

*Review Essays***America's Debate over the Rise of China**John W. Garver^{*}*The U.S.–China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996–2017*By ERIC HEGINBOTHAM, MICHAEL NIXON, FORREST E. MORGAN, JACOB HEIM, JEFF HAGEN, SHENG LI, JEFFREY ENGSTROM, MARTIN C. LIBICKI, PAUL DELUCA, DAVID A. SHLAPAK, DAVID R. FRELINGER, BURGESS LAIRD, KYLE BRADY, LYLE J. MORRIS
Santa Monica: RAND, 2015

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The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower
MICHAEL PILLSBURY

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Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry
LYLE J. GOLDSTEIN

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The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power

THOMAS J. CHRISTENSEN

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The rapid growth of China's power combined with the intensification of rivalry between the United States and China over the past several years has triggered a re-thinking of US policy toward the rise of China. America's traditional policy of supporting China's rise as a rich, strong and peaceful country in hopes of building a cooperative and generally friendly relation with China over the long term, is being called into question. Critics charge that that traditional policy is backfiring, playing into Beijing's wiles and producing a China so powerful it could well become the greatest challenge to the United States in its history. Other analysts offer a less jaundiced view of China, but all manifest apprehension over whether China will use its growing power to challenge the US. Earlier iterations of a similar debate have come and gone, but the closing distance between US and Chinese

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military, economic and technological power has brought this debate much closer to the US mainstream. Indeed, one or two of these books may represent the mainstream of US thinking. Together, the four books lay out the topography of the US debate.

All four books were written before the sharp downturn in China's economy in 2015 and while the US economy muddled along with its post-financial crisis "new normal" of two per cent annual economic growth. A much narrower gap between long term US and Chinese economic growth rates – if that is what China's slow-down produces – might affect judgments regarding some of these works, especially Goldstein's which argues that China's power will soon equal or surpass the US's. Yet three of the four works emphasize the growing influence of nationalist passions in China and worry that those passions, in the midst of mounting domestic difficulties, might incline China's leaders toward harder policies toward the United States.

The RAND study provides a base line for the debate. With 355 pages of text and tables, the study compares Chinese and US weapons systems in ten different areas, implicitly involving a clash between the PLA's anti-access/area denial and the US Navy's AirSea Battle doctrine. The study's ten "score cards" of capability are: the ability of China's ballistic and cruise missiles to attack, in a presumed opening pre-emptive surprise attack, US air bases in the Western Pacific; the PLA's ability to win a contest for air superiority over the Taiwan Strait (air superiority is presumed to be a vital precursor to successful invasion); China's ability to defend its airspace against a deep penetration US attack; the US ability to attack Chinese air bases in response to China's presumed initial attack on US bases and in the context of a struggle for air superiority and attempted invasion; China's ability to attack US surface warships including aircraft carriers and air-defence cruisers; the US ability to attack Chinese submarines and surface ships to devastate a Chinese invasion fleet headed for Taiwan; the capabilities of both sides in space and counter-space warfare (essential for modern "information warfare"); cyber warfare capabilities; and prospects that conventional war might escalate to the nuclear level. US and Chinese capabilities in each of these areas are weighed in the context of a hypothetical short-duration but intense war involving either a Chinese attempt to seize Taiwan or to defend disputed islands in the South China Sea against a US attempt to re-take an island after China seized it from the Philippines. The starkness of this hard analysis of the military balance in the Western Pacific poses, the RAND study suggests, the first major naval challenge the United States has faced in the Western Pacific since 1941–42.

Geographic proximity figures prominently in the RAND study. The proximity of Taiwan to China plus the great distances of that potential battlefield from US bases in the Western Pacific – let alone the continental United States – confers great advantages on the PLA in terms of intensity of operations, according to the RAND study. So too does the paltry number of US air bases in the Western Pacific – only two in Japan and one in Guam – compared to the 39 PLA air bases within the un-refueled distance of Taiwan. The physical parking space for aircraft on those three US bases would limit the number of planes

the US could shift rapidly from other regions to the West Pacific area of operations. The RAND study demonstrates that both sides have the capability of precision strikes on enemy runways, landed aircraft, fuel tanks and communications facilities, and both the Taiwan and South China Sea scenarios assume an all-out battle for air superiority. A crippling of the three US air bases by pre-emptive first strike, while China's potent anti-ship missiles forced US aircraft carriers to keep distant, could sharply degrade the intensity of US air operations while a PLA invasion fleet headed for Taiwan. The study assumes that South Korea would not permit US war planes to operate from Korean territory.

The overall conclusion is that the US still enjoys superiority in most, but not all areas, but that the margin of US superiority is rapidly diminishing. Given the differing trajectories of US and Chinese defence spending, force size and military modernization efforts, a "tipping point" could be reached within a few years, perhaps as early as 2017, the end point for the study. Would Chinese leaders – fed up with US arming of Taiwan and, perhaps, with Tsai Ying-wen's moves in Taipei – then decide it was time for Taiwan to return to the embrace of the motherland?

The RAND study makes clear that China and the United States are planning and preparing for war with one another. China in the early 1990s gave great attention to the new style of "informationized warfare" invented and demonstrated by the US in Iraq and the Balkans, and responded by developing well-funded and well-designed weapons systems targeting vulnerabilities associated with the new US high-tech style of war. A premise of the RAND study (and, for that matter, Pillsbury's and Christensen's studies) is *sic vis paxem para bellum*. The RAND study's over-riding concern is that the superiority of US military power that has prevented war over Taiwan for 65 years is evaporating. According to the RAND report, Chinese victory in an intense but short duration war over Taiwan would not require that China match the global military power of the United States, but merely prevail in the Taiwan Strait for perhaps several weeks during which the PLA would secure control of Taiwan and dig in.

Michael Pillsbury's fear in *The Hundred Year Marathon* is not a PRC-US war in the near run, but three more decades of US-assisted growth of Chinese power leading to a situation in which China's power over-awes the United States. Pillsbury held a number of positions at RAND and in US defence and Congressional agencies in the 1970s and 1980s and his book is, in part, a memoir. Unlike the RAND study and similar to Christensen, however, Pillsbury warns (p. 231) against overestimating China's power; China is nowhere near close to the United States in aggregate national power. During the late Cold War period, Pillsbury was an advocate of closer military and intelligence cooperation with China – activity that allows him to describe himself as "a panda lover" who became a wiser "panda skeptic" via wide reading of Chinese strategic writings. In 1997 and 2000, Pillsbury authored studies of Chinese military writings on "future wars." Those studies demonstrated that at least some PLA analysts believed (even then) that China could win a war with the United States, while none even mentioned the possibility that China might lose such a war. These

hawks in the PLA have risen in influence since the 1990s, particularly under Xi Jinping, Pillsbury contends, and they have a strategy.

Pillsbury argues that war with the United States would be a disaster for China's "secret strategy." That strategy seeks to gradually and inconspicuously build China's power over the first five decades of the 21st Century until, finally, China's power surpasses and overawes the US. The centenary in 2049 of the founding of the People's Republic of China is set as the goal line, with China as the indisputable preponderant power in the world. At some point the United States will cede primacy to China – either via defeat in war or by prudent war-avoiding appeasement of China – and China will proceed to reorganize the world on the basis of Chinese values and interests. During the remaining three decades of this century-long marathon, China will draw by hook or by crook on what the West has and what China needs to grow powerful: markets for its exports force fed by mercantilist methods; systematic theft and coerced transfer of advanced technology including cutting-edge systems; scientific knowledge garnered by "cooperation" with US corporations and universities. Not scaring the West and endangering access to these vital inputs is central to success of this "marathon" strategy. Building a large and ultra-modern military force too quickly, or using China's military power too provocatively, could alert the West and must be avoided. China must deny a desire for "hegemony," for displacing the United States as Asia and the world's dominant power, while steadily building the conditions for Chinese global hegemony. The West should wake up and be forewarned, Pillsbury writes. Otherwise the West will ultimately live in a world organized around China's interests and values.

Pillsbury centres his analysis around interviews with China's hawks that his government duties made possible. He translates dozens of these hawks' comments about lessons they learned from the practice of state relations in China during the Warring States period (402–221 BCE). While Pillsbury occasionally suggests that his understanding of China's "secret strategy" derives from his contacts with Chinese defectors and reading of purloined Chinese classified documents, in fact his understanding is extrapolated from the Chinese hawks seeking lessons today from Machiavellian writings that emerged during that ancient era. From the perspective of this hyper-realist *weltanschauung*, according to Pillsbury, the hawks see politics among states as a ruthless no-holds-barred struggle for power with the prize sought by each ambitious ruler being hegemony over other states. A key precept of this tradition, according to Pillsbury, is that there cannot be two emperors, or hegemon, and struggle between them will continue until one contender finally prevails and dominates. Deception is vital to success in this contest, and Pillsbury offers scores of examples of how today's hawks advocate ancient stratagems of deception: luring an opponent into a costly quagmire; using double agents to mislead rivals; sowing mistrust in your opponent's alliances, and most of all, using an opponent's strength against him while denying ambition. A clever ruler will deny ambition thus lulling his opponent while conspiring to overthrow him. Pillsbury uses these tropes to elucidate

contemporary Chinese policy toward the United States. He also argues that China's study of US strategy during its 19th-century "rise," as well as study of Soviet strategy during its long but ultimately failed attempted "rise," validate a strategy of low key avoidance of premature collision with and simultaneous exploitation of the incumbent hegemon until, finally, the rising power completely overawes the declining power.

Pillsbury's framework offers a plausible explanation for the widespread embrace in China of propositions that US policy seeks to weaken and injure China, in spite of copious evidence indicating that the US has, in reality, long supported China's emergence as a rich and strong global partner: that is what China's Warring States tradition teaches a reigning hegemon should do and, perhaps, what China itself would do in such a situation. Further, the more powerful an emerging rival becomes, the greater the threat it poses to a reigning hegemon, and the more desperate that reigning hegemon's measures to throttle its rival. This is why, Pillsbury suggests, such far-fetched notions as US-armed intervention in Tibet or Xinjiang, or US instigation of an uprising to overthrow the CCP, appeal to many hawks in China. This is also why China apparently feels deeply insecure even though it is stronger and enjoys a more benign international environment than at any time since the 1820s. This conundrum undermines traditional US China policy: US assistance to China's successful rise is not, in fact, making China friendlier and more cooperative with the United States. Instead and in fact, the stronger China becomes, the more fearful of the United States it becomes.

Pillsbury recommends that the United States start by recognizing clearly that China aspires to displace it as the world's leading power, and then adopt China's own Warring States strategy to counter it. One need not be German to apply Clausewitz's concepts, Pillsbury notes. The US should develop a long-range strategy for industrial and technological competition with China. China-like industrial policies should be employed to strengthen US competitiveness *vis-à-vis* China. The US should give stronger support to dissidents and economic reformers in China. It should punish China for its cyber espionage of US intellectual property and defence technology. The US should build a coalition of states concerned with China's rise: Japan, India, the Philippines, Mongolia and South Korea. In short, the United States should pursue a long-term competition against China. Pillsbury rejects resort to a full-bore Cold War-like strategy; "Much of U.S. strategy in the Cold War is not relevant – at least not yet. Calls for a new Cold War play into the hands of the hawks in China who seek to exaggerate the threat from the United Statesno need to create an anti-China alliance akin to the NATO alliance to contain an expanding empire..." (p. 224). Such caveats notwithstanding, Pillsbury represents one pole of the US debate.

Lyle Goldstein's book stands at the other pole of the US debate. Unlike Pillsbury's focus on 2049, Goldstein sees China as about to surpass America. He calls for a voluntary US withdrawal from its current position of hegemony over the Western Pacific in order to "make way" for the growth of Chinese

influence. But each drawdown of US presence would be matched by roughly equivalent Chinese concessions in areas of US policy interests. Thus the process would not entail unilateral US withdrawal, but a mutual and balanced effort at accommodation by an incumbent but declining hegemon and an ambitious, rising power determined to grow into portions of the incumbent power's receding sphere of influence. "Spheres of influence" are an "integral and natural organizing principle of world politics that follows from the continual deep relevance of geography," Goldstein asserts (p. 17). In line with this, the US should "bestow" on China a larger role in the Asia-Pacific region. In many cases this process would require reduction of US military forces in that region. This would allow the US to "draw back from the brink of disaster" and avoid an otherwise looming confrontation – implicitly a big war – with China.

Goldstein was the founding director of the China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) established in 2006 by the US Naval War College to promote mutual understanding and maritime cooperation with China. Under Goldstein's tutelage the CMSI became a leading centre for study of China's growing naval and maritime capabilities. Goldstein himself authored insightful CMSI monographs on the PLA-N's submarine development efforts, mine warfare capabilities, and China's maritime enforcement agencies. At first it might seem ironic that someone with this background would advocate such a dovish approach to an ever more powerful China. But in Goldstein's view, it is precisely China's great and growing power that makes unwise an American confrontation with it. In an email to this reviewer, Goldstein pointed out that the RAND report did not consider the PLA's extremely potent sea mine capabilities, and that when those capabilities are factored into the equation, the PLA's ability to punish the US Navy in the vicinity of Taiwan is even grimmer than presented by the RAND report.

Goldstein's central argument is that China's power is growing so much that the United States will be able to oppose it only at very great cost. It is virtually certain that China's economy will surpass that of the US in the near future, and the instruments of China's national power, military and otherwise, will grow accordingly. It is virtually inevitable that a very powerful China will insist on accommodation of its interests in the East Asia/ Western Pacific region, and a wise and prudent US policy would take the initiative in accommodating China's rise.

"Appeasement" is not a term Goldstein favours. But neither is it a term he eschews. Appeasement may be a sagacious policy in dealing with rising powers not set on over-turning the existing international system. He quotes Winston Churchill to this effect. The United States should follow, Goldstein says, a course similar to that of Britain in the late 19th century when London accommodated the ambitions of a rising United States. Proactive accommodation by a still much stronger United States will not be a sign of weakness, but of good will and sagacity. Moreover, accommodation of China's interests can be achieved without endangering fundamental US security interests. The United States should embrace China's desire for a "peaceful rise" and negotiate with Beijing outcomes

that reasonably accommodate both Chinese and US interests. Today's China is vastly different than Germany circa 1938, and it would be foolish to rule out accommodation of an aggrieved China because it failed with Hitler-led Germany. China's territorial demands are long-standing and are not likely to grow when existing claims are satisfied. China has long since abandoned world revolution and does not much care what sort of internal governance countries choose for themselves. Beijing has not built up massive military forces or stationed them abroad. It supports the United Nations system and its components: the NPT regime, peace-keeping operations and so on. China does not seek to drive the United States out of the Western Pacific; indeed such a development would not correspond to China's own interests. Beijing seeks, rather, to ensure that the US presence there does not trample on China's interests. It has not used military force against its neighbours (with the one exception of Vietnam in 1979). It has demonstrated a willingness to work with and even learn from the US and the West generally. If anything, China esteems and seeks to emulate the United States. If the United States opens the way to a reasonable growth of Chinese influence, reasonably accommodates China's interests and ratchets down US influence, there is a good chance for Sino-American partnership in the 21st century. That is the ambitious goal Goldstein posits.

There is a lot of common ground between Goldstein and Christensen. Both reject the notion that China seeks to overturn the existing international order. Why would China want to topple an open global economic order now that it has become a global economic power? Both believe – contrary to Pillsbury – that China's top leaders sincerely desire a long term peaceful relation with the United States and are not merely pretending. Both Goldstein and Christensen recognize a diversity of views among China's foreign policy community. Strident voices see US efforts to contain, encircle and split China to abort its rise, and call for more confrontational approaches toward the US. But other moderate voices recognize overlapping interests with the United States, and conclude that cooperation in these areas should be expanded. Both Goldstein and Christensen see moderate voices as dominant among China's top leadership but subject to nationalist pressures. Both Goldstein and Christensen call for active search via dialogue and negotiation for common ground and cooperation on common interests between China and the United States. They identify many of the same areas in which China and the US can work together more: nuclear non-proliferation especially regarding North Korea and Iran; global economic issues; climate change; development assistance to Africa. Both call for American representatives to listen and empathize more with China's concerns. Both call for the United States to downplay human rights and democratization, and instead deal with China as it is – ruled by the CCP's authoritarian one-party regime. Both stress Beijing's aversion to foreign intervention and regime change and the need for Washington to avoid those landmines in dealing with China.

Yet there are major differences between Goldstein and Christensen. One involves contrary estimates of the current state of Sino-US relations. Goldstein

views the relationship as deeply fraught, fueled by Chinese anger, and heading for confrontation unless switched soon onto a radically different, more cooperative path. For Christensen, Sino-US relations are sometimes better, sometimes worse, depending largely on the quality of US diplomacy and political alignments within China. But overall the relation is not that bad and generally becoming better, i.e. more cooperative. Per Christensen, China's top leaders understand very well the many ways in which the development of the country they rule benefits from participation in the system set up under tutelage after 1945 and still maintained by US global power. Nationalist propaganda to the contrary serves to legitimize the CCP regime, but China's moderate leaders understand that confrontation with the United States could derail China's remarkably successful post-1978 development drive – upon which social stability depends.

The most fundamental difference between Goldstein and Christensen has to do with the efficacy of a strong US military position in the Western Pacific. Such a position of US strength still exists, and has been maintained across several US administrations. Goldstein and Christensen differ sharply about the consequences and thus wisdom of continuing that presence. Goldstein views the strong US military presence as provocative, fostering Chinese anger and perceptions of threat, and leading ultimately and perhaps in the not-too-distant future, to a Chinese effort to end that presence. Christensen, on the other hand, sees US strength as “incentivizing” moderate Chinese behaviour toward China's smaller and weaker neighbours with whom China has territorial conflicts: “Contrary to the common assumption that US toughness in East Asia only breeds Chinese intransigence and spirals of tension in the region, the second half of the 1990s demonstrates that a robust US security presence and commitment to East Asia, in the proper diplomatic context, can incentivize China to behave more moderately toward its neighbors.” (p. 195).

Goldstein surveys ten policy areas recently characterized, he avers, by escalating US–PRC tension, and proposes in each area spirals of virtuous cooperative action in which moves by the US (the first actor because of its greater strength and its role in China's “humiliation” in the 19th century) will be met by cooperative counter-moves by China. Initial moves will be largely symbolic and designed to build trust. As mutual trust grows, moves will become more substantive, and the two sides move toward mutual accommodation in previously conflict-ridden policy areas. In each policy area Goldstein proposes five hypothetical moves for the US, and five reciprocal moves by China constituting together a “cooperation spiral.” The end result in each policy area will be greatly reduced Sino-American tension achieved by deliberate Sino-American cooperation.

Regarding Taiwan, for example, US moves begin by reducing forces on Guam, closing the US military office in Taipei, endorsing and encouraging “final status” negotiations between Beijing and Taipei, and finally, ending US ending arms sales to Taiwan. China's reciprocal moves begin with unconditional military talks with Taipei, withdrawal of missiles and amphibious forces from opposite Taiwan, and culminate in the signature of a “treaty” with Taipei promising

not to attack Taiwan or station CCP or PLA personnel on that island. Beijing would agree to a “confederation” with adequate guarantees for genuine Taiwan autonomy and continuing liberal democratic self-government – but within China’s rather than a US sphere. Goldstein postulates that Beijing and Taipei would sign a treaty (he does not say with whom; presumably with Taipei) guaranteeing Taiwan’s autonomy within the new confederation while promising the Mainland would not use force against Taiwan. China’s imperative of “reunification” would thus be reconciled with US concern with survival of Taiwan’s liberal democratic polity. Taiwan would thus be transferred, without war, from the US to China’s sphere while protecting US interests in the survival of Taiwan’s democratic polity.

Regarding Korea, Goldstein argues that the US should encourage China to play a greater security and economic role in the north, revitalizing a now largely nominal military alliance with the North and providing large-scale economic assistance to it. Chinese protection would eliminate the North’s need for nuclear weapons to ensure survival, while economic growth would provide strong incentives. For its part, the US would propose a bilateral investigation of the Korean War, draw down US combat forces in South Korea, begin negotiations with and then recognize North Korea. Since these moves would ease Pyongyang’s security concerns, they would, Goldstein hypothesizes, provide incentives for the North to give up its nuclear weapons programme, with China supervising and verifying that process. Beijing, after all, has an interest in denuclearizing North Korea and preventing further nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia. Goldstein’s Korea scenario ends with voluntary and China-verified denuclearization, North Korea firmly within China’s sphere of influence, and with Beijing relaxed about a residual US-South Korean alliance restructured to present no military threat to China.

With Japan, the US would marginally reduce its military presence on Okinawa and nudge Tokyo toward a more sincere demonstration of repentance on “the history issue,” a repentance to be enacted during a visit to the Nanjing Massacre museum in that Chinese city. Such moves would induce Beijing to agree to the mid-line principle in the East China Sea, but with Tokyo agreeing to “joint administration” over the disputed Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands. China would then accept Japan as a “normal country” with normal military capabilities, while the US would “restructure” its alliance with Japan to address China security concerns. With China’s security concerns over Taiwan, Korea and Japan thus obviated, China would no longer need to push the development of military power so vigorously, or be so suspicious of a residual US military presence in the Western Pacific.

It should be noted that Goldstein’s approach is largely hypothetical and speculative; it is based on speculation about what Washington and Beijing *might* do. While Goldstein’s proposed moves are grounded in research in Chinese sources, there remains a strong “what if” quality to them. Valid objections can be raised to almost all moves in the “cooperation spirals” proposed by Goldstein – as he

himself recognizes. Would Beijing really accept the mid-line in the East China Sea, give up the nine-dash line in the South China Sea, or recognize Japan as a “normal military power”? But given Goldstein’s objective of outlining a path to Sino-American cooperation to avoid collision, it is hard to see how one could avoid speculation. Moreover, Goldstein merely offers his proposed moves as illustrative, and recognizes that these or other such moves would need to be carefully thought-through and then negotiated by the two sides. Strong domestic opposition would emerge with many of his proposed moves. Goldstein responds to these difficulties with a call for statesmanship and national leadership.

Christensen sees two main ways in which China’s behaviour as a power rapidly growing in strength might nonetheless destabilize that existing order. First, China might adopt coercive approaches intended to compel Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam to submit to Beijing’s notions of sovereignty in territorial disputes. (Christensen says very little about the Sino-Indian relationship, an unfortunate omission that keeps him from focusing on the highly significant emerging Japan–India entente, an emerging relationship that fits very nicely into his framework about “incentivizing” non-belligerent Chinese behaviour.) A combination of aggrieved “post-colonial nationalism,” growing space for nationalist demands both popular and from within the elite, plus a belief that since the “great recession” of 2008 the balance of power has shifted fundamentally in China’s favour, could easily tempt Beijing to resort to attempt to force its neighbours to submit to Beijing’s notions of sovereignty. These pressures in fact combined to produce belligerent and coercive Chinese policies in maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas in 2010–14, Christensen maintains. It is in this realm of possible Chinese coercion of its weak neighbours over territorial issues that Christensen sees the relevance of a continuing strong US military presence as “incentivizing” China’s non-resort to coercive approaches.

The second way in which China’s rise might challenge the existing global order is by simply refusing to support efforts by other major powers to deal with various global governance issues: the proliferation of nuclear weapon technologies; improving the quality of development assistance to Africa; dealing with situations of egregious abuse of human rights by rogue governments; maintaining financial and economic stability; or dealing with climate change. China’s global footprint in all these areas is simply so large, Christensen argues, that refusal to join in international efforts may render those efforts ineffective. China’s insistence on continuing “normal” economic relations with North Korea or Iran, for example, undermine efforts by other powers to pressure Pyongyang or Tehran to abandon nuclear weapon programs. China’s no-strings-attached aid to African nations may undermine the efforts of other major aid-givers to ensure that development assistance actually goes to development. China’s carbon emissions are so large that its refusal to accept obligations via the Kyoto accord doomed that accord with the American Congress. China is so big and

consequential, and the world today so interconnected, that China simply must cooperate actively if many international problems are to be dealt with effectively. China, however, tends to view itself (not unreasonably per Christensen) as a developing country, and views as unfair American demands that it assume responsibilities equivalent to leading developed countries. Moreover, China's "post-colonial nationalism" tends to view such US demands as a nefarious scheme to hobble China's development and ensnare it in various foreign quagmires.

Christensen argues that strong and durable US security presence in the West Pacific produces a Chinese awareness that coercive pressure on its neighbours – again Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam – will push those countries closer toward the United States and toward one another in a coalition to counter a belligerent China. Fear of US encirclement is actually an incentive for non-coercive Chinese policies designed to reassure its neighbours, keeping them away from joining in encircling China. Continuing US strength in the Western Pacific is thus essential to the China-restraining option of potential "encirclement" of China. Without a strong US presence, China's small neighbours are unlikely to risk angering China by forming a coalition to balance China. With a strong US presence, however, China's weak neighbours will feel bold enough to draw together and with the United States to counter China. According to Christensen, China demonstrated its understanding of this principle when it drew away from its confrontational approaches of 2010–14 in the East and South China Sea and moved to reduce tension with Tokyo, Seoul and Hanoi. As Tokyo and Seoul began repairing their previously tense relations under the impetus of Pyongyang's provocative nuclear and missile tests, Beijing became much less tolerant of the North's reckless war-mongering. From Christensen's point of view, Goldstein's prescription of recession of US power would be an invitation to Chinese coercion against its weak neighbours – and all the destabilizing conflict that would ensue.

Goldstein warns against the US allowing itself be "played" by calls from China's small and weak neighbours for the US to "stand up to Beijing's bullying." That would be exactly the wrong approach, according to Goldstein; it would encourage further provocation of China by these small countries and draw the United States into deeper conflict with China. It is only natural that these weak countries might be unnerved by China's astounding rise, and the US might want to demonstrate empathy with those little-country fears, just as a parent might show empathy for the "irrational fears" of a child. But Washington should not found its policy on such "irrational fears" – irrational because China does not intend to invade these small countries. The reality is, Goldstein asserts, that the American people do not want and will not support war with China over "rocks and reefs," and a wise US policy must be founded on this reality. If China were to prepare to invade Japan or the Philippine archipelago, the US would be compelled to intervene and assume the burdens of war with China. But there is no evidence that China intends or is preparing something like that, Goldstein argues. The US should draw red lines against Chinese efforts

to overrun its neighbours, and be prepared to stand by those red lines should China someday morph into something like Japan in the 1930s. That is far from being the case today, Goldstein argues.

One factor underlying Goldstein and Christensen's differing assessments of Beijing's willingness to challenge the US position in the Western Pacific is differing views about the durability of US preeminence. Goldstein maintains that China will soon surpass the United States in national power in terms of GDP and military line up. With the US about to be surpassed by China, it makes sense for the United States to abandon hegemony in the Western Pacific and reconcile US positions there with China's own requirements. Christensen, like Pillsbury, views US preeminence, globally and in the Western Pacific, as far more durable. Christensen deconstructs theories of US decline to demonstrate continuing US leadership in economic, military, technological and educational areas. The United States has, to cite one element of continuing US preeminence, some 60 allies accounting for 80 per cent of global military spending. China has perhaps two allies: North Korea and Pakistan.

But continuing US strength is only part of Christensen's prescription. Reassurance of China is the other, equally important half. The US should make it clear to Beijing that the power of the US and its allies will not be used to support Taiwan independence (that is *de jure* separation from China), Tibetan or Xinjiang secession, or to undermine and overthrow China's incumbent CCP government. Christensen lauds the efforts of both the Clinton and the George W. Bush administrations to clearly disassociate the US from the boat-rocking moves of Lee Teng-hui and Chen Sui-bian respectively. The US should not take sides in the maritime disputes of the Western Pacific, and should limit its concern to the peaceful resolution of those disputes. The United States should not begrudge cooperative ties between China and its East Asian neighbours, even US allies. Washington must accept that these countries do not want to choose sides in a Sino-US conflict. Alliance with the United States will remain insurance against a belligerent China even as China's ties with its weak neighbours warm. The US should not view the Sino-US relationship as a zero-sum game; in fact China's moves often serve US interests as well as China's own. The US should use "dialogues" with China to better understand China's views, identify areas in which the US and China have common interests, and discuss how the two countries can best cooperate. The US must make clear – as most US administrations have according to Christensen – that it welcomes China's emergence as a great power, and seeks to cooperate with a more powerful – and responsible – China.

Christensen's method of analyzing this strength + reassurance balance is historical. He reviews the China policies of US administrations since the end of the Cold War, identifying when those administrations got right the requisite balance of strength and reassurance, and when they did not. The first Clinton administration got it wrong, combining US weakness with provocative policies. The second Clinton administration got the balance about right and Sino-US relations

prospered. The George W. Bush Administration started with a deaf ear regarding reassurance, but soon got the balance right – assisted by the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror. The early Obama administration blundered by inadvertently signaling US weakness (by agreeing inter alia to respect China’s open-ended “core interests”) with non-reassuring statements about “pivot to Asia” and “return to Asia” – formulations that China read as “containment.” The “great recession” also fed a Chinese conviction that the wind was now in China’s sails. This led to several years of confrontation (Christensen identifies 2010 as the most belligerent year for Chinese diplomacy in the reform era). But soon China realized its policies were precipitating the very encirclement it feared, while Obama restored the proper balance of strength and reassurance.

A final difference between Goldstein, Christensen and Pillsbury has to do with what one might call historical repentance. Goldstein shows strong empathy with China’s many grievances against foreign powers, including the United States, inflicted during China’s “century of national humiliation.” Goldstein begins his study with a walk-through of American villainies inflicted on China prior to 1949 as displayed in the revamped National History Museum in Beijing. He concludes his study with a scene from the 1962 historical novel *Sand Pebbles*. For Goldstein, the fact that American gunboats patrolled the Yangtze and mucked around in China’s internal affairs, while Chinese gunboats were absent from the Mississippi, should inspire in Americans a sense of humility, remorse and generosity. Christensen has little to say about what China perceives as pre-1949 US violations of China. Pillsbury stresses how Chinese domestic education grossly distorts the US role in China’s “century of national humiliation.”

Pillsbury, Goldstein and Christensen agree on one paradox of contemporary Sino-American relations: while US China policy since 1972 has, in fact, consistently sought to facilitate China’s rise as a great power (albeit a rule-abiding and peaceable one), China’s dominant nationalist political culture sees the US as set on stifling China’s rise. All three authors link this Chinese misperception to the legitimacy efforts of the CCP government.

Biographical note

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