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IS THERE A US GLOBAL STRATEGY?*

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Does the United States have a global strategy since the end of the Cold War? The answer can be more difficult that what is commonly believed. As Francòis Heisburg argues, the perceptions regarding the US strategic cohesiveness and intentions are shaped as much by what the United States does or does not do as by the power and self-identity of the "beholders" themselves.[1] With this in mind, I shall address the issue from both perspectives, American and Chinese.

US grand strategy stems from its power position in the international system. A discussion about its power position must precede discussions about the US grand strategy. Thus I first address how to think about the US power. I next discuss the debate within the US regarding its grand strategy and China's perception of the US global strategy. Finally I highlight the divergence of perception separating China and the US and draw out implications for US-China relations.

US POWER

After the Cold War, the United States is the sole superpower. But how preponderant is the US power? To what extent do capabilities translate into control? How long can the US stay on top? American analysts, using traditional and mostly realist criteria for measurement, conclude that the post-Cold War world is a US-dominated unipolar system.[2] But others, who are more aware of the changing nature of power, argue that power is actually more dispersed beyond the military level. Globalization and the growing web of subnational and transnational relations are eroding the power of traditional sovereign states, making US position much more complex and uncertain than the notion of unipolarity would suggest.[3] Analysts, who are skeptical of the traditional definition of power in terms of polarity, also note that US power preponderance does not

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[1] Francòis Heisbourg, "American Hegemony? Perceptions of the US Abroad," *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter 1999-2000), pp. 5-19.

[2] See, for example, Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and US Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 49-88; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41.

[3] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (July/August 1999), pp. 22- 35; Richard Haass, "What to do with American Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, N0. 5 (September/October 1999), pp. 37-49.

always translate into US-dominated outcomes, especially when it concerns second-tier great powers.[4]

Realism predicts balancing from other states to counter concentration of power in an anarchic, self-help international system.[5] However, by the late 1990s, many American scholars and strategic thinkers alike were pleasantly surprised that the US preponderance of power had confronted no counter-balancing from other secondary powers. In fact, none of the second-tier powers has vigorously tried to undermine US power by internal balancing (through domestic armament and force restructuring) or external balancing (through alliance formation) directed against the sole polar state. For some American scholars, this simply proves that US unipolarity can both be enduring and peaceful. The key for that to happen is to discourage any attempt to challenge the sole superpower by maintaining US preponderance and "the expectation on the part of other states that any geopolitical challenge to the United States is futile." [6] Clearly by the late 1990s, the view that US power preponderance is unquestionable and can last has gained important grounds among scholarly circles.

In the early 1990s, Chinese policy elites believed that US unipolarity was just a temporary, transitional stage toward multipolarity. Like their realist counterparts in America, they envisioned a prevalence of balancing behavior from other great powers (Europe, Japan, China, and Russia). But by the late 1990s, such a prognosis became increasingly untenable. Neither Europe nor Japan has sought to become independent poles. Instead, writes Yao Youzhi, head of the Department of Strategic Research in the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, the United States "has controlled and incorporated Europe and Japan, and suppressed and contained Russia and China." His colleague at the same Academy, Hong Bing concurs by acknowledging the vast disparity between the US and other "weak poles," some of which have joined the US strong pole.[7] China's call for multipolarization sounds increasingly hallow and has become, according to Chinese leaders' own private concession, "out of touch with reality." [8]

In the first half of the 1990s, views that suggest the US-dominated "unipolar moment" would be of short duration were widespread in America and China. Such a view was nearly universally held in China, while it was more contested in America. By the late 1990s, both countries witnessed a growing acceptance to the view that US unipolar status could endure, even though there continues to be official, rhetorical contestation to this view in China.

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[4] See, for example, David Wilkinson, "Unipolarity Without Hegemony," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 141-172. The quote is from p. 143.

[5] For the classic statement on this, see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1979), esp. chapter 6.

[6] Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 40.

[7] Yao Youzhi, "US Strategic Orientation in the 21st Century as Viewed from the Kosovo War," Beijing *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, May 20, 1999, pp. 11-14, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter cited as FBIS)-China, August 5, 1999, p. 2; Zhao Yiping, "World Security and US Global Strategy—Interview with Hong Bing, Deputy Research Fellow of the Academy of Military Science," *Guangming Ribao*, February 16, 2000, in FBIS, February 23, 2000.

[8] Wei Ming, "Jiang Zemin's Pragmatic Diplomacy," Hong Kong *Kuang Chiao Ching* in Chinese, October 16, 1999, pp. 16-19, in FBIS-China, November 20, 1999, p. 2.

I find the traditional polarity framework useful but inadequate to capture the dynamics of power redistribution in the post-Cold War era. The problem with the traditional polarity approach is that, as a product of the Cold War era, it is too materialist and narrowly state-centric focusing on the tangible capabilities of polar states. It fails to take into account the ever more important software aspect of power tied to the emerging normative structure of international politics.[9]

In the post-Cold War world, North Americas, Europe, and Japan have coalesced into a global center underpinned by interests and values. James Goldgeier and Michael MacFaul argue these advanced democracies form the core in world politics, the "great power society," wherein members embrace democratic values, subscribe to liberal economic ethos, and share an "in-group" mentality.[10] The core seems to follow what Michael Doyle calls "the logic of a separate peace" based on common republicanism, mutual respect, interdependence, and common interests.[11] In gauging the US power, one must consider the reality that under the US leadership, there is now a rough congruence of economic, political, military, and normative frameworks shared by a cluster of great powers in Europe, North Americas, and Japan. From this perspective, one appreciates better the nature and robustness of US hegemony and why there has been little balancing to US power.

GRAND STRATEGY

American analysts disagree over whether there is indeed a grand strategy guiding US foreign policy. Prescriptive analyses too reflect a wide range of views that fall in the whole spectrum between neo-isolationism and unmitigated pursuit of global primacy. [12] Robert Art lists 7 alternative strategies open for the United States, "dominion, global collective security, regional collective security, cooperative security, containment, isolationism, and selective engagement." He rejects either global domination or withdrawal, but prefers a strategy of "selective engagement," that the United States determines its international commitment based clearly on the priority of interests.[13] Barry Posen and Andrew Ross list four strategies, "neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy," but express no preference as to which strategy best suites the US. [14]

Some American analysts argue, having won the Cold War, the rationale for US global security commitment has ceased to exist. The US should abandon its traditional

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[9] Alastair Iain Johnston discusses this normative structure in some detail. See his "International Structure and Foreign Policy," in Samuel Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium*, 4th Edition (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).

[10] John M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, "A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 467-491.

[11] Michael Dolye, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), especially chap. 8

[12] See Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 5-53.

[13] Robert J. Art, "Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Winter 1998/99), pp. 79-113.

[14] Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for the US Grand Strategy."

strategy of global power projection, shifting instead toward a strategy of "offshore balancing" or "restraint" that withdraws its security commitments abroad and focuses on strengthening the domestic front of American society.[15] Others prefer a strategy that maintains US power position without excessive control and commitment. Still others believe that the US should aggressively pursue a strategy that prolongs and reinforces unipolarity.

The foregoing sampling of views suffices to demonstrate the diversity in strategic prescriptions. Then what about the descriptive assessment of the US strategy after the Cold War? Most American analysts agree that tendencies toward a strategy of primacy exist. And the US foreign policy has revolved around playing a leadership role of some sort in managing global affairs. Prominently on the agenda of US foreign policy is a commitment to promote liberalization of the world economic order, democracy and human rights, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

But beyond agreement over these broad outlines, most American commentators tend not to believe that the Clinton Administration has a clearly defined grand strategy.[16] They agree that the US foreign policy overall has been characterized by contradictions, ambiguities, and inconsistencies. Posen and Ross argue, the Clinton Administration adopted a hybrid strategy that combines elements of power aggrandizement, opportunistic maneuvers, and liberal impulse. They doubt such an unclear vision can sustain for long, as strategic choice determines force structure and policies toward the use of force, international institutions, and other great powers. Stephen Walt characterizes Clinton's strategy as that of a " half-hearted hegemon," "hegemony on the cheap," based on realpolitik calculation but under the rhetoric of global public good.[17] Inconsistencies in the US strategic vision have prompted an attempt to prioritize the US national interest in the post-Cold era. But even those who try have to concede the extreme difficulty in sustaining a foreign policy based on a pre-determined priority of interests.[18]

Strategy entails a well-thought out master plan based on a clear sense of priorities and a consistent commitment to implement such a strategic vision. The United States is the only superpower in the world. That it faces no serious threat generates disincentives for developing a coherent strategic vision on foreign policy. The US Cold War strategy crafted by George Kennan and others was prompted by a perceived threat of the totalitarian communist threat. With the end of the Cold War, strategic vision is bound to erode. A number of American analysts have cited Alexis de Tocqueville's doubt whether democracy is conducive to effective foreign policy. Indeed, the US domestic politics,

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[15] See, for example, Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 5-48; Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing" America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol.22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 86-124.

[16] There are of course exceptions. For example, Michael Mastanduno argues that US has "followed a consistent strategy in pursuit of a clear objective-the preservation of the United States' preeminent global position." Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment," p. 51.

[17] Stephen M. Walt, "Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (March/April 2000), pp. 63- 79.

[18] See, for example, Ashton B. Carter, "Adapting US Defense to Future Needs," *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter 1999/2000), pp. 101-123; Nye, "Redefining the National Interest."

Congress, the flux world itself have combined to make it difficult to design and execute a coherent global strategy.

The search for a well-defined global strategy continues. That the US has so many strategic choices is in fact a luxury of its hegemonic power.

While the US gropes for a coherent strategy, Chinese analysts attribute to the US a highly cohesive master plan bent on global domination. After Kosovo, many Chinese commentators conclude that US has adopted an offensive-oriented "neo-imperialist," "neo-interventionist" strategy, capitalizing on its preponderant power to expand, perpetuate, and impose worldwide hegemony. Chinese commentators point to the US spectacularly high defense spending, strong tendency to use coercive measures in its foreign policy, wanton disregard of international institutions and rules when it deems inconvenient, aggressive liberal agenda in promoting Western values, unilateral decision to build a shield and spear through national and theater missile defense, growing control over information high-tech in the age of globalization, arrogant violations of other countries' sovereignty, unprovoked expansion of traditional alliances in Europe and Asia, quiet but determined containment of emerging powers, etc. The list adds up to a US strategy of global domination similar to "the strategy of primacy" outlined by Posen and Ross, "a strategy of dominion" explained by Art. But few American analysts would agree with the Chinese assessment that the US is *actually* pursuing such a maximal realist strategy of power aggrandizement.

CHINESE PERCEPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR US-CHINA RELATIONS

Does the US have a global strategy? China clearly attributes a highly coherent, largely malign strategy to the United States. Such a perception won't help China to craft a proper, cool-headed foreign policy. It breeds a conspiratorial view toward the US, which in turn predisposes China to see ill intentions and sinister motives in US acts. Consequently, Chinese commentators interpret the NATO bombing of Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999 as a deliberate, calculated attack. They believe the US human rights concerns and humanitarianism in its foreign policy are nothing but camouflage of hegemony and brute power politics. Some Chinese analysts even maintain that globalization itself is a "trap" set by the United States to keep China weak.

What's life like under US hegemony? For Chinese analysts, it won't be pleasant. Many Chinese analysts have publicly stated that the record has shown the US does not respect China's vital security interest, particularly on Taiwan. Through its treatment of Iraq and Yugoslavia, the US has demonstrated a strong tendency to use force to impose its will on other sovereign countries. Based on their experiences, many Chinese analysts ask: How can they expect a benevolent peace under the US hegemony? In fact, some argue, life under US hegemony will be neither peaceful nor liberal, as unchecked power is prone to abusive power.[19]

What about China's place under US hegemony? China finds it hard to define its place under the US hegemony. That's why official media still insist that the trend in the

[19] Fang Ning, Wang Xiaodong, Song Qiang et al., *Quanqiu hua yinying xia de zhongguo zhilu* [China's Road Under the Shadow of Globalization] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999).

world power configuration is multipolarization. After the Kosovo crisis, Chinese analysts have become more pessimistic about US-China relations. Some, such as Yan Xuetong, contend that Sino-American conflict is "structural," as China is on the rise and the United States wants to maintain its unipolar dominance. Thus, "regardless of who is in power in the United States, the strategic element of encircling and containing China will not diminish."[20]

Frustrations with its foreign policy predicament explain Chinese perceptions of the US global strategy. The US-led global center potently impinges on China's foreign relations. Despite its impressive increase in material capabilities, China remains out of the great power club. From the perspective of the great power core, China's attitudes/and image with respect to the liberal norms, international institutions, and foreign policy outlook have condemned it to a peripheral status. Hence, Gerald Segal's provocative question, "Does China Matter?" For Segal, Beijing's actual international status does not live up to the image of a great power projected by Beijing's "theatrical power." China is but a mediocre, second-rate power, and should be treated as such.[21] Chinese analysts may disagree with Segal, but one discerns a growing sense of exacerbation (if not crisis) in China over its foreign relations especially after Kosovo. From the Chinese perspective, the NATO expansion and the reinvigoration of the U.S.-Japan security pact indicate that a de facto grand alliance has emerged. China is confronted with an emerging global center insistent on setting a set of standards and rules that China plays no part in drafting but is called up to comply with. Neither traditional balancing against nor bandwagoning with the dominant power is feasible. China becomes increasingly suspicious that, allied with other great powers, the United States is trying to contain China denying China's entrance into the great power club.

Regardless of how one understands the US global strategy, the question remains: as the US hegemony will likely persist for at least another quarter of a century, how does China define its place under a US-led global order? Granted, living under US is not pleasant, but what is China's way out? These questions should concern both American and Chinese strategists.

It is clear that, to avoid US and China becoming strategic competitors, a great deal of work should be done to bridge the gap in mutual perception of each other's strategic intentions.

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[20] See Huangpu Pingli, "Sino-US Relations: Today and Tomorrow," *Liaowang*, May 8, 2000, pp. 54-55, FBIS-China, May 15, 2000.

[21] Gerald Segal, "Does China Matter?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 5 (September/October 1999), pp. 24-36.