

Future of Asia: China's Economic Opportunities or America's Perpetual Conflict?

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The US recently announced possible plans to deploy thousands of additional US Marines to East Asia as part of the recently revealed 2018 National Security Strategy which designates China along with Russia as the US Department of Defence's "principal priorities."

The Business Insider in its article, "[The US is considering sending heavily armed Marines to Asia to counter China](#)," would state:

The possible MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit] deployments could reassure Asian allies that the US is not a waning power in the region, something that has become a concern for partners in the Indo-Pacific.

However, if a nation needs to arrange a token redeployment to convince its allies it isn't a waning power, such gestures seem to only confirm such suspicions.

China is the New "Threat"

Within the pages of the 2018 National Security Strategy, the US has justified its increasingly direct, adversarial posture towards China by claiming:

China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea.

The document continues:

China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.

The paper also makes mention of what it calls an "*international order*," a reoccurring theme throughout several decades of US policy papers. While this particular paper claims it is "*free and open*" and "*rules-based*," other papers have more candidly described it.

Prolific US policymaker and neoconservative pro-war commentator **Robert Kagan** would

claim:

The present world order serves the needs of the United States and its allies, which constructed it.

In other words, the *"international order"* is merely the world as the US sees fit. US policy in Asia, attempting to maintain hegemony in a region a literal ocean away from its own shores validates Kagan's interpretation of what *"international order"* actually means. It is neither *"free and open"* nor *"rules-based"* unless it is understood that the world is considered *"free and open"* for Washington to do with as it pleases, with *"rules"* used only to constrain the actions of others in order to prevent competition.

In reality, the *"international order"* is predicated on a more timeless geopolitical maxim, *"might makes right."* Reflected in the pages of the 2018 US National Security Strategy then, is a United States attempting to cope with the fact that very soon it will no longer be the mightiest in the zero-sum world it created.

Targeting China's *"strategic competition"* across Asia with a military build-up in East Asia, however, reveals the United States' fundamental weaknesses, its overdependence on military might and its reliance on geopolitical coercion based on outdated administrative institutions similar to those of the bygone British Empire. The US appears to have made its long-term containment policy regarding China based purely on the assumption that it could maintain its military supremacy over China and continue monopolising global economics indefinitely.

It assumed wrong.

Building Together Versus Dividing and Destroying

In contrast, China is building an alternative order upon economic opportunities, binding Asia together through infrastructure, manufacturing, enterprise and trade. Absent from Beijing's methodology is the political coercion, preconditions and interference ubiquitous throughout US foreign policy.

And while it is logical to assume that should China accrue the same amount of power and influence the US once had, it too would become coercive, the changing nature of technology, military and economic parity as well as leadership across Asia is ensuring a more equitable balance of regional power emerges in the form of the much discussed *"multipolar world order."*

The US, as it fades from the region, has simply doubled down on threats, coercion and the creation of conflicts it then poses its continued role in the region as the solution to.

Rather than competing with China's ambitious regional building spree with its own slew of sponsored projects, the US has opted to attack and undermine China's efforts. It does so by funding groups to impede construction projects under the pretext of protecting the environment, attempting to replace governments with client regimes unwilling to work with Beijing and even resorting to sponsoring violence and terrorism to directly target individual Chinese projects.

When all else fails, the US seeks to sow sociopolitical division across targeted nations,

ensuring that if the US cannot have Asia, no one will.

It is an unsustainable strategy both politically and technically. As Chinese-driven development continues, more people will be lifted from poverty and less likely to join US-sponsored opposition and militant groups seeking to destabilise and destroy Asia's collective achievements and the stability that underpins them.

Positioning additional troops in Japan, South Korea or the Philippines will not significantly affect the vector sum of America's regional or global decline. It has bet on and invested too deeply in the wrong course of action in its short history, having apparently learned nothing from the various empires that preceded and collapsed before it. Before American primacy too joins them in the scrapheap of history, it appears that US policymakers refuse to take a course of action now that could maintain a respectable position within this new, emerging multipolar world.

For Asia, the choice is simple if presented with a declining, coercive "international order" serving the United States "which constructed it," or rising with China in a multipolar geopolitical paradigm where national sovereignty holds primacy, not a distant capital an ocean away.

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