

US Initiatives to Contain China's Rise: Post 2008's Economic Crisis

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Abstract

In contemporary times, a Great Power Competition is being witnessed between the United States and China. On one hand, the United States is trying to sustain the current US-led liberal world order and maintain its prestigious status of the sole Superpower; on the other hand, China is trying to devise a more 'just and balanced' world order in which it sees itself playing a dominant role. In order to maintain its hegemony, the United States has adopted successive comprehensive strategies to effectively curb China's rise. This paper discusses in-depth the adopted successive policies and strategies by the United States to contain China's rise and analyzes the efficacy of these promulgated policies.

Keywords: *US-China Relations, American Grand Strategy, Great Power Competition, Indo-Pacific Region, Pivot to Asia.*

Introduction

Since its independence (July 4, 1776), the United States (US) has steadily followed an impressive plan concentrated on attaining and sustaining power over its rivals. Throughout the Cold War, the US successfully maintained and reiterated its status as the Superpower by promoting the strategy of 'containment.' The main aim for the containment policy was to limit the influence of communism in Eastern Europe in particular, and across the world in general; as communism was in direct conflict to the fundamentals of the US-led liberal world order. (Mayers, 1986) To achieve this aim, the US adopted various policies ranging from limiting Soviet Union's (USSR) relations with the major economic powers to ideological alliance making (Mayers, 1986).

After the Cold War, the US policymakers mistakenly believed that it was highly unlikely that soon another state would be in the position to threaten its global hegemony. This belief was further strengthened by articles/books such as 'End of History and the Last Man.' (Fukuyama, 2006) However, on September 11, 2001, merely a decade after the start of the unipolar moment, the US hegemony was under attack, when a well-coordinated attack was conducted by Al-Qaeda through 4 hijacked commercial airplanes and crashing them on the 'Twin Towers,' New York and 'the Pentagon,' Washington D.C. (Taylor, 2011) Soon after the devastating 9/11 attacks, the US initiated a full-scale war in Afghanistan (2001), against Al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of the attack, and the Taliban, the facilitators of the attack. Later, in March 2003, the US also attacked Iraq, to eradicate the 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' (WMDs) which Iraq supposedly had. ("The Iraq War," 2011).

The US was so focused in both these military endeavors, the Afghan and Iraq war, that it paid less attention to keep a close eye on the potential threats to its hegemony by other states, rather than non-state actors. China greatly capitalized from the convoluted global political situation created due to the unavailability of the sole hegemon of the world. It was only after the 2008's global economic melt-down, which adversely affected the economies of the majority of the developed world, except that of China, the US realized the serious threat China posed to its hegemony. Soon, after closely assessing China's ever-growing international stature as well as economic, diplomatic, and military abilities; the US was forced to not only revisit its policy towards China, but also divert considerable resources in order to curb the threat posed by China's rise.

In the recent past, the US evolved its policy towards China considering issues like nuclear and missile program of North Korea and the cooperation of China in this regard, US-China trade relation, Asia-Pacific maritime disputes, and their mutual efforts on global climate change. All these policies mainly focus to maintain the US hegemony, in the face of the ever-rising Chinese power. To counter the rise of China in the region particularly and across the globe generally, the US pursued its agenda of Chinese containment through different policies, which are discussed subsequently.

From 'Pivot to Asia' to 'US Grand Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region'

Since the beginning of the Cold War, Asia was considered of great importance to the US; thus, it always maintained a proactive approach towards the region. In the 1990's, the US policy towards Asia was predominantly focused upon geo-strategic concerns, particularly regarding the long-standing conflicts in East Asia; tensions among Taiwan and China, division of the Korean peninsula, and the Indo-Pak nuclear confrontation. ("Crafting a U.S. Policy on Asia," 2007) Later, in the early 2000's, after the 9/11 attacks, the US policy towards Asia witnessed a paradigmatic shift, now it focused upon eradicating the threats posed by 'non-state actors' in the form of terrorism and extremism. However, the 2008's devastating global economic crisis made the US realize the mammoth of China's economic power in Asia particularly and the world generally. Since then, the US has been working tirelessly to somehow contain and curb the Chinese rise.

Pivot or Rebalancing to Asia Strategy

In 2011, the Obama administration launched the first comprehensive US foreign policy initiative to contain China's rise and influence in the region; 'Pivot to Asia.' The principal objective of this policy was to substantially enhance US influence in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in the context of ever-increasing regional power and influence of China. (Manyin et al., 2012) The main components of this policy included, increasing US military footprints in the region, enhancing economic ties with the region via initiative such as 'Trans-Pacific Partnership' (TPP) and the 'Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation' (APEC), and increase engagement in the region through bilateral ties and with regional organizations like 'Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) and 'East Asia Summit' (EAS). (Manyin et al., 2012).

Military Rebalancing

To contain China, the most high-prolific initiative taken by Presidents Obama was in the security domain. Obama's military strategy focused upon increasing funds and adding military assets in the region to deter China and maintain US hegemony. (Brooks et al., 2009; Green et al., 2012; Hicks et al., 2016) The military rebalancing primarily focused upon strengthening cooperation with the traditional allies of the US and to establish new military partnerships in the Asia-Pacific.

The US not only decided to station more troops in the Asia-Pacific, but also readjusted their existing military deployment. Furthermore, as per 2012's Military Strategy Report by the Department of Defense (DOD), the US decided to position 60 percent of its naval assets within the next decade under the US Pacific command and to improve its troops combating capabilities. (Panetta, 2012) In a 2010 Pentagon

report, it is stated that the US shall invest \$12 billion to upgrade the Guam Military Base as well as speedily construct other several surrounding military bases (Agnote, 2010).

The US also reinvigorated its relations with its traditional regional allies. It intensified its cooperation with South Korea, especially after North Korea conducted its nuclear tests in 2013. In addition, the US solidified its military relations with Japan by the 'forward deployment' of military assets; deploying the Osprey aircraft to Okinawa and including the Senkaku Islands in the US-Japan security agreement. ("The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance," 2019) Furthermore, President Obama announced not only to include the network war into the joint defense treaty with Australia, but also reinforce Port Darwin by deploying 200–250 US marines. Moreover, the US increased the number of troops and surveillance aircrafts in the Philippines as well as deployed 4 topnotch combat ships in Singapore (Manyin et al., 2012).

Diplomatic Rebalancing

The Obama administration focused upon diplomatically rebalancing the Asia-Pacific region in favor of the US. Thus, the US proactively engaged in the already existing Asia-Pacific regional multilateral mechanism. For instance, since the US has signed 'Treaty of Amity and Cooperation' with ASEAN in 2009, it has adopted a wide range of strategies to expand its presence in the region and increase its engagement with the regional organizations by creating forums, like the 'ASEAN Regional Forum' (ARF) and the EAS. The US by participating in the regional institutions not only guaranteed cooperation on matters, like disaster management and nuclear non-proliferation, but also ensured its domination in setting the agenda of these institutes and manipulating these institutes to attain its political goals (Goh, 2004).

With time, the US slowly changed its long-standing 'non-intervention' policy on the marine territorial disputes in the East and South China seas. In 2010, at the 'Shangri-La Dialogue,' Robert Gates, the then US Defense Secretary, explicitly said that the US shall not favor any sides in the territorial disputes in both the East and South China seas. In 2011, at the East Asia Summit, President Obama reiterated this Stance. (Emmers, 2012) However, not soon after, the US quite tactfully used the territorial disputes of the region as the pivot to rebalance the region. Now, the US openly supported states, like the Philippines and Vietnam, in the marine territorial disputes through military means; naval exercises and defense arrangements, and by utilizing the well-established laws, the 'United Nations Convention on the Law of Seas' (UNCOLS). Most importantly, for the very first time, the US publicly challenged China's claim as per the 'nine-dash line' in both the East and South China seas. (Ross, 2014) By supporting its allies over the marine territorial disputes against China, the US ensured cooperation of these regional states in containing China.

Economic Rebalancing

Georg Löfflmann, an expert on the Asia-Pacific, concludes that the Asia-Pacific region with its ever-increasing share of global GDP is of great importance to the US; thus, it will grow its influence in the region. Previously, China was the center piece of regional economic cooperation. However, the US, under President Obama, established a US-centric economic mechanism for the region, which significantly threatened China's influence, in the form of the TPP.

On February 04, 2016, the TPP, a free trade treaty, was signed amongst twelve states; Canada, Brunei, Australia, Peru, Malaysia, Singapore, Chile, Japan, Vietnam, New Zealand, Mexico and the US. (Howard, 2016) It was designed with the objective of developing a framework that will greatly economically integrate the Asia-Pacific region. China had a pessimist view of the TPP, it considered it to be a US counterbalancing mechanism of the Chinese influence within the region and to curb/contain China's peaceful economic development. China's fears were legitimized when President Obama stated while explaining the TPP, "we cannot let states such as China to write the rules of the world economy." (*Statement by President Obama on the Trans-Pacific Partnership*, 2015).

The TPP accounted for 40 percent of the global GDP, 30 percent of the world's exports, and 25 percent of the world's imports; involving more than 793 million consumers. (Jackson, 2016) Excluding China from this pact, which is the largest merchandise trader, speaks volumes. Leading Chinese economists considered the TPP to be the practical manifestation of a geo-economic war between the mighty two, the US vs China, in the Asia-Pacific. ("What Is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)?," 2019) China fears that the leading economy of the world, the US, the third biggest economy of the world, Japan, and other major economies are ganging up and will use the TPP to construct such rules and norms of global trade and commerce that will adversely affect China's economy. Experts at the 'Peterson Institute for International Economics' estimate that this pact will cost China, approximately US\$100 billion of exports annually. (Jackson, 2016) The chief economist of the "People's Bank of China", Mr. Ma Jun, estimated that China would lose 2.2 percent points in GDP if it did not join this pact (Jia et al., 2019).

China has expressed its willingness to join the pact, but on the condition that it will not be there to follow the rules but to set them. However, the US was unwilling to make China a part of the pact, as it was made to contain the China's economic rise. Later, in response to the TPP, Beijing actively pursued to negotiate the 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' (RCEP), a China-led economic bloc to counter the TPP.

The US Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region

The term 'Indo-Pacific' was introduced by Rex Tillerson, the then US Secretary of State, in his Speech in India, in 2017, to explain the US wider strategic areas of interest in the Pan-Asian region. Security experts define the Indo-Pacific region as the areas in between India's western coast and the west coast of the US. (*Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, 2019) Still, the driving principle of the US strategy in the Indo-Pacific region is to contain the rise of China which is moreover inline with Obama's Pivot to Asia policy, with several key changes.

Firstly, for the first time, the US declared in black and white China to be a 'revisionist power,' which was opposing the US vision of 'free and open Indo-Pacific.' (*Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, 2019) The previous administrations never took China head on with such an antagonizing claim. In 2019's, 'Indo-Pacific Strategy Report,' it was clearly highlighted how China reaps tremendous benefits by being part of the international system yet undermines it from within by clearly defying set norms, patterns and principles of the world order. (Panda, 2019b) For instance, China is persecuting its Muslim population, especially the Uighurs and Kazakhs living in the province of Xinjiang. Many Chinese nationals living abroad are involved in cyber theft of technology information and highly confidential documents on the behalf of the Chinese Ministry of State Security. China is militarizing the South and East China seas to force its claim on the disputed islands. Lastly, China is using its various economic measures, especially 'debt-trap diplomacy,' to strongarm states to do what it deems essential to safeguard its interests.

Secondly, the strategy focusses on the importance of the US allies in the region, especially promoting 'equitable burden-sharing' with its allies to ensure the region's security. (Panda, 2019b) This strategy promotes stability as well as prosperity of the region through '*preparedness*;' the US and its allies jointly strive to maintain peace in the region via deploying a joint force for effective deterrence as well as to win any conflict if arises, '*partnerships*;' the greater the number of allies the stronger the position of America guarantee stability and peace in the region, and '*the promotion of a networked region*;' the higher the level of integration between the US and its allies the easier to compel each state of the region to uphold well established and widely followed international values, norms and patterns of engagement. (*Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, 2019).

Thirdly, the Indo-Pacific framework promotes a crucial role of India in the region to contain China. (Yoshihara & Holmes, 2013) However, China sees this framework to be a devious US ploy to pit China

against India; by doing so the US successfully kills two birds with one stone, i.e. neutralizes two challengers to the US hegemony, while ensures its control over the Indian Ocean.

Lastly, the Indo-Pacific strategy emphasizes the importance the US places on bilateral partnerships to preserve peace in the region, especially US relations with India, South Korea, Australia and Japan. (Korybko, 2019) Furthermore, the strategy greatly focuses upon the ASEAN as the central security apparatus and cooperation mechanism in the region. (Korybko, 2019) In addition, the US supports the evolving intra-Asian security relations, for instance, the ones being developed among India-Japan, Vietnam-India, and Japan-Indian-Australia.

All in all, the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report presents an inclusive picture of the US intentions towards the region. In contemporary time, International Relations have evolved from the mindset of pursuing a 'zero-sum game' toward promoting a 'positive-sum game;' thus, indeed it shall be one hell of a task for the US to successfully lobby its regional allies to tow its line and work together to contain a rising China.

US Response to China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI)

Soon after China's Premier, Xi Jinping, announced the BRI, the US, under the leadership of President Obama, strongly opposed China's project, in turn which made China and several other regional states to believe that the US not only resents a newcomer spreading its influence in the region via economic ties and building giant infrastructure, but also will utilize all resources in hand to contain its rise. (Wuthnow, 2018) Later, the US, under the Trump administration not only towed its predecessor's line on China's ambitious project, but also explicitly stated its skepticism to the world. In this regard, Rex Tillerson, stated that China will use the BRI to safeguard its economic interests by defining and making new rules and norms in the region; consequently, implicitly undermining the successful regional order that is well established and maintained under the US leadership (Yujun et al., 2019).

The majority of the US policy makers considered the BRI to have substantial potential to impact the economic and political future of Eurasia. They view this project as a deliberate attempt of China to economically marginalize US role and influence throughout the region through increased Chinese economic engagement across Eurasia. (Cavanna, 2018) However, majority of the leading authorities see this project undertaken by China to counter Obama's controversial Pivot to Asia policy. (Smith, 2018) Many political analysts criticize the US for overly relying up on arms rather than developing economic influence when it comes to dispute settlement in the region, in turn which has created a space that the Chinese policy makers have used efficiently by initiating projects such as the BRI.

In 2017's, BRI annual meeting, although the US sent a mid-level official to attend, but subsequently it stressed the risks that China's partners are being put in through China's massive lending that the recipient states most-likely cannot repay, forcing the recipient states to tow China's policy/agenda in regional and global politics. Christine Lagarde, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Director, too put forward his concerns regarding China's BRI publicly and advised "China to pay more attention to fiscal soundness, transparency, environmental impact and dispute resolution mechanisms" (Clover, 2018).

In order to effectively counter the BRI, the US decided to develop infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region through the use of new investment programs. In 2018, the Trump administration gave the 'Indo-Pacific Economic Vision' in which the US decided to substantially increase the economic assistance to states in the region through the 'International Development Finance Corporation' (IDFC). (Parameswaran, 2018) This plan doubled IDFC's spending to \$60 billion along with \$113 million in direct government investment. (Sundaraman, 2017) Meanwhile, in October 2016, ahead of Rex Tillerson visit to India, he greatly emphasized on working closely with New Delhi in the areas of defense and security in particular to counter the ever-increasing Chinese influence within the region. (Ayes, 2017) Other immediate measures by the US include pressurizing member states of the BRI through imposing stringent economic conditions as well as creating unrest in the region to sabotage this Chinese grand initiative.

Pressurizing Pakistan to Comply as per US Regional Ambitions

Shortly after invading Afghanistan (2001), to punish the perpetrator and facilitators of the 9/11 attacks, the US started supporting Pakistan through the 'Coalition Support Fund' (CSF) in 2002. (Rana, 2017) Through this fund, Pakistan was compensated for deploying tens of thousands of additional soldiers alongside the bordering areas of Afghanistan and for the use of its airspace, ports and roads for the reinforcement, supply of food and arms to the US forces fighting in Afghanistan. However, with time, the US started cutting the CSF due to one reason or another. During Obama's tenure, the US started with holding the Pakistan's share of the CSF. President Trump, in 2017, for the first time froze altogether the economic assistance Pakistan was to receive under the CSF, and in January 2018, the allocation of CSF for Pakistan was cut by 900 million dollars. (Stewart & Ali, 2018) This decision of Trump's administration substantially weakened the Pak-US relations.

Initially, the rationale behind the US cutting the CSF to Pakistan was to pressurize Pakistan to 'Do More' in the War on Terrorism (WoT) generally, and the Pak-Afghan border areas particularly. However, once the Gwadar deep-seaport of Pakistan became China's way out of the long-faced Malacca dilemma, with the building of the 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC), the US altogether stopped Pakistan's CSF to force Pakistan not to cooperate with China.

After 2018's general elections, the new elected government of Pakistan needed urgently \$12 billion to get relief from its looming balance-of-payments crisis, which resulted in another US opportunity to leverage Pakistan away from China's influence; back out of the CPEC. (Haider, 2018) The Trump administration linked Pakistan's bailout package to its non-cooperation with China. Going a step ahead, Mike Pompeo, the then US Secretary of State, called for the IMF to reject Pakistan's bailout request on the basis that there was no reason for US taxpayers to repay Beijing's lending as he alleged Pakistan for getting the bailout package to repay the Chinese loans that it got under the CPEC (Brunnstrom et al., 2018).

After Pakistan's did not agree to the US terms; curb the Chinese influence within the region, to teach Pakistan a lesson and force its hand, the US started supporting India economically and more importantly militarily to make Pakistan insecure and undermine its position in the region. In 2009, the US inked a \$29 billion civil-nuclear deal with India, which aimed at enhancing India's nuclear capabilities, this offensive policy of US further polarized the already volatile region. ("The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal," 2010) Later, in 2011, by formally inviting India to the 'Bonn Conference,' held to find an amicable solution to the Afghan conflict, the US defied the only precondition set by Pakistan while joining the US-led (WoT), not to give India no space whatsoever in Afghanistan. (Parvaz, 2011) By doing so, the US made it clear to Pakistan that its continuous non-compliance forced the US to cultivate other options in the region to serve its interests. In February 2018, the US further pressurized Pakistan to give in to its demands by successfully lobbying the 'Financial Action Task Force' (FATF) and add Pakistan's name in the 'grey list' as it failed to legislate laws that effectively and efficiently stop money laundering as well as combat financing of financial terrorism (Karim & Hayat, 2018).

To sum it up, in contemporary times, the US pressurizing Pakistan by cutting its economic and military aid directly and indirectly, is one small part of the its containment policy against China. The other part of the US tedious strategy banks on supporting India, which plays a dual role; it makes Pakistan uncomfortable and forces it to reconcile with the US and India will directly confronts and deters China's regional hegemony.

Supporting India's Regional Hegemonic Ambitions

In the last fifteen years, the interests of both, the US and India, have substantially converged; thus, a mutually beneficial strategic relationship is established among the two states. The policy paradigm shift of the US from Pakistan, being its front-line ally in the region, to India becoming its strategic partner begun during the Obama administration, when US-India signed the prolific \$29 billion 'civil nuclear deal.' ("The

U.S.-India Nuclear Deal,” 2010) Later, under President Trump, administration the relations between the two states greatly strengthened. Now, both states are cooperating on of geo-politics, monetary engagements and defense as well as collaborating to contain the threat posed by China (Wetering, 2016).

India’s major interest to develop its strategic ties with the US is to elevate its status to a regional power initially, and later becoming a global power. Also, by opting to be the front-line ally of the US, India comes a step closer in attaining its long time objective, a permanent seat at the ‘United Nations Security Council’ (UNSC) as well as the member of the ‘Nuclear Supplier Group’ (NSG). (Raja & Tellis, 2015) Whereas the US primarily intends to develop India as a counterweight to China within the region. (Raja & Tellis, 2015) It is also targeting the 300 million middle class of India as a potential lucrative market and India is a far bigger market of weapons and other military equipment than Pakistan.

Since its creation, the Indo-US nexus has proved to be effective in containing China’s influence within the region. For instance, China heavily invested in Myanmar to get direct access to the Indian Ocean, avoiding the ‘Malacca dilemma,’ but the US with the help of India overthrew the pro-China autocratic regime and installed the pro-US regime of Aung San Suu Kyi. (Kesling & Emont, 2019) Consequently, China lost a massive amount of investment in Myanmar. In addition, India did US dirty work in Sri Lanka, where the pro-China Rajapaksa’s regime, which ended the 26 year long civil war, was overthrown and a pro-US regime was established.

The Indo-US alliance is proving to be a major hurdle to the ‘String of Pearls’ strategy of China. As per the this strategy, China is developing friendship ports all across the region; a fueling station at Hambantota, Sri Lanka, a container facility in Chittagong, Bangladesh, a surveillance facility in the Bay of Bengal, and developing Gwadar, Pakistan, in order to facilitate its trade. (Ashraf, 2017) However, to hinder the expansion of China within the region, the Indo-US nexus is working hand in hand and proactively. Not only did they heavily militarize the Indian Ocean to maintain its control, but also all-important choke points, like Hormuz Strait, Strait of Malacca and the Bab-el-Mandab Strait, are under the de-facto control of the US. (Fernando, 2015).

With the aim to build Indian as a regional counterweight against China, the level of defense cooperation among US and India has significantly increased, evident from the frequent defense dialogues between the two states over the last few years. (Valente, 2018) A number of defense memorandums were concluded among the two states, including an agreement to jointly patrol the Indian Ocean, integration of the navies of both the states, and a joint framework on the Afghan crisis and security in the region. In the last decade, India has acquired military hardware worth over \$15 billion, not so long ago the military collaboration between the two states was moreover zero. (Iqbal, 2017) In 2012, both countries agreed to start the ‘Defense Technology and Trade Initiative’ (DTTI). This initiative shall transform their defense relationship from a ‘buyer-seller’ relation to a partnership of ‘co-production.’ Meanwhile, the US has also cleared decks for New Delhi in becoming a ‘major defense partner’ after passing the \$618 billion defense budget in 2017. (Gopaldaswamy, 2018) After passing this budget, the US created an ‘India Rapid Reaction Cell’ (IRRC) to magnify the ever-increasing importance of India for containing China in the region.

To conclude, the US indeed is utilizing numerous socio-economic resources and putting in a ton of efforts to build up India as a counterweight to China. the US is pursuing the classic realist approach of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ and cultivating India as an asset in the region to do its dirty work. By not opting a direct confrontation with China, but using a proxy instead, the US is playing it smart as it did in the Cold War. In the future, massive amounts of cooperation will thus be seen between the US and India.

Increase US Military Presence in the Region

China seeks to become Asia’s leading power; thus, in the last decade, China has started projecting its military power across Asia, particularly to undermine the US influence in the region. China justifies its military expansion by arguing that it is doing so to protect its economic interests. In this regard, China

initiated the String of Pearls strategy to develop a strong hold in the Indo-Pacific region to safeguard its economic interests in the region. (Marantidou, 2014) Later, China dominantly started to acquire more and more territory in both the East and South China seas by building artificial islands, capturing islands and significantly increasing its naval presence. (Bitzinger, 2018) These assertive policies of China forced the US to significantly enhance its boots on the ground within the region to maintain the stability and security, back its allies against the growing imperialism of China, and sustain the all-important status quo or 'balance of power' within the Indo-Pacific.

To ensure peace and security within Indo-Pacific region and contain the military expansion of China, the US decided that by 2020 it will station more than 60 percent of its Naval and Air Forces in the Asia-Pacific region. (Davidson & Dickey, 2015) This US security policy represented a major paradigm shift in how it perceives the rise of China and now considers it to be of the utmost importance to contain China. Furthermore, the US not only entered into bilateral military agreements with regional states and resultantly deployed its military forces there, but also took control of important maritime chokepoints, practically controlling the waters of Asia-Pacific.

The US strategically posted its troops as well as deployed its military assets all around the Indo-Pacific to effectively and efficiently deter China's rise. To date, it maintains more than 28,500 armed forces personnel, comprising of Marine Corps, Air Force, Army and Navy, in South Korea. (Lucier, 2018) Also, in South Korea, multiple squadrons of A-10 and F-16 fighter jets are based. In addition, recently the United States installed a missile defense system 'Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense' (THAAD) to reinforce the defense capabilities of South Korea (*THAAD on the Korean Peninsula*, 2017).

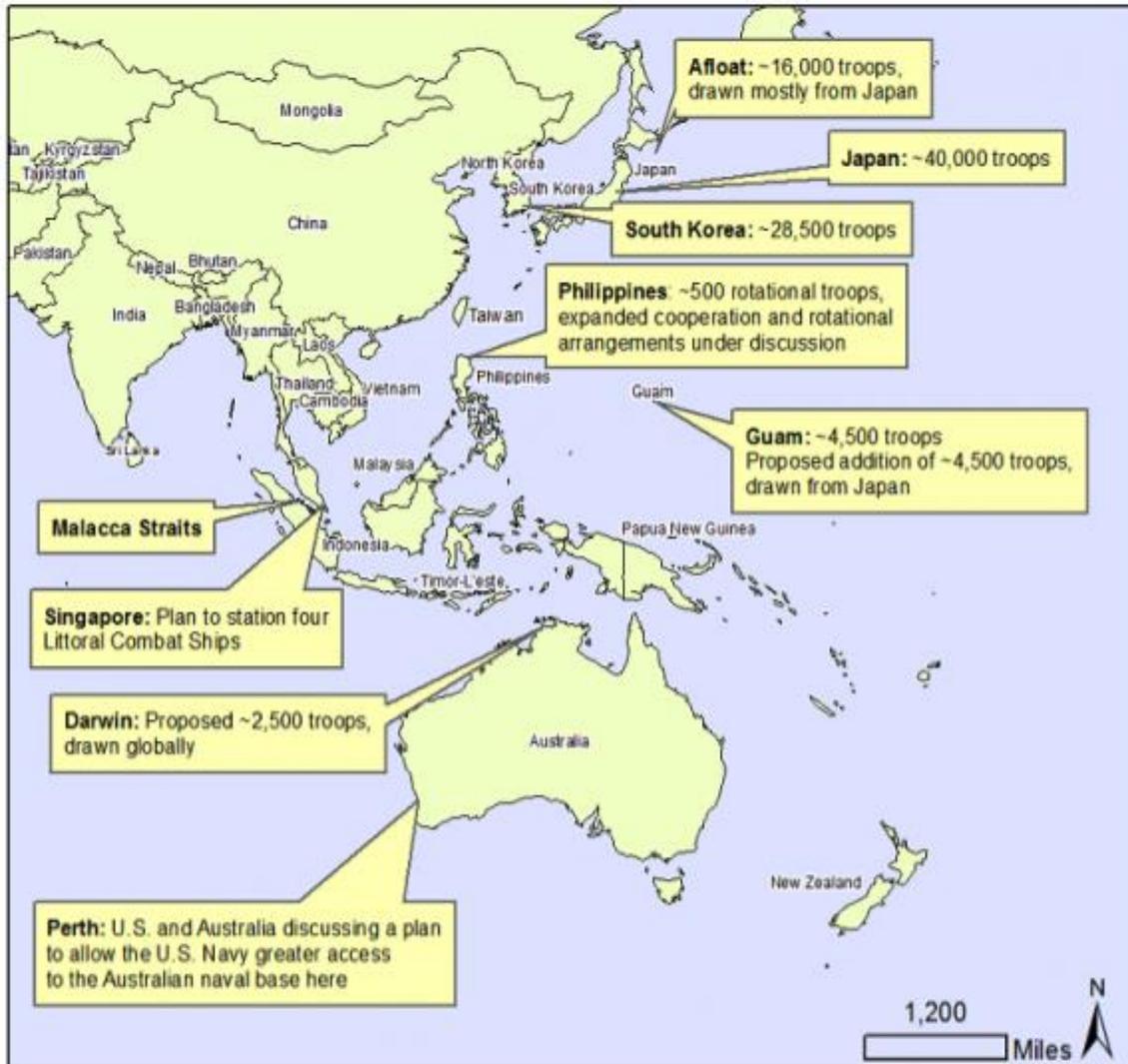
After World War II, the US has kept substantial military presence in Japan. Even now, more than 50,000 US troops are stationed in Japan, including 20,000 belonging to the prestigious Marine Corps. (Beech, 2016) The US Air Force operates from three air bases in Japan: Misawa, Yokota and Aomori. (Phillip, n.d.) The US Navy has permanently deployed the 7th Fleet, its biggest fleet, in Japan at Yokosuka naval base. ("U.S. 7th Fleet: Confidence and Skill in the Navy's Largest Area of Operation," 2012).

Historically, the Philippines and the US have had a cordial tie's with extensive military collaborations. Over the years, Philippines has been home to numerous US military bases. As per the original 1945 agreement, the Philippines allowed the US to have and use 16 bases within its territory, whereas it could use 7 other bases if needed. (Gregor, 1984) However, with time, the Philippines reduced the number of military stations to "Clark Field" and "Subic Bay" for America. (Gregor, 1984) As per the latest agreement between the two longstanding allies, the Philippines allowed the US to use 5 of its military stations: Antonio Bautista, Fort Magsaysay, Mactan-Benito Ebuen, Basa and Lumbia base (Tilghman, 2017).

Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore all are important strategic allies of the US in the Asia-Pacific. Over the years, the US has forged deep military relations with these states to maintain security and peace within the region. For instance, not only do the forces of Malaysia and the US regularly conduct joint training exercises, but also the US has unrestricted access to various Malaysian airfields and naval ports. (Razak, 2002) The hallmark of the US relation with Indonesia is their extensive defense and security ties, as more than 170 bilateral military-military engagements exist between the two states. (Harding & Natalegawa, 2018) Singapore and the US historically have extensive military ties. There exists a full-fledged military base of the US in Singapore, the Sembawang Naval Base. In 2012, Singapore agreed the US to station two US Navy Littoral combat ships within its maritime territory. (Stashwick, 2017) However, the key reason that makes these three states of great geo-strategic value to the US is the all-important 'Malacca Straits;' that runs between them.

The 'Straits of Malacca' is one of the most pivotal sea corridors across the globe, it connects the Middle East and Europe with the Asia-Pacific. Annually, approximately 40 percent of the globe's trade uses this 500 nautical mile (900km) long narrow waterway. (Hamza, 2017) The strait apart of being strategically important to the riparian countries, serves as a gateway to the supplies and more importantly energy needs

of China, Japan and South Korea. The US along with its all-important regional allies, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, jointly are in de-facto control of the straits of Malacca, with America being the dominant partner; creating the infamous ‘Malacca dilemma’ for China. (Lanteigne, 2008) On a consistent basis, the US and its regional allies conduct joint-naval exercises within the Malacca Straits to demonstrate their dominance in the region. Recently, in May 2019, the US deployed its missile destroyer, USS William P. Lawrence, along with two Japanese warships in the Malacca region. (Panda, 2019a) The continuous and ever-increasing US presence in the crucial Malacca Straits has forced China’s hand to explore and establish other trade routes to maintain a reliable line for uninterrupted trade via BRI, a multi-trillion dollar project.



Source: (Reed, 2013)

Today, the US with more than 400 military bases laced with bombers, missiles, warships and most importantly nuclear weapons effectively encircles China. The US bases form the perfect noose around China as they range from Australia north through the Pacific to Korea, Japan and across Eurasia to Afghanistan and India. These US military bases have not only kept China in line in the region, but also contained China’s rise.

Trade Wars with China

For a long time, the US has been raising its concerns publicly about China's trade policies. It has frequently criticized China's high tariff rates on selected import items, like automobiles and auto parts. These high tariffs, 25 percent tariffs on automobiles which were later reduced to 15 percent were enforced to lessen the imports of country, in turn ensure no trade imbalance. ("China to Suspend Extra 25% Tariff on US Cars, Parts," 2018) Furthermore, China is also far more restrictive to 'Foreign Direct Investment' (FDI) as compare to any other developed state. It only allows those foreign investors to invest in China whom are willing to joint ventures instead of doing their autonomous business, as in this way the foreign investors are compelled to transfer technology, which is beneficial for China's industry in the long run. (Jiang et al., 2018) Normally, US firms do not indulge into joint ventures due to risks involved in technology transfer but finding alternatives to the lucrative Chinese market is near to impossible and giving up such a big business opportunity is highly unlikely. Also, the US repeatedly has criticized China to go out of the way to provide favorable atmosphere for its state-owned enterprises, even at the cost of hindering the rules of a 'free market.' (Durkin, 2019) China does so, as almost one-third of China's industry comprises of state-owned enterprises; these enterprises serve China's economic and more importantly strategic purposes. ("State-Owned Enterprises Are a Hard Habit China Doesn't Want to Break," 2018) All the aforementioned Chinese policies and strategies have escalated tensions in the global economy generally, and the US-China economic relations particularly.

The continuous discriminatory economic and investment policies of China forced the US to reconsider and evaluate its trade relations with China, as US faced a severe trade deficit with China of approximately \$378.6 billion, an all-time high, in 2018. (Palmer, 2019) Interestingly, the trade-balance of China with the rest of the world is more or less near zero, but its trade-balance with the US is in surplus, as Chinese exports to the US were worth approximately \$579 billion, whereas its imports from the US were worth approximately \$179.3 billion, making it the dominant partner in the US-China trade relations (*U.S.-China Trade Facts*, 2019).

In response to these exploitative economic policies and to even the playing field, in 2018, the President Trump levied hefty tariffs on Chinese imports. Initially, President Trump imposed 30 percent tariffs on washing machines and solar panels. (Zheng, 2018) Later, in March, US specifically imposed 25 percent tariffs on Chinese imports of approximately \$50 billion, particularly electronics. Up till now, the US has imposed tariffs worth \$550 billion on Chinese imports. (Wong & Koty, 2020) Furthermore, Huawei, a Chinese telecom giant, allegedly evaded sanctions against Iran, the US swayed Canada to arrest Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's Chief Financial Officer, officially charged Huawei with fraud, and forced its allies to terminate its contracts with Huawei regarding 5G networks. (Keane, 2020) Also, 'ZTE,' another Chinese telecom firm, was penalized by the US. It paid a \$1 billion fine to continue with its operations (Borak, 2018).

By creating a tight economic environment for China to trade within, President Trump is trying to force China to comply and give in to its demands. This is evident from President Trump's recent statement in which he offered compensation on the Huawei issue if China agrees to negotiate a good new trade deal. (Corbin, 2019) In the past, the key reason behind consistent failure of US economic diplomacy towards China was due to the lack of consensus on its objectives. However, this time not only the Trump administration has put forward a comprehensive list of demands to China, including policy reform, but also forced China to completely submit to conclude a fair-trade deal.

China terms it highly unrealistic to completely change its trade system with the US within such a short time. In retaliatory move, China has also implemented \$180 billion tariffs on imports from the US. (Wong & Koty, 2020) After realizing Trump's aggressive and stubborn attitude, the Ministry of Commerce of China has warned that the conflict among the two states can lead to "the largest trade war in economic history to date" (Politi et al., 2019).

A recent report of 'Moody's' depicted that in the fiscal year 2019-2020, China's economy faced tremendous pressures as tensions with the US grew. The Chinese economy grew by 6%, in contrast to its predicted growth of 6.7 percent. (Lighthizer, 2017) Already, in 2017, Moody's demoted China's sovereign credit one level due to serious concerns over high debt levels amid hopes of some progress on resolving the trade conflict after G20 summit in Argentina. ("Full Text: The Facts and China's Position on China-US Trade Friction," 2019) Interestingly, in October 2018, shortly after the imposition of steep tariffs on China, the Chinese exports to the US increased by 13.2 percent, but Moody's predicted that the tariffs will decrease China's growth by 0.3-0.5 percent. (Angell, 2018) However, this growth in Chinese exports was due to the compulsion imposed by the US importers on Chinese firms to complete their orders in time; thus, those firms increased exports to avoid the upcoming list of tariffs.

In a recent statement, President Trump stated that the US will maintain punitive tariffs on imports from China, leaving China no choice but to comply. Soon after, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House Spokeswoman, released a statement that indicated that Beijing wanted to make a deal, which was then negotiated, and phase-I already implemented. Reflects the effectiveness of Trump's 'stick approach.' Nevertheless, it was critically important to put a stop to the economic hostilities between the two Great Powers, as escalation was adversely affecting the economic conditions of other states, slowing down global financial market, trade and investments, and upsetting the global supply chain system.

Policy Recommendations to Contain China's Rise

After critically analyzing the successive policies adopted post-2008 by the US to curb China's rise, the US must focus its future containment strategy on the following lines;

- The US should develop a long-term geo-economic policy to deal with China, using its economic strength, networks, and innovations to attract Asian states.
- The US must create a mechanism consistent with international law to deal with China's coercive pressure on its neighbours.
- The US needs to forge a new web of partnerships throughout Asia, with the objective of strengthening Asian nations to deal with China independently.
- It is important that the US develops a comprehensive economic partnership with East-Asian states, as such a regime would limit China's economic growth and political influence in the region.
- The US must accelerate diplomatic efforts towards China to try to resolve the profound tensions amongst the two states, which originate from mutually incompatible grand strategies. In addition, the US needs to reassure its friends and allies in Asia and beyond that it is utilizing all resources in hand to avoid confrontation with China.
- The US with its allies need to develop a technology-control regime vis-à-vis Beijing to limit China's access to cutting-edge military equipment and technology.
- To maintain the US posture in Asia, it is crucial that the current nuclear balance between China and the US be sustained.
- The US must enhance its military abilities to counter China's 'Anti-Access Area Denial' (A2/AD) programs as well as help regional states to develop their own A2/AD capabilities.
- It is vital that the US improves its cyber defensive/offensive capabilities.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, post-2008's economic crisis, the US realized that the biggest threat to its hegemony and the 'uni-polar moment' was the rapidly rising China. Soon after, the US deployed its maximum resources to curb China's rise. Thus, a range of comprehensive strategies were adopted by the US; from the Pivot to Asia policy to the US Grand Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region. Both these strategies primarily focused upon containing China's influence within the Indo-Pacific region by isolating it. In order to do so effectively, the US forged bilateral ties with the majority of the key strategic countries in the region. Also,

the US tactfully partnered up with the all-important regional institution, like ASEAN, to steer the regions politics in its favor and particularly against China.

Lately, the US has been investing heavily to establish India as a counterweight to China. Also, to cause economic problems for China, the US is pressurizing Pakistan to give in its demands, especially disallowing China to use the Gwadar port; imposing stringent economic sanctions on Iran to create energy insecurity for China; and most importantly initiated the trade wars to compel China to abide by the global commerce rules and regulations. Moreover, the US has substantially enhanced its military presence across China, especially in the disputed East and South China seas; to keep China inline and maintain a constant pressure on China to abide by the US-led liberal order.

The efficacy of the US geo-strategic policies to contain China is evident from the fact that China was forced to develop new trade routes; thus, it initiated the BRI. Furthermore, the US was able to compel China, through the initiation of trade-wars, to a more balanced trade agreement. In addition, a great blow to the geo-political influence of China within the region was the regime changes in Myanmar and Sri Lanka. In the near future, the US will continue to tighten the screws for China as it is determined to stop the rise of a hegemon in the 'Eastern Hemisphere,' having the capability to challenge the prestigious status that the US holds of the sole Superpower (Zaidi & Saud, 2020).

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