

## Study on A Possible Aggressive Rise Strategy for China

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### Abstract

The US-China relation is absolutely the most important international relation in the world, which has significant effects on the peace and development of the world. So, there are a lot of articles concerning US-China relation. However, while many of them is about the situation in East Asia and US strategies, or US countermeasure towards specific Chinese approach, there are few concerning Chinese grand strategy from the perspective of the Chinese leaders. In this article, the authors will demonstrate that China will apply an aggressive rise strategy in a company with strong military forces, and examine the causes, costs, and benefits of such strategy.

### Keywords

US-China Relation, Chinese Grand Strategy, Aggressive Rise Strategy.

### 1. Introduction

China has experienced rapid economic development for the last 40 years and has become the second-largest economy in the world. As a rising power, any future strategies that China choose is of great importance. In this article, the authors will demonstrate that China will apply an aggressive rise strategy in a company with strong military forces because of the fear for a potential US intervention and its bottom line thinking as a rising power, and examine the causes, costs, and benefits of a possible Chinese aggressive rise approach in accompany with a strong military force.

First, the authors will illustrate the possible reasons for China to apply an aggressive rise strategy by analyzing the current world situation and the prospect of Sino-US relations, which is the salient influence factor in determining China's policy.

Second, the authors will demonstrate why China should apply an aggressive rise strategy and what it is all about.

Third, the authors will try to assess the meaning of a strategic balance for China and speculate the possible cost or benefit of such strategy for China from various perspectives.

### 2. The Current World Situation

When the cold war ended in 1989, the United States became the only superpower in the world. So far, it has dominated the global common for more than 30 years. The world is in a unipolar structure with the US benefiting from this domination. Ergo, the US will try its best to preserve the status quo. [1]

China, on the other hand, is a rising power with more and more capabilities, both militarily and economically. By 2019, China's GDP has reached \$14.3 trillion, which is about 66.8% of that of the US, which is \$21.4 trillion, and is still growing very fast, which is 6.1%, comparing to 2.3% growth of the US. It is clear that China is chasing after US rapidly in economy.

### 3. The Prospect of Us-China Relation

In considering the relations between great powers, many believe that the Sino-US relation is the most important and complicated one. The two have a great amount of interactions politically, economically, and culturally. Though influenced by the Trump initiated trade war, the trade between the US and China still reached to \$558.8 billion in 2019. So, the Sino-US relation is significantly different from that of between the US and the Soviet Union during the cold war, with whom the US never have much economic intercourse or dependency.

Many scholars have proposed their arguments on the future of the Sino-US relationship. Friedberg concluded in his article that "The fundamentally mixed character of the Sino-US relationship will not change very much, perhaps oscillating within a fairly narrow range, with periodic shifts toward greater cooperation or increased competition, but without a clear trend in either direction." [2] Realists like Mearsheimer believes that China would seek regional hegemony and direct security competition between China and the US is avoidable. Other countries in the region may also ally to check the rise of China. Also, Mearsheimer argues that the multipolar structure in Asia makes it more prone to war comparing with the bipolar structure in Europe during the Cold War. [3] Chinese scholars like Yinan Jin and Baofu Wang prefer the peaceful rise of China. However, they admit that while US leaders express their welcome of the peaceful rise of China, their actions in East Asia make that expression hardly plausible. [4] Considering the difficulty in establishing strategic trust, they also provoke "A Holistic View of National Security" introduced by President Xi as the cornerstone for Chinese National Security. Although the academic has not reached a consensus on how future Sino-US relations will look like, China will eventually make its choice. Considering China's traditional bottom-line thinking, together with its status as rising power, the author believe that China will eventually rise aggressively.

### 4. Reasons for An Aggressive Rise Strategy

Strategies need corresponded with a country's interest, and China officially regards Sovereignty, Security, Territorial Integrity, National Unity, the Stability of Regime and Society, and Guarantee of sustainable economic and social development as the core interests of China. For Chinese scholars, they have another two points to add: access to international markets and transportation routes, and no alliances or groups of hostile states in the surrounding areas. No matter which way China chooses to rise, its purpose must be to secure its core interest with the lowest cost and the lowest risk. And, if possible, try not to let China's rise cost other countries. The first reason why China wants to apply an aggressive rise strategy is for its better development and future prosperity. If China wants to achieve better development and become a superpower in the next 30 years, it needs to do the following:

- (1) For better development in the economy, military, and people's living standards, China needs to upgrade its overall scientific and technological strength, master more advanced technologies, and achieve complete technological independence in relevant fields to make up its industrial loopholes.
- (2) China might want to break the blockade in the South China Sea and the East China Sea to secure access to international markets and transportation routes.
- (3) China needs to determine its own mainstream culture and establish a complete cultural system. This can substantially increase national confidence and promote the development of many domestic industries.
- (4) Nowadays, exchanges between countries in the world are growing, so China should keep friendly with most countries. It needs to find allies as far as possible by forming a joint development.

(5) China may be able to achieve independence in many industries in the future. But energy is relatively scarce on land. So, China should look for more energy to reduce its dependence on oil states.

If all the above points can be achieved, China is sure to make great development in various fields in the next 30 years. However, in fact, China is likely to encounter the following problems and obstacles in its development:

(1) China develops science and technology, more slowly than western countries due to its weak basic science and technology. In many areas of technology there are still constraints.

(2) It is difficult for China to break the encirclement situation of western forces in the South and East China sea by military means. It might also be unwilling to break the blockade because the cost is too high.

(3) Due to the complex international situation and historical reasons, it is difficult for China to establish its own culture and mainstream ideology. As a result, people are not confident and united, and it is difficult for China to gain recognition from the international community.

(4) There is a lot of energy available at the bottom of the western Pacific, but those areas are beyond China's reach. So, it does not completely solve the energy problem.

These are some of the obvious problems that China may face in its development, but they are difficult to solve. So, to address these problems, China would need outside help like an alliance with Japan and South Korea to increase its power culturally, economically, and technologically. To establish such an alliance, China needs to apply an aggressive and coercive strategy.

The second reason for an aggressive strategy lies in the fact that the US is always facing a choice of whether it should coercively constrain or restrain China's economic development. On the one hand, doing so would lead to severe economic recessions. On the other hand, however, so long as the US cannot accept the emergence of another regional hegemony and the risk of itself becoming a regional power like Britain, it would inevitably choose to restrain the Chinese economy by all means. So, what China needs to do is to strengthen its power right now in the hope of the US acceptance of an established fact because of the huge cost in altering it.

## 5. What Exactly Is An Aggressive Rise Strategy?

The aggressive strategy does not necessarily mean a war against the US and its allies to establish regional hegemony, which is costly and unachievable. It is more of using checks and balances and then "pushing" US out to secure China's national interest.

The first critical problem is whether China has the ability both economically and technologically to possess an aggressive strategy. To address that problem, we could trace the development of the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy), PLAAF (People's Liberation Army Air Force), and PLARF (People's Liberation Army Rocket Force). It is obvious that all of them are under the way of modernization in the last decade and have made huge progress. Take the PLAN for example, it has roughly 30 modern destroyers as well as more than 30 modern frigates in 2019 comparing to less than 20 modern destroyers or frigates in 2009. "While the US and its allies still possess a qualitative and quantitative advantage over the PLAN when it comes to high-end destroyers, it is uncertain though whether the US, South Korea, and Japan can keep up with the Chinese shipbuilding industry. With the resources at its disposal, China could very well field a technically mature fleet in a short period of time," according to National Interest. So, it is more possible the determination of the China's elites, rather than the ability, that prevents China from owning a huge army which is essential to an aggressive rise strategy.

In short term, China may seek to establish a balance of power between the two countries and a defined sphere of influence, at least in Asia, as quickly as possible. The balance of power is mostly about the military. On the one hand, the development of A2/AD capability may help

China establish an area inaccessible to the US Navy and Air Force in order to protect its strategic assets like SSBNs, which has become an important component of its nuclear power since the introduction of the JL-2 and the rumored JL-3.[5-7] On the other hand, China is trying to build a strong navy and air force, which are important in the competition of the global commons and to challenge the current US dominance in East Asia, especially in the East Sea and South China Sea. Such power would most likely be used as a negotiating power in talks with the US as well as a deterrence to the US extreme attempts.

China, in a long run, would also use a strong hand from military, economic, and culture perspective to get the United States out of East Asia and form a Europe-like alliance with Japan, South Korea, even Vietnam, north Korea, outer Mongolia, etc.

Militarily, China has natural advantages over US because of geographical factors. China could deploy much more Naval and Air Forces without concerns about supplies and the capacity of the bases.[8] United States, in contrast, may have more CSGs at the moment, but needs to deploy them all around the world, so it is hard for them to have 3 or 4 CSGs simultaneously in West Pacific. Forward deployment may be a solution, but it comes with great cost and risk.[9] In a long-term armed race, it would be harder for US to keep a naval several times the size of PLAN. Economically speaking, western countries will have economic crisis every once in a while. The economic crisis of 2008 hit many industries in western countries hard, but the impact on China was relatively small. Nor did the 1997 Asian financial crisis cost China much. So it is likely that China's political system and economic structure have enabled it to withstand some degree of economic crisis. And since 1929 there has been a minor economic crisis in the west almost every decade. So within the next 30 years, there may well be one or two economic crises affecting the world (some even argue that the current plague has caused economic problems around the world). If the economic crisis hits the United States hard, and China puts pressure on the United States, the United States is likely to give up economic control over Japan.

China could also be culturally aggressive. The war conducted through culture and media exists and has a profound impact on the whole world situation: a concert can promote the reunification of Germany; A film could spark a wave of Scottish independence; Some Internet information can make some middle eastern countries completely collapse and plunge into war. And the collapse of the Soviet union was partly due to cultural shock from the west. Japan has historically been unsure of its culture. In ancient times, the Japanese studied Chinese culture, worshiped China, and even wanted to be China. Then, in the 19th century, they began to worship the west and to be hostile to China. Due to their current complex culture and inferiority complex, if China strengthens its cultural output in the next 20 years, it may have a huge impact on Japan. It even affects Japan's economy and politics. (Nowadays, many of China's cultural industries, such as social media, video games and some sociological research, are rapidly infiltrating the west.)

So it is likely for China to adopt a strategy of pressuring the United States militarily and economically to push US out of east Asia in the next 30 years through an offensive strategy, and with offensive cultural transmission mode to influence the East Asian region.

## **6. The Meaning of Having A Balancing Force for China and the World**

The acquirement of balancing power would entail China's relative influence in the region and also challenge the US dominance of the global commons. What would China do with that influence? Considering China's core interest, we could get some cues about what China wants and highly likely to get: free of the US violation of territorial sovereignty, the reunification of Taiwan, settlement of territorial disputes, economic development without interference, accessibility of important transportation routes like Malacca. [10] After all, a Europe-like group in East Asia is also possible.

First of all, Japan, South Korea and other countries have clear development ideas: since they cannot become East Asian hegemony, they can only develop peacefully and try to reduce the threat posed by neighboring countries or forces. In the future, they will have to choose between being an ally of the United States and being an ally of China. Because of geography, being an ally of China may be a better choice. From the economic analysis, although Japan and South Korea have strong industrial level, their industrial production is somewhat dependent on China. On the other hand, they have been looking for more markets to boost their economies. China is also a world leader in many fields of science and technology. China can also help Japan and South Korea develop relevant industries.

Second, the alliance would bring substantial benefits to China: Japan and South Korea are among the world's leaders in some areas of science and technology, and an alliance with them would enable China to better break the shackles of science and technology. Strategically, the alliance of East Asian countries can break the geographical constraint of western countries on China. And countries will have the opportunity to jointly develop energy resources in the south and east China seas in the future. Therefore, the unity of east Asia is of great significance to China.

Culturally speaking, the unity of East Asian countries can better define the eastern culture. Despite historical factors such as the second world war, the east is likely to gradually embrace each other (many ethnic groups in China have invaded the Han-nationality in history, but today people of all ethnic groups can accept each other and generally identify with Chinese culture). At that time, east Asia will have great influence on the whole world and will be able to drive many countries around the world to better development.

If China accomplishes that, that would be a huge loss to the US: its control on the First Island Chain and the alliance with South Korea and Japan, together with its superiority in international settlement system, may be heavily damaged.

## 7. The Possible Cost of the Aggressive Strategy for China

Although the prospect stated above is very cheerful and the alliance might be very beneficial to East Asian countries, the United States does not want east Asia to be out of its own control, let alone the eastern countries controlling the western Pacific. It also advocates western culture culturally and does not want to see ideas or cultures around the world that challenge traditional western ideas. So, it would stop China from rising by all means.

The US would choose to restrain the development of China's economy, which has been shown clearly by the Trade War. It would also pin its hope on "destroying" China's Hi-Tech industries by blockade and sanction.

It is also considering the deployment of more military force in the West Pacific right now, including the redeploy of SRBMs and IRBMs in Guam and Japan. [11] The tension between the two countries might reach its peak in the following years in the form of FONOP (Freedom of Navigation Operations), military exercise and so on.

Japan may also build an independent military power by amending the current Constitution of Japan, especially Article 9, by which Japan renounces its right to wage war. JMSDF and JASDF may develop into a powerful navy and air force with offensive ability. [12] The Medium-Term Strategic Plan (Fiscal 2019-2023) mentions several offensive weapons including F-35B, JASSM-ER(AGM-158B), and a type of SRBM. But most important, Japan may seek to acquire nuclear force.

Southeastern Asian Countries may abandon their path of hedging and completely turn to the US as China is a closer and more impending threat and an alliance like ASEAN is incapable of deterring China. [13]

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, through this paper, the authors try to present a potential scenario for China's aggressive rise to power. China may adopt an aggressive rise strategy as a deterrence to US potential extreme attempts as well as a way to pursue better development and future prosperity through a coercive alliance with Japan and South Korea. Such strategy will incur US attack and arouse worries among other countries, but China has the capability to execute such strategy and is highly likely to gain advantage over the US in the long run. Although the future remains unclear, the world stage will certainly be centered on these two superpowers.

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