

ICAS Bulletin

June 17, 2015

A Bimonthly Survey of Research and Analysis on China-US Relations

Twice a month, the ICAS Bulletin updates a global audience on American perspectives regarding the world's most important bilateral relationship. Research papers, journal articles, and other prominent work published in the US are listed here alongside information about events at US-based institutions.

Publications

China's Emerging Vision for World Order

Timothy Heath

The National Interest Online, May 21, 2015

Heath assesses China's recent shift towards greater global responsibilities in terms of its historical tendency toward self-reliance. He finds that a globally engaged China both presents greater opportunities for cooperation with the West, but also opens new areas for competition. He argues that China's new strategic outlook reflects the feeling that it "cannot entrust the protection of its interests to the goodwill of its chief competitor." According to Heath, China's security is best served not merely by participating in existing institutions, but also shaping them to better serve its needs. This means that, ironically, China's becoming a "responsible stakeholder" will bring it into greater competition with the United States. Heath warns that the US must carefully balance policies of accommodating China with reassuring allies.

China's Missed Opportunity at the Shangri-La Dialogue

Bonnie Glaser

CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 31, 2015

Glaser describes the Shangri-La Dialogue appearances by Secretary of Defense Carter and PLA Admiral Sun, as well as the responses they elicited. She argues that the Chinese delegation was determined not to negatively influence relations with the US, and was more positive and less confrontational than it had been following Secretary

Hagel's speech the year before. However, Glaser found that Sun, in his refusal to directly answer questions from the audience, missed the opportunity to explain China's position and reassure neighbors, creating the appearance that China is indifferent to the concerns of other nations.

Will China Close its Doors?

Ira Belkin and Jerome Cohen

New York Times Op-Ed, June 1, 2015

The authors express concern that China's draft "Foreign NGO Management Law" will bring the "international cultural, educational, and technical exchanges that have become so commonplace and so essential to China's astonishing development...to a grinding halt." They note that if interpreted rigidly, the law could expose agents of foreign entities to punishment for activities that their group engages in anywhere in the world, not just in China. This would introduce a chilling effect that would hamper China's continued global integration and soft power.

The United States, China, and the South China Sea: Is regional order at risk?

Jonathan Pollack

Blog Post, brookings.edu, June 3, 2015

Pollack notes the increasing intensity of media coverage on the South China Sea issue and suggests that the situation is not as grave as the press may suggest. He argues that "recent events do not imply an imminent crisis," but that there is great danger in the US and China not airing their concerns to one another. Such discussion must be done privately, however, and dragging tensions out into the public sphere—the US Navy's bringing CNN on a surveillance flight, for example—is not helpful.

Averting a Deepening US-China Rift over the South China Sea

Michael Swaine

The National Interest Online, June 2, 2015

The author finds that the current controversy in the South China Sea "threatens to drive US-China relations permanently in a far more adversarial, zero-sum direction." At the same time, Swaine contends that to allow this to happen would be the "height of folly." He thus puts forward a number of recommendations and critiques meant to ease the tensions. Swaine criticizes the Chinese for being unclear on the meaning of the nine-dash-line, but also faults the Americans for being unclear about their ultimate interests in the South China Sea. In short, each nation gives the other reason to fear that its purposes might be unreasonably expansive. He urges the US to promote a conflict resolution mechanism rather than focusing on a posture of deterrence, and to scale back intelligence gathering in China's EEZ.

Events at US-based Institutions

Asia-Pacific Economic Integration and the Role of the United States and Japan

Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 14, 2014

This conference was heavily dominated by discussion of the integrative effects of the TPP, with some discussion about governance plans for the AIIB. Zhang Jianping of China's National Reform and Development Commission focused his remarks on the "Belt-and-Road" initiative. Kurt Tong from the US State Department discussed the importance of TPP as an expression of shared values for Japan and the US, and claimed that AIIB was not a "geostrategic issue" to the US, but rather, the Obama administration is concerned about the bank's governance. The conference was led off by a keynote address from Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO), a member of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. Gardner spoke broadly about US engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, and claimed that TPP was the most significant integration pact of our time. He criticized the Obama administration for not producing any "tangible results" in its so-called "rebalance" strategy and urged US leadership to commit more resources to engagement in the region. Along these lines, he described US inability to keep its allies away from the AIIB as indicating a "credibility gap." Gardner discussed the importance of continuing engagement with China, and described the Bilateral Investment Treaty as an "important step" in promoting transparency in the US-China relationship, but that more significant steps must be taken by China in order to facilitate cooperation. To improve relations with the US China must cease reclamation in the Spratly Islands, curtail "rampant theft" of intellectual property from the US, and halt cyberattacks.

Rising Asia and America's Evolving Global Role

A Discussion between Ian Bremmer and Kevin Rudd

Asia Society, May 27, 2015

Ian Bremmer described his recent book about the future of US power and how it relates to the Asia-Pacific. He described US foreign policy as being "marked by extraordinary overreaction" and only intermittently focused on large strategic issues like the rise of China. He made several remarks about the decline of US credibility, and argued that it has reduced influence in Europe and the Middle East, though not yet in Asia. Both Rudd and Bremmer discussed the demographic futures of North America and Asia and noted that the demographic/economic future of the NAFTA region is more promising than that of China. Bremmer described the timing of the AIIB's creation as a strategic mistake on the part of China, because it virtually guaranteed that US policymakers would authorize the TPP in response.

Blurring Borders: National, Subnational, and Regional Orders in East Asia

Wilson Center, June 1, 2015

This conference featured panels on both the “Evolution of Regional Economic and Security Architectures in Asia” and the US “rebalance.” Former US Ambassador to China J. Stapelton Roy delivered a keynote address on US-China relations ([text version available here](#)). Roy centered his remarks upon his interpretation of the recent Chinese white paper on defense strategy. In his view, the paper suggests that China seeks to challenge the US role as arbiter and security guarantor in Asia, but not drive the US out of the Asia-Pacific as many believe. Roy claimed that the “pax Americana” will wane, but a “pax Sinica” will not emerge. Thus the future of order in East Asia is difficult to predict. Roy dismissed fears that China seeks to re-create a system of tributary states, but expressed concern about the direction of Chinese policy as expressed by recent events. First, Roy sees Xi Jinping as viewing international order as a kind of contest, with regard to the white paper, Roy sees no clear limits to Chinese military expansion it describes, nor does the paper address the fact that such expanding capabilities in turn alter the security situation for the rest of the region. Regarding US policy, he expressed disappointment with a lack of US creativity in the area of non-military engagement, and made the point that the international order is constantly changing, and that the US must do a better job of adapting rather than fixating on the preservation of a status-quo.

2016: Taiwan Faces the Future

Address by Tsai Ing-wen

CSIS, June 3, 2015

Taiwan Presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen described her party’s vision for the future of Taiwan, with a focus on innovation-based economic development. Tsai spoke of her desire for Taiwan to become a “new model” of economic development and be a source of “new Asian values.” Regarding the cross-strait situation, Tsai stated that Taiwan will seek to build on the twenty years of negotiation and exchange with the mainland, and that her government will respect what she regards to be a public consensus in Taiwan about maintaining the status-quo.

Commentary: Messages from China's National Defense White Paper

By Hong Nong

"China's Military Strategy," released on May 26, 2015, is the 9th Chinese defense white paper since 1998. For the first time, the white paper elaborates comprehensively on the missions and strategic tasks of China's armed forces in the new political environment and emphasizes the essence of the strategic concept of active defense. There are four critical security domains highlighted in this White Paper: challenges for outer space security; security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests; maintenance of a minimum nuclear capacity sufficient to meet national security demand; an increased capacity for cyber security.

Four important messages could be read between lines. First, China is aware of the profound changes in the international situation. While a world war is unlikely, China admits that the world still faces both immediate and potential threat of local war. China's threat perception includes "hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism." "Border and territorial disputes" are highlighted in the list of hotspot issues. Though not pointing a finger directly at the United States, the white paper shows China's deep concern about increasing U.S. engagement in the South China Sea, which can be read from its assessment of the national security situation.

The United States is described as carrying on "its 'rebalancing' strategy and enhanc[ing] its military presence and its military alliances in this region," in parallel with "Japan's effort of dodging the post-war mechanism" and "some offshore neighbors taking provocative actions and reinforce[ing] their military presence on China's reefs and islands that they illegally occupied." The example of "constant close-in-air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance against China" is explicitly highlighted in the white paper. China has consistently opposed these activities based on its interpretation of 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the "legitimacy of military activities in foreign countries' EEZ," and this is a long standing argument with the United States. The U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft directly flying over a Chinese administered artificial island constructed atop the Fiery Cross Reef in the South China Sea is simply not constructive to the management of the South China Sea dispute, and not helpful for a healthy China-U.S. relations in the maritime domain. Despite the question of the legitimacy under UNCLOS, which is worth debating, activities of this kind have the potential to trigger accidents at sea, like EP-3 incident in 2001. Such incidents are clearly not the interests of China and the United States. A regional mechanism to help avoid accidents is urgently needed. Such a mechanism could be in line with the existing international instruments, such as Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) or a Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES).

Second, "active defense" is the essence of the military strategic thought indicated in

the white paper, which boils down to: adherence to the unity of strategic defense and operational and tactical offences; adherence to the principles of defense, self-defense and post-emptive strike”; the basic point of “preparation for military struggle (PMS)” will be placed on “winning informationized local wars, highlighting maritime military struggle and maritime PMS.” The wording of “maritime military struggle and PMS” may catch eyes when it is read in the context of maritime disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. However, another important message could also be revealed from “adherence to the stance that ‘we will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked’.” No one in this region wants to see a breakout of a military conflict near home, even it is small scale, given the interdependence of ASEAN and China. China assures in this White Paper that it will not be the one who “fires the first gun.” China’s concern derives from the potential intervention from the extra-regional states, which may take provocative attempts due to the misperception of each other and miscalculation or assessment of the situation in this region. China hopes to work with ASEAN to solve their differences in the South China Sea in their preferred ways.

Third, the navy will shift its focus to “open seas protection,” rather than “offshore waters defense” alone. In general, the PLA is seeking to shift away from a narrow focus on defense of its territory and near-periphery, toward the ability to defend and secure Chinese national interests farther abroad. For the PLA Navy, that will mean moving from an emphasis on “offshore waters defense” to an equal focus on “offshore waters defense” and “open seas protection.” On the one hand, the PLA Navy is expected to play a bigger role in pursuing its maritime interests. On the other hand, China wants to play more of a role in protecting the security of strategic SLOSs and oversea interests, and to participate in international maritime cooperation so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power.

Fourth, in the field of “preparation for military struggle,” China emphasizes preparing for military operations other than war such as emergency rescue and disaster relief, counter-terrorism and stability maintenance, rights and interests protection, guard duty, international peacekeeping, and international humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. For military and security cooperation, China will endeavor to establish fair and effective collective security mechanisms and military confidence-building measures. This statement is clearly a positive message from this white paper.

This article previously appeared on the CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative’s website.