the desire for security from other great powers compels it to seek hegemony in its home region. If successful, security motivations drive it to weaken other great powers in their respective home regions (Mearsheimer 2014). Thus, few realists would be surprised if China's great power aspirations require strategic dominance in East Asia. The question is whether it develops a suitable geostrategy.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF EAST ASIA IN MACROHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Continental vs. Maritime Spheres

Since the dawn of civilization, the geopolitical heartland or core of East Asia has been the vast fertile region bounded on the north by the Yellow River, the coastal seas to the east, the Pearl River in the south, and the Tibetan plateau and deserts to the west. The rich land and labour resources of the core permitted the rise of East Asian civilization and it became the seat of successive empires. When Han Chinese culture was in its formative stage, this core was subdivided among kingdoms arranged from north to south, and from east to west, along the Yellow, Huai, Yangtze, and Pearl river basins. Defense against nomad raids and invasion from the north and west quite literally taxed heartland states throughout history, most notably to build and maintain the Great Wall of China (Barfield 1992; Di Cosmo 2002).

To the east, the East Asian core drains into the Yellow, East China, and South China seas. The Korean and Indochinese peninsulas bracket the core's seacoast on the northeast and south respectively. Across the semi-enclosed coastal seas lie archipelagic lands (Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia) of significant size that control the core's access to the Pacific and Indian oceans. This vast and diverse littoral

region stretches from 50 degrees north latitude to 10 degrees south latitude, and from 90 degrees east longitude to 150 degrees east longitude.

Northeast Asia vs. Southeast Asia

Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia contain peninsular, coastal and archipelagic domains. Throughout history, the smaller littoral states of both subregions have sought exchange with the core while maintaining their independence. This remains true today except that these states now rely on open global trade, and in each subregion the United States counts one peninsular and one archipelagic state as an ally.

However, the subregions differ in key respects. In Northeast Asia there are unresolved armed conflicts in the Korean peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait. And since 2010, another militarized confrontation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands has developed between China and Japan. All three flashpoints implicate China and the United States on opposite sides. From military bases in Japan and South Korea, the United States assists South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan in maintaining local military balances. Associated hostility and armed tension between Northeast Asian actors have ruled out a Northeast Asian analogue of ASEAN. Though cushioned somewhat by economic interdependence, stability still rests directly on military power balances.

The seven states involved strategically in Northeast Asia are well-armed. Four have nuclear weapons (China, North Korea, the United States, and Russia) and four are large (United States, China, Russia, and Japan). The three small states (North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan) are on the front lines of suspended and unresolved armed conflicts.

In contrast, there are no major unresolved armed conflicts among the ten states making up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. All are modestly armed and postured defensively. All are primarily striving to achieve or maintain economic prosperity. These factors, together with U.S. maritime predominance promoting free trade and a rules-based order, have allowed ASEAN to construct a soft normative order governed by the ASEAN Way — at least until the new era of geopolitical competition in East Asia intervened.

THE EAST ASIAN IMPERIAL CYCLE IN MACROHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

When Han Chinese civilization was maturing, the geostrategic core region was divided up among rival kingdoms (Lewis 1999). After the Qin kingdom conquered the rest to create the Qin Empire (221–206 BC), centralized administration created the first great golden age of Chinese civilization, which continued under the successor Han Empire (206 BC – 220 AD). This age was characterized by great cultural advances and expansion into the "barbarian" periphery. Eventually, the unified core disintegrated into contending kingdoms. After 360 years of division and nomad incursions, the Sui dynasty (581–618 AD) managed to reunify the core and usher in a new golden age of unification and expansion.

Over the course of the two millennia since the Qin Empire, one sees a cycle of unification, expansion, and disintegration repeated by successive Chinese and nomad imperial dynasties. The ethnic Han Chinese dynasties that ruled a unified core were the Qin (221–206 BC), Han (206 BC – 220 AD), Sui (581–618 AD), Tang (618–907 AD), Northern Song (960–1127 AD), and Ming (1368–1644 AD) dynasties. Nomads played important roles in the downfall of empires, and the nomad Mongol Yuan (1271–1368) and the Manchu Qing (1644–1911 AD) dynasties incorporated the core into larger multi-ethnic empires that included vast areas of steppe, plateau, and desert beyond traditional core borders (Brook 2010; Crossley 1997; Elliott 2001).

The Core-Maritime Periphery Relationship

The abiding existential threat emanating from the north and west compelled core states to focus geostrategy and territorial expansion attempts there. The peninsular and archipelagic lands to the east and south developed distinctive cultures and possessed resources and natural defensive advantages that permitted them to resist core expansion and absorption. Geography suggests — and history shows — that the difficulty of keeping the core region unified and safe from nomad incursions, together with the difficulty of invading the littoral peninsulas and archipelagos, may explain why core states extended empire to the

north and west, but never conquered and ruled the maritime littoral.[2] Only the Mongols made this kind of attempt, but it gained only limited success in the Korean peninsula where, after a difficult twenty-eight-year campaign, they left it under a Korean vassal dynasty before going on to conquer China.

In the littoral region, the Korean peninsula has been the most vulnerable to core state invasion. The Han Dynasty, the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, and the Manchu Qing Dynasty managed successful invasions, but the Sui and Tang dynasties both failed (Yu 1987, Tennant 1996; Mote 1994). However, aside from the Han, no invading core state directly ruled the peninsula, and Korean dynasties were left to govern the peninsula for most of the past two millennia.

The Indochinese peninsula was first penetrated along Vietnam's northern coastal margin by the Qin Dynasty and was administered as part of China until 938 AD. Vietnamese kingdoms subsequently fought off attempted conquest by the Yuan, Ming, and Qing empires (Allsen 1994; Taylor 2014). Burma was invaded and occupied by the Mongols for only ten years before they were forced to withdraw. The Ming and Qing each attempted to conquer Burma four times, but none succeeded (Maung 1967; Wang 1998; Woodside 2002).

With respect to the archipelagic lands, only the Mongol Yuan Dynasty attempted conquest of island kingdoms. After it conquered China, it mounted three invasions of Vietnam (1257–88); one extended campaign in Burma (1277–87); two attempts against Japan (1274 and 1281), and one against Indonesia (1293). None succeeded.[3]

Because littoral conquest was difficult and less critical than ensuring domestic order and securing northern and western borderlands, core states normally were satisfied to extend rich gifts and trading privileges to

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[2] The strain of four failed invasion attempts in Korea led to the collapse of the Sui dynasty and a takeover of its empire by the Tang dynasty.

[3] The Mongols successfully conquered the Korean peninsula from 1231 to 1259, but this was accomplished before the conquest of the Song Dynasty and the start of Mongol rule of China under the Yuan dynasty in 1271.

littoral kingdoms in return for their ritual obeisance (Fairbank and Teng 1941). Core empires gave surprisingly little thought to the development of naval power and commercial empire perhaps because they turned their backs to the seas in order to confront existential threats that regularly came from Inner Asia.[4]

Therefore, historically and geopolitically, East Asia has divided into continental and littoral spheres. Core states struggled to achieve and defend a unified heartland through cycles of imperial rise and decline. Meanwhile, peninsular and archipelagic kingdoms struggled against each other and against invasion attempts by core empires experiencing golden ages of expansion to maintain their independence.

XI JINPING AND CHINA'S NEW GOLDEN AGE OF EXPANSION

Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream to achieve the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China" was announced as soon as he took power in 2012 (Xinhuanet 2012). The Chinese Dream discourse constructs a mythologized tradition of unbroken and unchallenged Chinese predominance in Asia that was destroyed during the "century of humiliation" that began after the Opium War (1839–42). But under Xi Jinping, this imagined past leads to the image of a rejuvenated China's future under CPC leadership. According to Beijing's version of history, the CPC defeated Japan in World War II to set China on the road to recovery. Now that China has caught up to the West and is unrivalled in Asia, territories and prerogatives that once belonged to China before the century of humiliation are now being claimed on the basis of "historical

[4] The outstanding exception was the tribute-seeking naval voyages that Admiral Zheng He conducted from 1405 to 1433. After the Ming's Yongle Emperor died, his successors shrank and eventually destroyed the expensive ocean-going navy in 1525 because it diverted attention from landward threats.

right." The maritime disputes we see in East Asia grow out of this historical narrative and grand Chinese Dream agenda.

Though we discuss here immediate problems and prospects in China's geostrategic behaviour, one mentions in passing that, the only other time complete littoral dominance through forceful means was on the agenda of a core state was when the Mongols had absorbed China into a trans-Eurasian empire. Despite the massive power imbalance between the Mongol empire and littoral kingdoms at that time, the Mongol invasions all failed to achieve lasting effect. Other factors that question the feasibility of forceful subjugation of the maritime periphery by the core today include post-colonial norms against the unilateral annexation of territories that may belong to other states, the strategic presence of the world's strongest military power in the littoral; the nationalism and defensive capabilities of littoral states; the still uncertain stability of China's western border regions and domestic arrangements; and China's unprecedented and critical dependence on peace and stability inside the maritime littoral.

The Geopolitical Themes in the Chinese Dream

In the complex and ambitious Chinese Dream agenda, several messages stand out. These are the "new type of great power relationship" (*xinxing daguo guanxi*); the "community of common destiny" (*mingyun gongtongti*) ; "One Belt, One Road" (*yidai yilu*); "New Asian security concept" (*xinde yazhou anquanguan*); and great power military status including "maritime great power" (*haiyang qiangguo*).

New type of great power relations

A programmatic effort to achieve the geopolitical aspects of the Chinese Dream may be discerned in Xi Jinping's major foreign and security policy initiatives. After assuming party leadership in November 2012 and state presidency in March 2013, Xi Jinping met with President Barack Obama in June 2013 to seek a "new type of great power relations" between China and the United States (Perlez 2013). He sought U.S. recognition of China as a great power with equal rights and prerogatives, including U.S. recognition of the paramount nature of Chinese interests in Asia

(Xinhua 2014). In return for this, China would offer peaceful cooperative relations in order to avoid the "Thucydides trap" that awaits a weakening predominant power and a rising challenger (Erickson and Liff 2014; Chen 2014; FMPRC 2014).

Community of Common Destiny and One Belt, One Road

In fall 2013, Xi Jinping announced his One Belt, One Road (OBOR) programme and convened a central CPC study meeting on diplomacy toward China's periphery that was attended by the top CPC leadership. OBOR is a "top-level design" programme to build a China-centred "community of common destiny" (FMPRC 2013; China National Development and Reform Council 2015). Xi has called for a whole-of-government effort to construct modern transportation, energy, and communication infrastructure connectivity through Eurasia and neighbouring regions such as Africa and the South Pacific to bring all into an economic and security community centred on China's continuing rise (Xinhua Online 2014). China's economic, diplomatic, and strategic weight in relation to any other member of this community of common destiny would give it significant governance capacity.

China's economic, diplomatic, and military weight in relation to any other member of this community of common destiny would give Chinese diplomacy significant scope to reward and punish individual states. This begs the question what principle of governance Chinese power would serve. If China consistently acted to reinforce stability, give equal respect to the sovereign rights of large and small states alike, and advance the peaceful management of relations in accordance with international legal norms, we might see a radically different atmosphere accompanying China's rise. But China's actions toward ASEAN and individual ASEAN members involved in the South China Sea maritime disputes leading up to, during, and following formal deliberations of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the case brought by the Philippines regarding China's claims and behaviours in areas of disputed maritime jurisdiction in the South China Sea suggest that China will manage its envisioned community of common destiny according to China's own narrow national interests.

New Asian Security Concept

On regional security, Xi Jinping enunciated the "new Asian security concept" (CICA 2014). He asserted that security in Asia is a matter that concerns only Asian states, and that military alliances have no role in a peaceful development community. Instead, peace should be based on cooperative and mutually beneficial economic development. Any conflicts that arise should be resolved only by the parties directly involved. This conception sees little role for non-Asian states, non-state actors, and international law.

Great power military status

Soon after assuming China's presidency, Xi Jinping affirmed China's desire to become a maritime great power (*haiyang qiangguo*) at a central party work meeting in July 2013 (Bickford 2016; McDevitt 2016). Besides a powerful ocean-going navy, this maritime power concept includes world class coast guard, maritime militia, maritime resource exploitation, commercial fleet, and scientific research capabilities. The White Paper on China's Military Strategy published in May 2015 adds "safeguard the security of China's overseas interests" to the list of strategic military tasks (Xinhuanet 2015*a*). It goes on to say that "[t]he traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests." Accordingly, the PLA Navy "will gradually shift its focus from 'offshore waters defense' to include 'open seas defense'" (Blasko 2015). In line with this new emphasis, the PLA navy (PLAN) now regularly patrols and exercises beyond China's coastal seas in the western Pacific and Indian oceans, and two new aircraft carriers are now under construction to join the existing PLAN carrier, the *Liaoning*.

At the unprecedented Beijing military parade to commemorate China's victory over Japan in World War II on 3 September 2015, Xi suggested that China's victory over Japan in World War II gives China both the right and responsibility to oversee peace in Asia today (Xinhuanet 2015*b*). That same day, a five-ship PLA naval task force made innocent passage through Alaskan waters while President Obama

was there instead of viewing the Beijing military parade (Ryan and Lamothe 2015; Stewart 2015). As evidence of its ability to strike naval targets well into the western Pacific, China paraded never before seen ballistic and supersonic cruise "carrier killer" missiles (Clover 2015). Xi also announced at the parade a comprehensive reform of the PLA that re-postures forces to project power beyond China's borders (Allen, Blasko and Corbett 2016). And as part of this military reform, Xi Jinping assumed a new role as military commander in chief (BBC 2016).

THE GEOSTRATEGY OF THE CHINESE DREAM

China repeatedly tells the United States not to "meddle" in China's conflicts with its neighbours (Xinhua 2015). Instead, it tells the United States to abandon its "cold war mentality," evidenced by insufficient U.S. respect for China's core interests and concerns in Asia (Zhang 2016). China appears impatient for the United States to give up its alliances and bases in Asia, and yield regional strategic dominance to China. Since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, China has become more overtly forceful over time to complete the takeover of disputed areas and to tell the United States to leave the management of Asian affairs to China. This is not surprising. Conservatives in China have long interpreted U.S. policy in Asia as an effort to "contain" China (Wang 2011). If China's current conservative leadership wants to claim rightful regional dominance based on realpolitik principles and historical precedents set by ancient despotic empires, as its rhetoric suggests, then cultural scripts joined with geopolitical imperatives will drive Chinese policy.

The Chinese Dream has a goal to reclaim its mythologized identity as Asia's suzerain. Starting now, China will need to persuade East Asian states to "respect" China above all other powers. Geopolitically, if it wants to dominate Asia and rival the United States as a global power, then China has to control geographical access in and around the littoral, not only for its own territorial security, but also to ensure free and unhindered

naval and commercial access to the Indian and Pacific oceans in times of peace or war.

However, Chinese control over islands and waters of the East China Sea and South China Sea will not give China free and unhindered access to the oceans. To achieve this goal, China needs to win the strategic trust and cooperation of the peninsular and archipelagic states that control passage between the coastal seas and the open oceans. But if this is China's desired end state, then to the extent that its ongoing effort to put the coastal seas under Beijing's administration alienates the peninsular and archipelagic states, it becomes more difficult to displace U.S. strategic influence and gain free, unhindered access to the open oceans.

U.S. Geostrategy in East Asia

After the United States "lost" China as a strategic ally in Asia when the CPC defeated the KMT government in the Chinese civil war, the United States signed treaty alliances with Japan (1951) and the Philippines (1951). After the Korean War (1950–53), the United States added alliances with South Korea (1953), Taiwan (1954), Thailand (1954), and South Vietnam (1955). These alliances constructed a defence perimeter through the littoral that contained the expansion of communism and established U.S. naval predominance in the Asia-Pacific region (Gaddis 2005).

What remains today are U.S. alliances with the peninsular states of South Korea and Thailand, and with the archipelagic states of Japan and the Philippines. There is a residual security relationship with Taiwan as defined by the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979. The United States has permanent military bases only in Japan and South Korea, and of these, only the Japanese bases have naval significance. Today, the United States aims to maintain its alliances and military presence to maintain a liberal international order (Ikenberry 2011); and to maintain a defensive perimeter on the far shore of the Pacific Ocean rather than on its own open and vulnerable Pacific shoreline.

From 2009, China began to act unilaterally and coercively to take exclusive possession of its 9-dash line claim in the South China Sea and

the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea despite the active resistance of rival claimant states. The Philippines and Japan bore the brunt of this campaign, and U.S. reluctance to get involved in territorial disputes involving "bunches of rocks" strained its alliances with these states and caused others to doubt U.S. commitment to maintaining its traditional security role in the region against a rising and possibly revisionist China.

The Obama Administration reacted to this assertiveness in 2011 with strategic rebalancing toward Asia. One could say that this strategic rebalancing has two main thrusts. One seeks to engage China in a comprehensive strategic partnership that maintains the existing liberal international order that enabled China's rise. The other is to preserve U.S. alliances, bases, and navigation rights in East Asia which sustain an international liberal order (Clinton 2011). These are principles rather than a blueprint, and so rebalancing is an inherently adaptive approach to maintaining U.S. interests in an evolving regional environment.

Chinese Strategy in Peninsular East Asia

To establish primacy in the littoral, China's first task is to weaken U.S. alliances. China has no outstanding territorial disputes with South Korea or Thailand, and so China has focused on economic inducements to bring Thailand and South Korea into economic dependence that China can leverage to displace U.S. strategic influence in the littoral.

Korean Peninsula

In South Korea, Xi Jinping has used the lure of the China market and a South Korean desire for security coordination toward North Korea to court South Korean president Park Geun-hye. Xi Jinping has continued to sustain North Korea's survival as a state, but he has not even pretended to accord Kim Jong-un the respect that one would accord an ally.

Meanwhile, the Obama Administration has sought to increase trilateral US-South Korea-Japan alliance coordination to meet the growing nuclear threat from North Korea and rising Chinese assertiveness in the maritime domain. The United States has relied on "strategic patience" to allow economic sanctions, South Korea's diplomatic initiatives, and

Chinese influence over North Korea to lead the way to North Korean denuclearization.

Xi offered Park a bilateral FTA, Chinese pressure to get North Korea to denuclearize, and talks on the future of the Korean peninsula. In return, Xi asked Park to block U.S. deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Anti-missile Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea, and he also asked the ROK to join China in denouncing Japanese efforts to meet U.S. requests for more alliance contributions as well as criticizing Japan over history and territorial issues.

This gambit succeeded in temporarily hindering U.S. rebalancing efforts. He met with Park seven times throughout 2015. In keeping with his pledge to push North Korean denuclearization, Xi met not once with his treaty ally, Kim Jong Un. And it was Park, rather than Kim who was sitting with Xi on the reviewing stand at the Beijing military parade on 3 September 2015 to celebrate China's World War II victory over Japan (Munro 2015). However, as indicated below, the effort to woo the South has ended in a failure that has significantly worsened relations with both Koreas.

The Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty, first signed in 1961, is effective to 2021. It formalizes mutual strategic assistance between the CPC and the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) that goes back to World War II. Although both regimes have remained invested in their mutual survival, their relations have become increasingly discordant and mistrustful since the end of the cold war.

The North Korean regime of Kim Il-sung felt betrayed when China severely cut assistance and normalized relations with South Korea as the cold war ended. China also opposed North Korea's turn toward nuclear weapon development. When the crisis caused by the North's nuclear programme threatened to lead to armed conflict, the North signed the Geneva Framework Agreement of 1994, which froze its nuclear development programme in exchange for international energy assistance.

But when Kim Jong-il, son of Kim Il-sung, restarted the nuclear weapons programme in 2003, international sanctions were imposed on North Korea. China supported the principle of denuclearization by hosting the 6-Party Talks, but it continued to give the North enough

economic aid to prevent its collapse and preserve it as a buffer state, even if this also permitted the North to continue its nuclear development.

However, relations took another turn for the worse after Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un, the young son of Kim Jong-il, came to power. Despite China's desire to cool nuclear tensions, restart the 6-Party Talks, and woo Park away from strategic alignment with the United States, the young new North Korean leader tested a ballistic missile in December 2012 and then tested a nuclear bomb in February 2013.

Following these events, China voted for UN Security Council Resolutions 2087 and 2094 that condemned North Korea for the tests and increased sanctions. Then came the arrest and brutal execution of Jang Sung-taek for treason in December. He was the young leader's uncle, an influential figure with close relations to China, and a potential successor should Kim become unable to lead.

As China's top leaders shunned meeting Kim Jong-un and parlayed with Park Geun Hye, the insecure Kim redoubled his nuclear bomb and ballistic missile development while China looked the other way. Kim's anger caused by China's failure to defend his nuclear bomb and missile programmes, as well as by the treatment of North Korea's all-girl Moranbong group during a visit to Beijing in December 2015, triggered another nuclear bomb test in January 2016 and a long-range ballistic missile test in February 2016 which marked technical progress in both areas.

Betrayed and embarrassed by North Korea's steady progress toward weaponized nuclear capability while she talked with Xi, Park sent officials to the United States to discuss THAAD deployment by early February (Defense News 2016). The official decision to deploy THAAD was announced on 7 July and Park just as quickly shelved historical and territorial disputes and began to rebuild security cooperation with Japan.

Bound by its official commitment to North Korean denuclearization and embarrassed by North Korea's defiance of China's demands that North Korea avoid making provocations, China condemned North Korea and imposed further economic sanctions in UN Security Council resolution 2270 in March. This was the third time that Xi Jinping condemned North Korea via UN security council resolutions, which

indicates an unprecedented deterioration of Sino-North Korea relations, and an indirect admission that official Chinese policy is failing.

On 1 June there was an unscheduled meeting with Xi Jinping by North Korean envoy Ri Su Yong, Vice Chairman of International Affairs in the KWP, who was visiting Beijing to report on a KWP party congress. A meeting with Xi was ruled out before his arrival due to North Korea's defiant behaviour, so its occurrence might suggest that after the failure of his South Korean gambit, Xi is now willing to meet with Kim to work out some new understanding in their relationship (Macdonald 2016).

China's lip service to denuclearization and UN sanctions while continuing to permit sufficient trade, investment, and assistance to sustain North Korea and permit its weapons programmes to approach a critical threshold of capability has not only alienated South Korea; in late September, the U.S. imposed sanctions on the Dandong Hongxiang Industrial Development Company, a Chinese firm responsible for a fifth of China's trade with North Korea. Federal prosecutors also filed criminal charges against the Chinese firm's owner, Ma Xiaohong (Forsythe 2016). Ma also happens to be a Liaoning Provincial delegate to China's National People's Congress.

North Korea tends to attract blame for tensions in Northeast Asia, but careful observers may note that China's strategy in the Korean peninsula has damaged its reputation as an honest broker and effective manager of regional stability. It has also left China's relations with both Koreas and the United States worse off than when Hu Jintao left office.

Peninsular Southeast Asia

With respect to Thailand, China has been giving increased economic and military assistance after U.S. laws forbade the sale of weapons and required sanctions in the wake of Thai military coups in 2006 and 2014. This has led to new Thai-Chinese anti-terrorism cooperation and the Blue Strike 2016 joint military exercise. Thailand also announced the purchase of three Chinese submarines as well as Chinese main battle tanks for the Army (Parameswaran 2016).

Nevertheless, the Thai-U.S. alliance continues, though military sales are hindered by Congress-mandated sanctions after the 2014 military coup. The annual Thai-U.S. Cobra Gold military exercise was cancelled

in 2014 but resumed in 2015. And Thailand has certain frictions in cultural and economic dealings with China, including the implementation of a planned high speed railway to link Thai ports to China. In sum, Thailand is wary of becoming overly dependent on China, or any other major power for that matter, and is not interested in abandoning alliance relations with the United States (Storey 2016).

If China made some gains in strategic ties with Thailand, it has suffered setbacks in other key peninsular Southeast Asian states. China's relations with Vietnam suffered a major setback in May 2014 when China's deployment of the marine oil rig HS 981 excited popular anti-Chinese sentiment and caused elite-level loss of trust in China. This event tipped Vietnam into a new era of security cooperation with other powers (Hiep 2015). On 6 November 2015 (the day after Xi Jinping arrived for an official visit to Hanoi), visiting Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani signed an agreement with his counterpart in Hanoi to send Japanese warships to visit Cam Ranh Bay for a joint naval exercise in 2016 (Reuters 2015). In May this year, on the occasion of Barack Obama's first visit to Vietnam, both sides announced new U.S. maritime security assistance and the lifting of a U.S. ban on lethal arms sales (White House 2016). On balance, although China still wields great influence over Vietnam, Hanoi's pursuit of stronger economic and security cooperation with the United States and Japan (as well as other powers such as India and Russia) means that China's geostrategic agenda has suffered a setback.

Myanmar offers another example of a strategically important peninsular Southeast Asian state seeking to escape dilemmas posed by China's rise. China covets Myanmar's land, energy, natural resources, and location on the Bay of Bengal, which could give neighbouring China overland logistical access to the Indian Ocean, lessening China's reliance on the circuitous and easily interdicted sea lanes through the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait.

After Thein Sein became president in 2011, he suspended the controversial Myitsone hydropower dam project that would send 90 per cent of its electricity back to China, and began political and economic reforms to repair normal relations with the West suspended in the aftermath of the military junta's suppression of democracy in

1988. He did this to escape economic and strategic overdependence on China that threatened to turn Myanmar into an economic and strategic captive of China.

After announcing democratic reforms in 2011 and holding parliamentary elections in 2012, Thein Sein welcomed a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011 and President Barack Obama in 2012, and Thein Sein was hosted at the White House in 2013. These developments opened the way for the lifting of Western sanctions, which has created a new situation for China. When dealing with a diplomatically normalized and domestically liberalized Myanmar, China must compete with a much wider range of actors and forces to influence a more complex and unpredictable political decision-making system in Myanmar.

Economically, a wider range of foreign investment inflow, which over time will alter Myanmar's trade and industrial structure, is diluting China's influence. Whereas, China's share of cumulative FDI in Myanmar may have been over 40 per cent in 2010, according to investment approvals this figure is only 28 per cent as of August 2016 (DICA 2016). China has succeeded in developing an onshore gas terminal at Kyaukpyu, with pipelines carrying both oil and gas running from that port to Yunnan, and it has recently won a contract to construct a huge container port, railway terminal, and industrial park there as well. But there are two other large logistical and industrial complexes that rival the economic significance of the Kyaukpyu project that are being constructed in Myanmar in Thilawa near Yangon and at Dawei. These are being built by Japanese, Thai, and Indian interests in partnership with local and national authorities that will offset control over Myanmar's economic future that Kyaukpyu port and industrial development may give China.

Politically, the rapid development of an open media environment, domestic civil society, more democratically accountable governance, and ethnic nationalism since 2011 has combined to obstruct the US$3.6 billion Myitsone hydropower dam project, the huge Letpadaung copper mine, and a planned railway connecting Kyaukpyu to Kunming in China. Long accustomed to using coercive and corrupt measures to advance development while ignoring social and environmental impacts as well as legal requirements, China is finding it a challenge to see its

investment projects through to completion in Myanmar's new political environment.

Strategically, China's ability to spur and rein in rebel elements along their common border gives it leverage over Myanmar, but to the extent that China tolerates or facilitates the operations of these elements, it places China in a threat category. Consequently, it is hard to imagine that Myanmar would ever welcome the deployment of Chinese troops in Myanmar. Western democratic nations are in a position to engage the Tatmadaw in valuable education and training at all levels to promote not only more effective defense of Myanmar territory, but also better compliance with legal and democratic governance requirements.

In peninsular Southeast Asia, one sees that since 2012, China has failed to decisively capitalize on a break in US-Thai alliance relations; has lost the strategic trust of Vietnam, a cold war Chinese ally that now courts defence cooperation with the United States and Japan; and has lost a commanding position in Myanmar.

Chinese Strategy Towards Archipelagic States

Territorial disputes are at the heart of China's geopolitical agenda with Japan and the Philippines. According to Beijing, China today is reclaiming ancient ownership rights in the coastal seas. Selective historical memory gives China "indisputable sovereignty" over areas claimed by other coastal states. Confident that the United States does not want war with China to defend "bunches of rocks" claimed by Japan and the Philippines, China aims to take over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands (located near the strategic Miyako Strait that gives East China Sea access to the Pacific Ocean) and Scarborough Shoal (where naval forces operating from there can quickly neutralize Philippine naval bases at Manila Bay and guard approaches to the Bashi Channel that connects the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean). Though militarization of these tiny land features will help China access key passages through the littoral, they do not give China command over the littoral.

To extend its effective control over disputed waters and exercise ownership rights in the coastal seas, China has been using civilian fishing, research, energy exploration, and artificial island construction activities

to occupy and exercise sovereign rights in contested areas. If vessels of rival claimants appear, Chinese fishing vessels, maritime militia, and civilian patrol vessels regularly obstruct, ram, damage equipment, assault, arrest, and water cannon them to force their withdrawal (Wee 2016; Erickson 2015).

Such tactics succeeded at Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao in 2012, but they failed that year in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands because Japan could muster superior numbers of coast guard vessels, and the US pledged to respond under security treaty provisions if China used military force against Japan there. China has since constructed 20,000-ton coast guard patrol vessels and has transferred naval frigates to the coast guard perhaps to ensure future dominance in a battle between coast guards (*Japan Times* 2016; Wee 2016).

PLA units, with their mission to defend Chinese citizens and sovereignty, are available to deter rival claimants from using military means to stop China's civilian-led advance. China also declared an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) above the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in November 2013, and PLA air and naval vessels challenge, harass, or closely shadow foreign military vessels inside China's claimed maritime jurisdictions.

China and the ASEAN Factor in Southeast Asia

China does not want ASEAN to stand united with ASEAN members in conflict with China over 9-dash line claims. Under China's 2+7 Initiative begun in 2013, at each annual China-ASEAN leaders meeting, China offers economic inducements to win ASEAN attentiveness to Chinese economic and strategic concerns even as it unilaterally and coercively advances its 9-dash line claims against individual ASEAN members (Arase 2015). China uses two divide-and-rule tactics. One is to shift South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC) talks with ASEAN into a low-level dialogue track unconnected with high-level China-ASEAN meeting agendas. Thus, fruitless COC talks will not impede China's strategic and economic agendas at high-level leadership meetings. The other tactic is to find at least one pliant ASEAN member, usually Cambodia, to block any ASEAN initiative that China dislikes. This divide and rule strategem

gives China an effective veto over ASEAN policy, and it leaves individual ASEAN members with territorial disputes with China frustrated by ASEAN's impotence.

Southeast Asian Littoral States Respond to China's Geostrategy

SIPRI data show that from 2006 to 2015, China's military spending rose 132 per cent as it became assertive and belligerent in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. This impressive spending has been associated with China's agenda of expanding maritime power and control at the expense of neighbours' sovereignty and security.

Consequently, there have been large military spending increases in 2015 by Indonesia (16 per cent), the Philippines (25 per cent), and Vietnam (6 per cent). Submarines have been recently acquired or ordered by Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand (Beng 2014; DW.com 2016). New fighter jets are being sought or have been ordered by the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (Millar 2016). Air and naval patrol craft as well as maritime surveillance capabilities are also being sought by the larger Southeast Asian coastal states, and new bases are being developed by the Philippines and Indonesia.

Moreover, South China Sea coastal states are enhancing security cooperation with outside powers to offset China's assertiveness. The United States, Japan, Russia, and India (as well as South Korea and Australia) are giving more security-related assistance, selling more weapons, engaging in more joint training exercises, and enjoying greater port access in maritime Southeast Asia today than before the Chinese Dream was enunciated.

China's escalating measures against Japan and the Philippines are not working as intended. The hawkish Shinzo Abe has increased defence spending, reinterpreted Article 9, strengthened U.S. alliance relations, authorized weapons exports, began giving security-related aid in Southeast Asia, and moved Japan closer to constitutional revision. China's actions have also caused Japan to deepen security cooperation with India, Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia as it seeks to rally resistance to China's geostrategic agenda.

The Philippines

China's actions in Scarborough Shoal led the Philippines under President Benigno Aquino to strengthen alliance ties to the United States and request an arbitration tribunal established under UNCLOS and serviced by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague to resolve disputes with China over the interpretation of UNCLOS rights and obligations. The PCA found, inter alia, that China's historical case for the 9-dash line has no legal standing under UNCLOS provisions; that no land feature in the Spratly group is an island that can generate an EEZ and only some are rocks with rights to a 12 nm territorial zone; that China has no right to construct artificial islands on reefs or shoals in the EEZ of another state; and that it may not obstruct or usurp a coastal state's economic rights inside its own EEZ (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016). In other words, the court found that Chinese actions have violated the Philippines' sovereign rights under UNCLOS (and by implication those of other states in analogous positions).

The election of populist Rodrigo Duterte to the Philippine presidency in May 2016 makes possible a radical change in the government's foreign policy priorities. However, a country's fundamental interests, and the long-term policy trajectories that they produce, ordinarily do not turn on a single election or the personality of the selected leader.

Duterte won the election by promising to end a scourge of drug-related social ills by any means necessary, including the extrajudicial killing of drug dealers and criminals. After taking office, Duterte reversed Aquino's effort to strengthen U.S. military presence in the Philippines and insist on Chinese respect for the Philippines' rights in the South China Sea.

Although he favours continuation of the Philippine-U.S. security treaty, Duterte has said he wants to explore new "alliances" with China and Russia. In a speech at Philippine Navy headquarters, he said, "I would have alliances on trade and commerce with China. Russia has agreed to talk about how they can help us here. China is ready to help us with this goddamned problem of drugs" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016).

Duterte has reservations about the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement signed in 2014 that permits the U.S. military to station more assets in the Philippines and conduct military exercises with Philippine

forces, and appears inclined to shun U.S. diplomatic and military assistance to resolve differences with China. He also seems willing to abandon Aquino's demand that China strictly abide by the PCA's arbitration award if he can get valuable Chinese assistance that meets everyday concerns of Filipinos. He has suggested such Chinese assistance as the provision of railways in Mindanao; work permits for Philippine citizens currently working in China illegally; cessation of Chinese citizen involvement in the shipment to and sale of narcotics in the Philippines; and non-interference with Philippine fishing activity in the South China Sea. All this has made him wildly popular in the Philippines. He was elected with 39 per cent of the vote, but now enjoys a 92 per cent public approval rating.

Of consequence here is how Duterte can manage the disputed ownership and use of Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao, which will be the central agenda item in his upcoming visit to China scheduled for 19–21 October 2016. This land feature, if turned into an artificial island with naval support facilities and on which Chinese radar, missiles, and fighter jets are deployed, would enable lightning PLA strikes on key military bases used by both Philippine and US forces in Subic Bay and metro Manila. It would also give China control of the Bashi Channel in the Luzon Strait, a vital passage between the South China Sea and the Western Pacific for submarines and ships. This could effectively neutralize the U.S. ability to guarantee security for the Philippines and U.S. forces stationed there, which in turn could induce the United States to abandon the treaty relationship.

The PCA award did not address the question of who actually owns the land feature, but it ruled that it was inside the Philippines EEZ and that it is not a natural island but a high tide elevation that at most is entitled to a 12nm territorial zone. It said that both parties have traditional fishing rights there, and that China acted illegally in preventing Philippine fishing activity, endangering navigational safety, and damaging the marine environment around the shoal. It also ruled that China cannot legally construct artificial islands on land features inside the EEZ of other coastal states (PCA 2016).

China appears willing to respect Philippine traditional fishing rights at Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao in return for recognition of Chinese sovereignty. Though popular sentiment demands that China respect Philippine sovereignty there, Duterte may be willing to concede ownership in return for Chinese guarantees, but the question remains, aside from fishing in surrounding waters, for what purpose China will use this high tide elevation inside the Philippine EEZ. If it is developed for military or dual use without Philippine permission, it would be another breach of Philippine sovereign rights under UNCLOS, and constitute a grave concern to the Philippine military and foreign policy establishment, not to mention U.S. forces using facilities at Subic Bay. This military security concern could be met if China pledged in writing not to construct facilities or otherwise militarize the shoal, but if China's aim is to gain strategic dominance in the littoral, it will be unwilling to agree to this safeguard. In this case, it would be politically very difficult for Duterte to sign an agreement after China indirectly revealed its true intentions in this way. Alternatively, if Duterte consciously avoids discussion of Scarborough Shoal, this could suggest that he seeks a fundamental change in the Philippine approach to national security and its strategic alignment. Thus, one must wait until after Duterte's visit to China before drawing any conclusions about fundamental change in the direction of Philippine foreign and security policy.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR CHINESE GEOSTRATEGY IN THE EAST ASIAN LITTORAL

In its effort to weaken U.S. alliances and gain strategic dominance in the East Asian littoral, China has begun a lengthy, costly, and risky conflict with littoral states and external stakeholders. China's effort to displace U.S. strategic presence has produced more setbacks than successes in Korea and Peninsular Southeast Asia. China's maritime campaign in the South China Sea and East China Sea is not producing acquiescence to Chinese claims, nor is it persuading archipelagic states to turn away from

the U.S. and follow China. The U.S. Navy continues to patrol through international waters and airspace. And outside stakeholders such as India and Australia are becoming concerned. Meanwhile, exogenous factors such as the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) make it less likely that anyone will sympathize with China's behaviour.

Current Chinese geostrategy is not delivering what China desires because it suffers from certain flaws and contradictions. China must avoid triggering military conflict or the formation of an anti-Chinese coalition while it simultaneously violates the sovereign rights of multiple neighbouring states. And China's control over coastal seas, even if secured, would not compel the United States to vacate the littoral; nor would it assure China of passage through the archipelagic states into the Pacific and Indian oceans. China's whole zero-sum traditional great power approach to securing its geopolitical interests is off-putting because it is anachronistic in an era of norm-governed cooperative and common approaches to security.

To change these prospects, China's choices are to escalate confrontation or negotiate a compromise. The wisest move would be to negotiate a set of binding rules that give all states, including China, assured access through the littoral and into the surrounding oceans. However, having whipped up patriotic fervour with talk of military action to teach lessons to small states and bring contested maritime jurisdictions under exclusive Chinese governance, China may feel compelled to complete the takeover of Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao and the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands for the sake of regime legitimacy. But such an attempt could lead to armed conflict and the formation of an organized coalition to oppose Chinese geostrategy.

Thoughtful Chinese strategists today are obliquely dissenting from current Chinese geostrategy. Yan Xuetong argues that "for China to become a superpower like the United States, Beijing needs a new strategy that fully embraces genuine alliances, and not just so-called "strategic partnerships" (Yan 2015). Xue Li points out that China's South China Sea strategy is obstructing the economic cooperation that China needs to make OBOR a success (Xue 2015). Currently, China is alienating the very countries it needs as partners to gain what it seeks.

Thus, the misguided geostrategy of the Chinese Dream promises only self-defeating results.

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