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## Pacific Confrontations: Historical Lessons for the Sino-American Strategic Relationship

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Pacific Confrontations:  
Historical Lessons for the Sino-American Strategic Relationship

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by

Graham Clark  
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## **Introduction**

### *Why does East Asia matter?*

#### *I: Summary*

This paper is devoted to exploring the international relations (IR) concept of the “security dilemma” through the historical case study of Japanese-American relations in the 1920s and 1930s. In my conclusion, I analyze the current Chinese – American strategic relationship through the lens of the security dilemma, asking what lessons and warning signs the Japanese case has for the developing Chinese – American strategic relationship. Central to this analysis is the distinction between “security-seeking” states and “greedy” states. I argue that Imperial Japan transitioned, in 1931, from a security-seeker to a greedy state, which largely explains Japan’s aggressive foreign policy in the 1930s compared to its benign, negotiation-oriented foreign policy in the 1920s. In the conclusion, I argue that China remains a “security-seeker” despite rising tensions between her, the United States and regional U.S. allies such as Japan and the Philippines. Moreover, the nascent security dilemma that exists today between China and the U.S. pales in comparison to the severe security dilemma between Imperial Japan and the United States in the interwar years. It is my hope that the Japanese-American case study will lend a frame of reference to current Sino-American relations.

The paper is organized as follows: the introduction touches on the significance of East Asia, and China in particular, to the United States today, chapter I introduces and parses the concept of the security dilemma, chapter II explores the Japanese-American interwar security dilemma, and the conclusion explores the current Sino-American strategic relationship in light of the Japanese case study and security dilemma theory.

## *II: The Rise of China*

The rise of China in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries is the defining story of contemporary international relations. This is due to two factors: China's remarkably rapid economic growth following the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, and the corresponding increase in Chinese military power. For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a potential challenger to U.S. hegemony in East Asia is emerging. President Obama's administration has devoted considerable effort to shifting the focus of U.S. foreign policy away from the Middle East and toward East Asia. As Jeffrey Goldberg wrote of Barack Obama in a recent *Atlantic* expose, "For years, the 'pivot to Asia' has been a paramount priority of his. America's economic future lies in Asia, he believes, and the challenge posed by China's rise requires constant attention."<sup>1</sup>

A few figures demonstrate the gravity of China's rise, and the growth of the region as a whole. In 1980, at the beginning of Deng's tenure, China "ranked twenty-sixth among the world's trading nations. By 2009 the country had become the world's biggest exporter of goods (ahead of Germany) and the second-biggest importer (after the United States)."<sup>2</sup> Of the fifteen busiest ports in the world, seven are located in China, and eleven total are located in East Asia. As China's total share of global trade continued to rise, her export surplus narrowed from a high of \$298.1 billion in 2008 to \$154.9 billion in 2011, indicating China's growing importance as a market for international goods.<sup>3</sup> Intraregional trade has grown as well, signaling regional economic integration. Trade between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Heilmann and Dirk H. Schmidt, *China's Foreign Political and Economic Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

(ASEAN) states grew from \$41.6 billion in 2001 to \$361.2 billion in 2011. By 2010, China had become ASEAN's largest trading partner.<sup>4</sup>

In 1992, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimated that China spent \$21.9 billion on defense. By 2002, that number had more than doubled, to \$45.9 billion.<sup>5</sup> By 2014, SIPRI was putting Chinese defense expenditures at around \$216 billion,<sup>6</sup> second only to the United States which has hovered (including war funding) between a high of \$748 billion and a low of \$577 billion during the presidency of Barack Obama.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the exact figure is, Chinese defense spending now eclipses the third biggest spender, Russia, which clocked in at just \$84.5 billion in 2014, according to SIPRI. Whether by economic or military measures, modern China has become a force to be reckoned with.

## *II: The Japanese-American Security Dilemma*

In examining the strategic relationship between Imperial Japan and the United States in two decades prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, areas of conflict can be broken into two categories: economic and military. The Japanese were sensitive to the possibility of intervention by the U.S. (and Britain, following the dissolution of the Anglo-Japanese alliance) to disrupt Japanese interests in China. Japan, an island nation with few resources and a growing population, felt that her economic interests in China were crucial to industrial-economic vitality. Eventually, Japan would choose to secure these interests by force, but the willingness of the Anglo powers to abstain from

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>6</sup> "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2014," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 13 April 2015, [http://books.sipri.org/product\\_info?c\\_product\\_id=496](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=496)

<sup>7</sup> "National Defense Budget Estimates for FY16, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)," *United States Department of Defense*, March 2015. See pp. 133-139, Table 6-8, [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2016/FY16\\_Green\\_Book.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2016/FY16_Green_Book.pdf)

addressing the “political” issues of Japanese interests in China during the Washington arms negotiations is an example of why differentiating between peripheral and core interests is crucial in high-stakes negotiations. The potential for conflict over military issues was more straightforward: because the U.S. controlled territories in East Asia, and was dependent on imported resources from Southeast Asia to fuel its economy, it was far more sensitive to Japanese naval power than to questions of Chinese territorial integrity.

I argue that in the 1920s, Japan pursued a negotiated settlement of the Pacific security dilemma with the United States and Great Britain through the Washington and London naval treaties, effectively resolving the Pacific security dilemma. In the 1930s, I argue that Japan transitioned to a greedy state with an imperialist-expansionist foreign policy which was uninterested in negotiated settlement and very difficult to deter.

### *III: The Sino-American Security Dilemma*

Today, the potential for conflict between the U.S. and the People’s Republic of China remains high. Nearly all countries in East and Southeast Asia have increased bilateral trade volumes with China, including U.S. treaty allies such as South Korea and Japan. To facilitate and protect its regional economic interests, China is attempting to position itself as the “United States of East Asia;” a regional economic and military hegemon capable of creating favorable economic and military conditions in its geopolitical neighborhood. Just as Japanese naval hardliners feared that the Washington treaty amounted to nothing less than an attempt by the Anglo-American powers to encircle Japan and keep her in a permanent position of military inferiority, some in Beijing are hostile to China’s encirclement by American military power and U.S. treaty allies in

the region. Moreover, China, much like Imperial Japan, feels that it has “special interests” in the region that are unfairly threatened by the Western order that it did not contribute to and never agreed to support. Today, the strategic relationship between China and the U.S. has become strained by Chinese attempts to test the boundaries of that order, especially by claiming islands and waters in the South China Sea that are claimed by a number of other states in region. These provocations have led to a tit-for-tat naval escalation between the U.S. and the PRC. If the U.S. and China cannot deescalate the emerging security dilemma, there is serious potential that “all of Asia, and perhaps other regions as well, could be divided in a new cold war. Should this happen, the prospects of confrontation and conflict would certainly grow.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy? China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011), 36.

**Chapter I: Security Dilemma Theory**  
*Implications for Optimal and Sub-Optimal State Behavior*

*I: The Security Dilemma and Great Power Politics*

The security dilemma has long been at the heart of *realpolitik*. According to Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, Thucydides “argued that what led to war in ancient Greece between Athens and Sparta was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this had caused in Sparta.”<sup>9</sup> Booth and Wheeler argue that the enduring significance of the security dilemma lies in that it engages with what they call the “*existential condition of uncertainty* that characterizes all human relations-”<sup>10</sup> including, they add, international politics. Steps taken by one great power to shore up its own security, namely by increasing offensive military capabilities, inadvertently cause other great power(s) in the equation to feel insecure.

Why do states arm when it may simply invite a response in kind from other great powers, running the triple risks – identified by Charles Glaser - of reduced offensive military capability, increased value placed by the adversary on expansion, and “simply wasting money?”<sup>11</sup> In order to understand how the security dilemma can lead to mutual hostility and suspicion between great powers, and sometimes even war, we must pose an understanding of how great powers end up in such an undesirable situation. With an eye toward history and the current Chinese – American strategic relationship, this will also help us understand why the Pacific Ocean has served as a

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<sup>9</sup> Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” in *Security Studies: An Introduction (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, ed. Paul D. Williams (London: Routledge, 2012), 141.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>11</sup> Charles L. Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997): 175.

stage for two structural security dilemmas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: an unsuccessfully managed security dilemma between Imperial Japan and the United States in the interwar years, and the budding security dilemma between China and the United States today. The maritime geography of the region heavily influenced the Japanese-American security dilemma, but military technology, Japanese interests in China and the offense-defense balance were also important factors.

## *II: Anarchy and Uncertainty*

Three conditions of the international system enable the security dilemma. First, John Mearsheimer argues “that the international system is anarchic.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, states are forced to look after themselves – to pursue “self-help strategies” – because the international system “comprises independent states that have no central authority above them.” To be sure, there have been times when some “higher authority” has come to the assistance of besieged states. Take two prolific United Nations- sanctioned interventions on behalf of besieged states in the post-WWII era: South Korea; 1950, and Kuwait; 1991. Yet such sanctioned interventions remain rare, and were nonexistent prior to WWII. Furthermore, in both cases, both interventions were driven by and constituted of United States national interest and military power.

Second, Mearsheimer contends that “great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability.”<sup>13</sup> All states possess some capacity to harm their neighbors. Why are great powers compelled to spend enormous sums of money on defense in both war and peace?

Kenneth Waltz suggests that “defense spending, moreover, is unproductive for all and

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<sup>12</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2014), 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

unavoidable for most. Rather than increased well-being, their reward is in the maintenance of their autonomy.”<sup>14</sup> However, defense spending can also serve as a constraint: much of the impetus for the Japanese to engage in the Washington Naval Arms Conference in 1921 stemmed from serious concern over Japan’s ability to fund the ambitious “eight-eight” fleet plan. Japanese naval planners, concerned about the swift growth of American naval power during World War I and the possibility of American military intervention to enforce its “Open Door” policy in China, sought an ambitious naval building program for eight battleships and eight heavy cruisers. However, as Navy Minister Kato Tomosaburo argued, Japan lacked the economic-industrial resources to carry out such a plan.

Part of what makes great powers *great* is that they possess significant destructive capability in the form of technologically advanced, professional militaries that eclipse the weaker states in the system. With regard to the Japanese – American security dilemma in the 1920s and 30s, contemporary naval fleets served to obfuscate the offense-defense distinction due to the pairing of extreme mobility with significant firepower. Today, in the South China Sea, modern warships such as *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers pose a serious challenge for offense – defense differentiation, combining a mobile missile defense platform with anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

Third, Mearsheimer contends that “states can never be certain about other states’ intentions.”<sup>15</sup> While Mearsheimer is quick to clarify that great powers do not exist in a state of permanent hostility to other great powers, when two states are engaged in a security dilemma the stakes are raised significantly with regard to this problem of uncertainty. Booth and Wheeler describe this as the “other minds problem... some degree of understanding, sympathy, and

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1979), 107.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

(even) empathy is usually possible, but when it comes to matters of national security, the degree of confidence required by national security planners has to be very high.”<sup>16</sup> As Waltz puts it, “because some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so – or live at the mercy of their militarily more vigorous neighbors.”<sup>17</sup> This observation helps to explain the perpetually high state of arming among the great powers. Uncertainty is at the heart of the security dilemma: no state can ever be certain of another’s intentions.

## *II: Defining the Security Dilemma – Two Kinds of States*

Robert Jervis offers a simple definition of the security dilemma: “many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others.”<sup>18</sup> Uncertainty is such a significant contributing factor to the security dilemma that Booth and Wheeler identify it as the first part of a two-part dilemma. The first part of the security dilemma is a “dilemma of interpretation” about the motives and intentions of the adversary state: “those responsible have to decide whether perceived military developments are for defensive or self-protection purposes only (to enhance security in an uncertain world) or whether they are for offensive purposes (to seek to change the status quo to their advantage.”<sup>19</sup> The second is “a dilemma of response,” where “decision makers then need to determine how to react. Should they signal, by words and deeds, that they will react in kind, for deterrent purposes? Or should they seek to signal reassurance?”<sup>20</sup> If the dilemma of interpretation is resolved to find that the

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<sup>16</sup> Booth and Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” 140.

<sup>17</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>19</sup> Booth and Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” 139.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

opposing state poses “a definite threat to one’s own national security,” then “there is no longer a security dilemma; the relationship is best understood as a *strategic challenge*.”<sup>21</sup>

The shift from security dilemma to “strategic challenge” implies that the state posing the “strategic challenge” has foreign policy objectives that are fundamentally incompatible with the security of the other state(s) in the equation. In turn, this suggests that the challenger is not a state that seeks only domestic security and territorial integrity. Rather, it is what Glaser calls a “greedy state.”

In a security-dilemma scenario with at least one greedy state, Glaser suggests that “the puzzle largely disappears: the incompatibility of states’ goals provides a straightforward explanation for competition and conflict.”<sup>22</sup> A greedy state has different goals than a security-seeker, as it would be difficult to argue that conflict between great powers enhances the security of the participating states. As I show in chapter two, Imperial Japan in the 1930s was fully aware that policies such as the annexation of Manchuria, abrogation of the Washington and London naval treaties, the resumption of intensive naval arming, and eventually imperial expansion into European-held colonial possessions in Southeast Asia would bring Japan into direct conflict with the United States. These policies also violated international norms regarding sovereignty and territorial integrity; namely, that it is wrong to take what is not yours by force. Finally, and most damningly from a strategic perspective, there is evidence that hardline Japanese policymakers in the 1930s appreciated that Japan continued to occupy a position of industrial inferiority to the United States.

In short, Japan pursued such policies not because it sought security in a traditional sense, which can be defined by the absence of conflict with other states, particularly other great powers.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>22</sup> Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” 190.

It sought a warped sense of “security” informed by a mindset of total-war inevitability: war with the U.S. would come, it was only a question of when. Thus, to give Japan the best chance at winning such a conflict, Japanese foreign policy sought to create an autarkic, self-sufficient empire from Manchuria to the Dutch East Indies. The tragic irony is that such policies greatly accelerated the likelihood of war with the United States.

In contrast, a security-seeking state seeks only enough military power to adequately defend its homeland and existing possessions. Moreover, a security-seeker will pursue a foreign policy oriented toward cooperation and negotiation with potential competitors. As the Washington and London naval treaties concluded between Japan, the U.S. and Great Britain demonstrate, “arms control agreements that limit both countries’ current or future ability to perform offensive missions communicate a lack of greed, since a greedy state sees greater value in offensive missions than does a pure security seeker.”<sup>23</sup> When two security-seekers adopt competitive arming policies when engaged in a security dilemma, they do so only because the dilemma of interpretation about the other’s motives has not yet been resolved. If competitive arming policies continue after the dilemma of interpretation has been resolved, this is a strong indicator that the state believes it is no longer facing a security-seeker, but rather a greedy state.

To be sure, security-seeking states that have an interest in maintaining the status quo will likely have interests that extend beyond strict defense of the homeland and the military balance of power. For example, “defending the status quo often means protecting more than territory. Nonterritorial interests, norms, and the structure of the international system must be maintained. If all status-quo powers agree on these values and interpret them in compatible ways, problems will be minimized.”<sup>24</sup> In the 1920s, Japan and the United States shared a similar “value system”

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<sup>23</sup> Glaser, “*The Security Dilemma Revisited*,” 181.

<sup>24</sup> Jervis, “*Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma*,” 185.

regarding the nature of the international system and the balance of power in the Pacific. In the 1930s, however, Japan pursued a foreign policy based on an entirely different value system that was no longer compatible with the American conception of normative great power behavior and the structure of the international system. Today, China is seeking to test the boundaries of the liberal-institutional international system built by the U.S. in the wake of World War II in ways that have caused great concern in Washington.

### *III: The Prisoner's Dilemma*

Jervis uses a game-theory mechanism to explain the same problems faced by decision makers engaged in a security dilemma: the Prisoner's Dilemma.<sup>25</sup> Jervis agrees with Mearsheimer in that "because there are no institutions or authorities that can make and enforce international laws, the policies of cooperation that will bring mutual rewards if other cooperate may bring disaster if they do not."<sup>26</sup> Anarchy, uncertainty and offensive military capabilities push great powers into Jervis' Prisoner's Dilemma.

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 171.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

Fig. 1: *The Prisoner's Dilemma*

	Cooperate	<i>State A</i>	Defect
Cooperate		2	1
<i>State B</i>	2		4
Defect	1	4	3
			3

In the above diagram, the numbers 1-4 indicate the order of action preference for both State A and State B. There are only two behavioral choices for both states: to cooperate, or to defect. In a two-state security dilemma, there are four possible outcomes: CC (cooperate-cooperate), DD (defect-defect), CD (cooperate-defect), or DC (defect-cooperate). Because states in the international system exist in a state of anarchy and “unresolvable uncertainty,” if the “game is to be played only once, the only rational choice is to defect.”<sup>27</sup> Hence, the order of action preference for both states is as follows: DD → CC → DC → CD. This is a cynical perspective on international politics and, moreover, it is possible for great powers to both compete and cooperate simultaneously. However, Jervis argues that “if the game is repeated indefinitely,” as it will be as long as international politics exists, DD is no longer “the only rational response.” In other words, the “security paradox,”<sup>28</sup> where a situation of mutual

<sup>27</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” 171.

<sup>28</sup> Booth and Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” 139.

suspicion and hostility develops where none was intended, is not inevitable. Thus, the key question for states facing a potential security dilemma is how to reduce uncertainty – and thus suspicion – and increase the odds of mutual cooperation. Barring some promise of mutual cooperation, however, the logical response remains to defect, as CD is the worst possible outcome for either state.

Examples of cooperative behavior (what Booth and Wheeler call actions that “signal reassurance”) include arms reductions, treaty propositions, trade agreements or at the least security dialogues that seek to create mutual understanding or “codes of conduct” over disputed issues. Cooperation, of course, is not a course of action free of suspicion or concern. As Waltz points out, “when faced with the possibility of cooperating for mutual gain, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. They are compelled to ask not ‘Will both of us gain?’ but ‘Who will gain more?’”<sup>29</sup> Mutual hostility and suspicion are not inevitable. Security-seeking states interested in resolving the security dilemma must find ways to communicate benign intentions to the other great powers involved. Key among these are “signaling” devices, where the state pursues military and diplomatic policies that communicate a lack of greed. The best strategy for ameliorating the security dilemma is multilateral, diplomatic negotiation that can facilitate clear communicating regarding the national interest of the parties involved. Unilateral signaling devices can include arms reductions, the acquisition of “defensive” weapon systems, and abstaining from the use of bellicose foreign policy rhetoric that would suggest greedy motives.

The series of naval conference held to reduce mutual suspicion between the Empire of Japan and the United States in the 1920s and 30s illustrate the sensitivity to relative gains: the

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<sup>29</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 105.

Japanese delegates in particular agonized over the precise fleet ratios. Would 60% of U.S. fleet strength be sufficient? Or was 70% the absolute minimum? If a 60% ratio in capital ships was attained, could a higher ratio of “auxiliary” ships and submarines be negotiated? When the stakes are perceived to be high, negotiation becomes correspondingly more challenging. Examples of defection include significant levels of arming irrespective of what the other state signals or does, or in the worst-case scenario, pursuing territorial aggrandizement through military conquest. In Chapter 2, I argue that in the mid-1930s Imperial Japan transitioned from a “security seeking” state that pursued strategies of cooperation with the United States into a “greedy” state that was effectively impossible to deter. Glaser notes, however, that even “greedy” states can still feel insecure.

### *III: Incentives for Cooperation and Defection*

In *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz explores structural constraints on state behavior, and incentives for cooperation and defection. Waltz argues that “the individual unit acts for itself. From the coaction of like units emerges a structure that affects and constrains all of them.”<sup>30</sup> This is a macro perspective on international politics: as Waltz notes, “no state intends to participate in the formation of a structure” that limits its course of action. One might ask, indeed, how states inadvertently restrain themselves simply by participating in the modern state system. Since the Westphalia peace treaties that ended the Thirty Year’s War in 1648, the principle of state sovereignty has been the defining principle of international politics. States are, in theory at least, free to conduct their internal and external affairs as they see fit. Yet it is, after

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 90.

all, a small world: there is only so much territory, only so much wealth, and only so many resources.

Hence, Waltz alludes to a categorical imperative when he writes that states, “out of the interaction of their parts... develop structures that reward or punish behavior that conforms more or less nearly to what is required of one who wishes to succeed in the system.”<sup>31</sup> The security dilemma is a structural mechanism of reward and punishment, but one that acts more strongly to punish rather than reward. Wars occur when there are conflicts of national interest, or sometimes merely the *perceived* possibility of conflict of national interest.

World War I is an example of a great-power conflict that had its roots in an intense system-wide paranoia regarding the growth of German power. As Waltz describes, “if force is used by one state or its use is expected, the recourse of other states is to use force or be prepared to use it singly or in combination.”<sup>32</sup> Again, we see here the dilemma of interpretation: recourse to use of force can occur merely if its use is expected. The transition in Japanese naval circles from viewing the United States primarily as a “budgetary enemy” to the likely adversary in a Pacific showdown strongly drove the interwar security dilemma. An attack on one great power by another, or the pursuit of security through territorial aggrandizement fails the categorical imperative; these are the sort of existential fears which drive the security dilemma and thus provide incentives for mutual restraint amongst great powers.

Jervis identifies three challenges that make international cooperation difficult. The first is that there exists “the potent fear that even if the other state supports the status quo, it may become dissatisfied later.”<sup>33</sup> This is primarily a problem of being unable to predict the nature of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>33</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” 168.

future national leadership. In other words, even if the present government is willing to cooperate, future governments may be more inclined to defect, increasing incentives for the other play to simply defect now rather than risk being put in a “CD” situation in the future. Again, the Japan – U.S. relationship in the interwar years illustrates this challenge: Japanese naval leadership was open to negotiating naval armaments in the 1920s, as they recognized the economic and industrial challenge of competing with the United States in a condition of “total war,” a prophetic observation. However, in the 1930s, the “fleet faction” based in the Naval General Staff came to dominate naval (and eventually, foreign) policy, purging the more moderate, pro-negotiation leadership based in the Naval Ministry. Japanese historian Sadao Asada called this transition a “milestone”<sup>34</sup> on the road to war with the United States.

The second problem is that “in order to protect their possessions, states often seek to control resources or land outside their own territory.”<sup>35</sup> This can be both a cause and an effect of great power competition. As Glaser notes, “making an adversary more insecure will often increase its interest in expansion, since expansion can often increase security.”<sup>36</sup> Glaser concludes that this can be a negative outcome of rational decision-making by great powers. Great powers arm in order to increase their own security, yet it is possible that arming practices may incentivize the adversary state to seek territorial expansion, with the possible “net result” being “a reduction in its security.”

Glaser contends that states that seek, or have achieved, territorial expansion are harder to deter; I argue that the Japanese attempt to use territorial expansion in the 1930s to create the “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” appears to corroborate this claim. Yet the Japanese

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<sup>34</sup> Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor* (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2006): 172.

<sup>35</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” 168.

<sup>36</sup> Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” 177.

experience also begs another question: did Japan seek territorial expansion for security reasons, in the face of growing U.S. naval power and colonial possessions in East Asia? Or, as a result of the “hardline” takeover within the Japanese Navy and Army, was it a strategy of greed? In the conclusion, I will ask the same question of China today: has encirclement by U.S. allies, and the presence of significant U.S. military forces in East Asia encouraged Chinese leadership to push harder in the South China Sea and elsewhere?

Jervis identifies the third problem of international politics as the security dilemma itself: “many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others.”<sup>37</sup> Jervis contends that “the fear of being exploited (that is, the cost of CD) most strongly drives the security dilemma; one of the main reasons that international life is not more nasty, brutish and short is that states are not as vulnerable as men are in a state of nature.”<sup>38</sup> By this same logic, “states that can afford to be cheated in a bargain or that cannot be destroyed by a surprise attack can more easily trust others and need not react at the first, and ambiguous, sign of menace.”<sup>39</sup> Unit-level variables such as geography, population, and access to strategic materials may have a significant impact on the perception by national leaders of the severity of the security dilemma.

Japan, as an island nation, surely felt more vulnerable to attack and coercion than did the continental U.S. Jervis looks to British-German naval competition prior to WWI as an example of a security dilemma: although the British felt that the German fleet was much more of a threat to her than the British fleet was to Germany (again, geography is a factor), “the British often overlooked what Germans knew full well: ‘in every quarrel with England, German colonies and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 172.

trade... were hostages for England to take.”<sup>40</sup> The British-German naval rivalry prior to WWI illustrates the poignancy of what Booth and Wheeler identify as the “other minds problem.” some degree of empathy is crucial to arriving at mutually cooperative efforts to ameliorate the security dilemma.

Finally, Glaser identifies greed as an important variable that influences the “magnitude of the security dilemma.” In a potential standoff between a greedy state and a security-seeker, “arms control will tend to be riskier because it requires forgoing the opportunity to communicate resolve by competing... unilateral restraint designed to signal the state’s security motives becomes still more dangerous,”<sup>41</sup> because it opens up the security-seeker to coercion by the greedy state (a cooperate-defect scenario in terms of the Prisoner’s Dilemma). Thus, in both the Japanese and Chinese cases, we must do our best to discern whether those states were (and are) “security-seekers” or “greedy.”

Thinking about tensions between great powers in terms of the security dilemma provides a useful framework for analyzing optimal and sub-optimal great power policies in the face of potential competition and conflict. In the Japanese-American interwar case, it gives us a framework to ask whether war could have been avoided by placing greater emphasis on mutual cooperation, or whether the “greedy” Japan of the 1930s became almost immune to deterrence and negotiated compromise. Today, with tensions rising between the U.S., its regional allies, and China, it provides a useful framework to ask if Sino-American conflict is inevitable, or whether Chinese and American regional interests can be reconciled. While acknowledging that any emerging security dilemma between China and the United States is still very much in the nascent

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<sup>40</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” 170.

<sup>41</sup> Glaser, “Revisiting the Security Dilemma,” 191.

stages, it gives us a tool to evaluate Chinese policies such as the “nine-dash line,” and American strategies such as the “rebalance” to Asia.

## **Chapter II: Imperial Japan and the United States, 1920-1941** *Transition from Security Seeker to Greedy State*

### *I: Summary – From Negotiation to Competition*

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941: “a day which will live in infamy.” The *New York Times* called the Japanese attack an act of “sublime insanity,” the *Los Angeles Times* described the Japanese choice as “an insane adventure that for fatalistic abandon is unsurpassed in the history of the world.”<sup>42</sup>

In truth, the Pearl Harbor attack came as little surprise to the Roosevelt administration, which had spent the better part of the 1930s attempting to delay a Pacific clash as long as possible. The question was not if, but when. I argue that Imperial Japan *transitioned* from a state that sought only adequate power to defend the home islands – a “security seeker” in terms of the security dilemma – to a “greedy” state that sought expansion for reasons that could not be justified solely in terms of national defense. As Joseph Maiolo put it, “the tidal-like effects of arming did not force anyone to choose war. In Rome and Tokyo we can imagine alternative choices being formulated.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, Japanese foreign policy throughout the 1920s pursued those “alternative choices.” It was only in the 1930s that the loss of control over foreign policy by the pro-negotiation civilian leadership paved the way for an aggressive policy of imperial expansion.

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<sup>42</sup> Scott D. Sagan, “The Origins of the Pacific War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, No. 4 (1988): 893.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: How the Arms Race Drove the World to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 5.

In the 1920s, Imperial Japan was a state with clear civilian control over the military. The civilian government, conscious of the reality that in a condition of “total war” Japan would be unable to out-build and out-produce the United States, sought to participate in a series of multilateral naval arms treaties with Great Britain and the United States: the Washington and London Naval Arms conferences, concluded in 1922 and 1930, respectively. The United States sought to limit Japanese naval power to prevent its Pacific possessions of Hawaii, the Philippines and Guam from being easily taken as “hostages” in a potential conflict. The Japanese, aware of the severe economic and industrial imbalance between themselves and the Americans, sought a ratio of naval forces adequate to defend the Japanese homeland from a potential assault by American forces, but not strong enough to go on a warpath of imperial expansion. As we recall from the previous chapter, “because there are no institutions or authorities that can make and enforce international laws, the policies of cooperation that will bring mutual rewards if others cooperate may bring disaster if they do not.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, neither state was willing to enact unilateral arms reductions. It was only through an arduous negotiation process that binding treaties were successfully concluded, ameliorating a genuine security dilemma between two Pacific powers that sought to avoid conflict.

The transition of Imperial Japan from security-seeker to greedy state occurred in 1931 following the Mukden incident on 18 September, when the Japanese forcibly annexed the resource-rich area of Manchuria (shortly renamed Manchukuo) in northern China. In doing so, Colonel Ishiwara Kanji, who commanded the 10,000 strong occupation force, singlehandedly “carved out an enclave bigger than France and Germany combined.”<sup>45</sup> At the same time, an increasingly powerful group of hardline naval officers based in the Naval General Staff was

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<sup>44</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” 167.

<sup>45</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 30.

wresting control over naval (and eventually foreign) policy from the more moderate, pro-negotiation leadership based in the Naval Ministry. From this point onward, the path for southward expansion into European-held colonial possessions was clear, leading to a likely clash of interests with the United States which imported the majority of its critical strategic resources from European possessions in Southeast Asia. The decade-long road to Pearl Harbor began in 1931- from that point onward, Japanese foreign policy demonstrated little interest in genuine negotiation, and the Roosevelt administration was forced to adopt competitive arming policies to attempt to deter a Japanese attack for as long as possible.

## *II: Cooperation in the 1920s: an overview*

Japanese foreign policy in the 1920s, however, was a very different story. Both Japan and the United States recognized the clear potential for conflict in the Pacific, given American possessions in East Asia and Japan's geographic vulnerability as an island nation with few indigenous strategic resources. Thus, both sides engaged in cooperative negotiation efforts in a largely successful attempt to alleviate the security dilemma.

As Jervis points out, "technology and geography are the two main factors that determine whether the offense or the defense has the advantage."<sup>46</sup> Japanese policymakers were keenly attuned to these variables, especially as they pertained to modern naval capabilities. As naval technology progressed and the cruising range of vessels increased, the Japanese increasingly came to feel that the United State Navy was gaining the offensive edge, especially when taken in conjunction with American possessions scattered across the Pacific which could serve as

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<sup>46</sup> Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," 194.

refueling and maintenance stations. As we will see, this led to the question of “fortification” being placed at the center of the Japanese agenda at the Washington Naval Conference: the Japanese were only willing to agree to the 5:5:3 ratio in capital ships if the United States agreed to abstain from fortifying its pacific possessions. Despite the preexisting British-Japanese alliance, Britain agreed prior to the beginning of negotiations to support the American position. Japan, “taking for granted their British ally’s friendly support, had not even informally discussed the matter with the British delegates.”<sup>47</sup> Evidently, in the wake of the American contribution to the allied war effort in Europe, Britain had calculated that it would be more advantageous to begin shifting support away from Japan in light of growing U.S. industrial and military power. Hardliner Kato Kanji, President of the Naval Staff College and Navy Minister Kato Tomosaburo’s naval adviser at the conference, reacted violently to the shift in British attitude: “The United States and Great Britain are banding together in oppressing Japan... In our view, their intention obviously is to deprive the Imperial Navy of its predominance in the Orient.”<sup>48</sup> For now, though, Kato Kanji and the nascent “fleet faction” would be unable to override Kato Tomosaburo’s imperative to amicably resolve the Pacific security dilemma.

As we recall, Glaser adds two important elements to Jervis’ theory of the security dilemma: first, to what degree can a state determine “...the extent of the adversary’s greed (that is, motives beyond security.)” Second, how much information does the state have regarding “unit level knowledge of the state’s motives?”<sup>49</sup> These two factors have the potential to influence whether a state pursues strategies of cooperation (negotiation) with the adversary, or whether it chooses strategies of defection (competition). In the case of Japan in the 1920s, policymakers

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<sup>47</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 77.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” 174.

combined offense-defense balance assessment, an assessment of how “greedy” the United States was and specific knowledge about U.S. naval capabilities to inform their decision to engage in multilateral naval armament negotiations with the U.S. and Great Britain. On the balance of things, the Japanese concluded that, even in an anarchic international environment, cooperation was preferable to competition because of 1) Japan’s clear economic and industrial inferiority and 2) a lack of evidence suggesting that the U.S. had “greedy” motives in East Asia, or would seek to “defect” after pursuing negotiations, putting Japan in the worst-case scenario of cooperate-defect (CD).

The Washington Naval Arms treaty was a major accomplishment, preserving (according to the participants) Japan’s ability to effectively defend its homeland against a potential U.S. naval blockade, while the 5:3 fleet ratio in favor of the United States ensured that Japan would encounter very unfavorable odds if it launched offensive operations against U.S. possessions such as Guam or Hawaii. Yet the Washington treaty also contained the seeds of a deep, nationalistic dissatisfaction with the status quo for a group of hardline Japanese naval officers. These men, rising to power in the early 1930s, would dramatically alter Japanese military and foreign policy, putting Japan on a collision course with the United States.

The road to Pacific rapprochement and multilateral arms reductions was not guaranteed, just as the reversal of these trends in the 1930s was not a foregone conclusion. In particular, it was the control over naval and foreign policy in Japan by a group of moderate, pro-negotiation diplomats and officers that made entreaties to the United States possible. Yet these policymakers, on both sides of the Pacific, were no Wilsonian idealists: they were realists who thought explicitly in terms of the security dilemma, and who had to weigh the two critical variables of *capabilities* and *intentions* to determine whether their counterparts in the United States sought to

preserve a relatively neutral balance of power in the Pacific, or whether they sought to place Japan in a clear position of military inferiority. In telling this story, we will see how state preferences can be altered dramatically not only by changing material conditions in the international system, but also by how individuals in positions of power and influence define the national interest.

## *II: Harbingers of Conflict*

By the 1920s, Japan and the United States faced a potential clash of national interests that began to drive the security dilemma. This nascent security dilemma had begun to develop prior to World War I, when the United States embarked on its first major naval buildup in the creation of President Roosevelt's globe-trotting Great White Fleet. As early as the 1900s, an influential professor of naval strategy at the Japanese Naval Staff College put his finger on the two issues that were to dominate Japanese military policy until the beginning of southward expansion in 1939: China, and the U.S. Navy. Future commander Akiyama Saneyuki, who "graduated from the Naval Academy at the top of his class in 1890, barely ninety days after Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power* was published" was so devoted to the strategic teachings of the famed American that he was "already deeply knowledgeable of Mahan's *Influence* to the point of having memorized portions of it."<sup>50</sup>

What was Alfred Thayer Mahan's thesis on the nature of sea power? "The first and most obvious light in which the sea presents itself... is that of a great highway... these lines of travel are called trade routes."<sup>51</sup> Mahan's theory, in other words, had already entered a stage of

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<sup>50</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 29.

<sup>51</sup> A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987), 25.

globalization in which international trade was critical to the wealth and prestige of great powers. Trade, of course, is not a zero-sum game: in its least politicized and restricted form, it is precisely the opposite. What had greater potential to foment conflict among nations regarding Mahan's theory, however, was his corollary to international trade: "As a nation, with its unarmed and armed shipping, launches forth from its own shores, the need is soon felt of points upon which the ships can rely for peaceful trading, for refuge and supplies."<sup>52</sup> Mahan, while not advocating for traditional colonial-imperialism ("I dread outlying colonies or interests, to maintain which large military establishments are necessary"<sup>53</sup>) argued that global trade required global naval power to protect that trade.

In turn, a navy capable of global power projection required friendly ports of call in every economically relevant region, and the simplest way to ensure port access was to simply own the port. In the Pacific, that meant the American possessions of the Philippines, Guam and Hawaii—all controlled by the U.S. since the 1890s. These possessions, naturally, could also serve as military facilities— a strategic reality which began to increasingly worry Japanese naval officers following the publication of Mahan's *Influence* in 1890. In the most cynical sense, "neither the United States nor Japan could assure protection for their territories by military and naval means without compromising the defenses of the other. This problem would plague American and Japanese statesmen down to 1941."<sup>54</sup> Yet Japanese foreign policy in the first two decades of the new century remained unconcerned about stepping on American toes; L.M. Cullen argues that "...Japan failed to appreciate the geopolitical implications of the pan-Pacific role which the United States had acquired in 1898 (widened by the building between 1903 and 1913 of the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>53</sup> David Milne, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 33.

<sup>54</sup> William Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1897-1909* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958), 240.

Panama Canal).<sup>55</sup> A critical part of that “role” was the U.S. “declaration of its Open Doors policy in Asia in 1899, calling for a level playing-field in access by outsiders to China.”<sup>56</sup> The Open Door policy would continue to haunt the Japanese-American strategic relationship up to Pearl Harbor; hardliners in the 1930s would frequently cite alleged American willingness to back up an essentially economic policy with overwhelming naval force as a key reason to expand the Japanese navy. In short, the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a time of dramatic change in East Asian geopolitics- as the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> would be as well.

From 1905 to 1908, “Akiyama devoted his full attention to devising a strategy against the United States, which was then emerging as the Japanese navy’s hypothetical enemy.”<sup>57</sup>

Akiyama, along with many other disciples of Mahan in the Japanese Navy, must have felt alarm upon witnessing Roosevelt’s new battle fleet, capable of projecting power around the world in precisely the manner advocated by Mahan. Interestingly, in 1909, Akiyama “came to emphasize the special importance of Manchuria” after “taking a fact-finding tour.” Specifically, Asada recounts how “Akiyama gravitated toward the policy of expanding Japanese influence in China. Increasingly he emphasized the prospect of conflict with the United States over the China question.”<sup>58</sup> Akiyama foreshadowed the events that would transpire twelve years later, when the forcible Japanese annexation of Manchuria would mark the transition of Japan from a state that sought only domestic security, to a greedy state that could not be swayed from pursuing an aggressive agenda of imperialist expansion. For now, though, Akiyama was no alarmist: reflecting on the large U.S. naval expansion that accompanied her involvement in World War I, he cautioned that “the American building plan was occasioned by the European war... he

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<sup>55</sup> L.M. Cullen, *A History of Japan, 1582-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 239.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 31.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

dismissed the Japanese-American war scare as nonsense.”<sup>59</sup> On China, however, he was much more bullish: “If a foreign power, be it the United States or any other power, should infringe on our traditional rights in East Asia... we will fight to the last ship to resist such an attempt.”

Here, Akiyama combined an optimistic analysis of American intentions with a sharp definition of Japanese national interest in China- questions that would continue to be fundamental to war and peace in the Pacific. The Japanese interest in China would coalesce more firmly during the Versailles negotiations that followed the end of European hostilities: “... Japan went on to occupy the German possessions in Shantung [Peninsula] and the German islands in the north Pacific.”<sup>60</sup> Cullen contends that these acquisitions “changed Japan’s position from one of defending itself against Western encroachment [a tack pursued with merit by the Chinese since the First Opium War in 1839] into an exploitative role identical to that of other countries.”<sup>61</sup> However “exploitative” Japan’s acquisition of the Shantung Peninsula was, Japan’s participation in the Versailles negotiations alongside the United States, Britain, France and Italy marked an important transition from bystander to participant in the great power politics of East Asia.

### *III: The Road to Washington*

For the time being, concern over the naval balance of power overrode concerns about Japanese intervention in China. In fact, the Washington Conference delegates would explicitly abstain from discussing such “political questions,” choosing instead – to the great relief of the Japanese – to focus exclusively on fleet ratios and the question over fortification of existing American possessions in East Asia. This was also a reflection of American national interest: as

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>60</sup> Cullen, *History of Japan*, 239.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 242.

long as the U.S. could continue to trade with China, Japanese activities in Manchuria did not merit inclusion into already fraught negotiations over the naval balance of power. However, when Japan began to expand into European-held colonial possessions in Southeast Asia in the mid-1930s, this would mark the point of no return for the United States. We will explore the ramifications of Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia following Japan's distinctive shift from security-seeker to greedy state- but for now, the Washington Naval Arms Conference is an outstanding case study in how to ameliorate a "sincere" security dilemma.

Glaser, who clarified the two variables of unit-level knowledge and the extent of the adversary's greed within Jervis' classic cooperate-defect model of the security dilemma, also stresses that "even if arms races correlate with war, they do not cause it."<sup>62</sup> Rather, a state's decision to go to war is driven not by the existence of an arms race but by the "security environment" writ large, which is "determined by material variables – power and the offense-defense balance – and by information variables, with the most important being the state's information about its adversary's motives and goals."<sup>63</sup> In the context of a state's decision to defect or cooperate, with the ultimate form of defection being an attack against the adversary, arms races are byproducts of the security environment. They are one of the primary forms of competition, and thus can either be *optimal* or *sub-optimal*, depending on whether the state determines it is facing a security-seeker or a greedy state. While Maiolo takes pains to describe how the inter-war arms race drove Japan to increasingly seek a centralized state and economy that necessarily sacrificed personal and political freedoms,<sup>64</sup> he describes the Japanese naval arms race with the U.S. in the 1930s as a deliberate decision to support and enable the national

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Glaser, "When Are Arms Races Dangerous?" *International Security* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2004): 45.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 138.

policy of imperial expansion. In other words, the arms race did not cause the Pacific war, it merely aided and abetted a greedy foreign policy that put Japan on a collision course with the United States.

In the 1920s, Japanese policymakers (and their American counterparts) determined that to engage in an arms race was *sub-optimal* given the available information about 1) the offense-defense balance and 2) information about the adversary's motives. Japan in the 1920s was also fiscally insecure, adding domestic pressure to avoid an extremely costly naval arms race. The Great War itself was a boon to Japanese industry, as it provided a large opening in the international export market: "Japanese manufacturing and agriculture prospered... National income doubled. New steel, machinery and chemical factories sprang up."<sup>65</sup> However, as the close of hostilities afforded an opportunity for Japan to increase its extraterritorial possessions in East Asia, it also meant shrinking demand for Japanese goods. As Maiolo relates, "...the demand for Japanese goods fell, and the country suffered a financial shock, mass bankruptcies and rice riots. The postwar stagnation persisted, punctuated only by another financial panic in 1927, until things got much worse after 1929."<sup>66</sup> To those responsible for weighing the costs vs. benefits of pursuing an aggressive naval building program, the economic conditions at the time appeared nearly prohibitive. Glaser's admonition that arms races can cause states to "simply waste money" would be a severe understatement when applied to Japan in the 1920s.

Since 1907, Japanese naval policy was defined by three interrelated doctrines: "(1) the concept of the United States as the navy's 'hypothetical enemy;' (2) the need for a 70 percent fleet ratio against the U.S. Navy as a strategic imperative; and (3) its corollary, a program for building a first-line 'eight-eight fleet' consisting of eight modern (dreadnought) battleships

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

displacing 20,000 tons and eight armored cruisers.”<sup>67</sup> On the face of it, such a plan – which effectively amounted to a force-structure blueprint for the IJN – seems reasonable. From a security dilemma standpoint, the primary risk of a naval building program is that “the benefits of the increased capabilities” may fail to “more than offset the dangers created by the adversary’s insecurity.”<sup>68</sup> For now, it is important to note that Japanese policymakers faced the exact same dilemma in the 1920s: would increasing naval capabilities more than compensate for the inevitable alarm caused in Washington? This calculation was complicated by a factor that has rarely placed serious pressure on U.S. planners: the clear economic and industrial inferiority of Japan in the interwar decades, especially problematic because “warship building would gobble up huge amounts of money, steel, plant and skilled labor.”<sup>69</sup> Asada concurs, noting that “although the appropriation for the eight-eight fleet plan, to be completed in 1927, was finally approved in 1920, he [Navy Minister Kato Tomosaburo] saw that the plan was beyond Japan’s financial capability.”<sup>70</sup> For two important reasons, then, arms negotiation with the U.S. became an attractive option for ameliorating an emerging security dilemma, especially for Naval Minister and future Prime Minister Kato Tomosaburo.

The concept of a 7:10 ratio of Japanese fleet strength to American fleet strength “was reinforced by war games, tabletop maneuvers, and fleet exercises, and it crystallized into a firmly held consensus – even obsession – within the Japanese navy until the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack.”<sup>71</sup> The basic calculation was that, as Mahan observed, distance was a factor that served to reduce the combat effectiveness of naval fleets that had to travel thousands of miles to reach their

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<sup>67</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Glaser, *When Are Arms Races Dangerous?*, 51.

<sup>69</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 49.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

intended target. The American navy estimated that every 1,000 miles of the Pacific their ships were forced to cross would result in 10 percent reduction in fighting effectiveness due to “wear and tear, bottom fowling, the enemy’s attacks en route, and declining morale of officers and men.”<sup>72</sup> These strategic calculations imply that while the U.S. navy was considered a serious potential threat, the offense-defense balance still remained firmly in favor of the Japanese position, primarily due to geographic realities. As Jervis put it, “when states are separated by barriers that produce these effects, the security dilemma is eased, since both can have forces adequate for defense without being able to attack.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, taken in conjunction with the premise that an attacking fleet would need at least 50% superiority in fleet strength, the roughly 3,000 mile journey to Japanese-controlled waters would sap 30% of American combat effectiveness. In short, “to the Japanese navy, the seemingly minor margin between 60 and 70 percent made the difference between victory and defeat.” In the 1930s, Japanese naval hardliners would argue that advances in technology had effectively negated the defensive advantage of the vast Pacific expanse, but for now, the offense-defense balance suggested that the Japanese had a margin of inherent security that favored avoiding a naval arms race.

Heading into the Washington Conference, Navy Minister Kato Tomosaburo – accompanied by his antagonist, the hardliner Vice Admiral Kato Kanji – had two objectives: to secure a fleet ratio agreement that would at least give Japan a *slightly* better than 50/50 chance of victory against the U.S. Navy, and to ensure that the American possessions of Guam and the Philippines would remain unfortified- and thus incapable of servicing or repairing damaged American ships. The fortification question was of such great importance to the Japanese that a special committee formed by Kato Tomosaburo concluded that “should this [fortification]

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Jervis, *Cooperation*, 194.

problem fail to be satisfactorily resolved, naval arms limitation would not only be meaningless but may conceivably prove suicidal to Japan.”<sup>74</sup>

Kato Tomosaburo fared quite well in his efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement. Yet his achievements would instill in the “other Kato,” Vice Admiral Kato Kanji, a sense of deep national betrayal that would prove decisive in Japan’s shift to a greedy state in the early 1930s. The Americans were unexpectedly open to Japanese entreaties, with assistant to Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes and State Department Special Counsel J. Reuben Clark’s memo on the American conference strategy going so far as to note that “the problem of naval limitation is of vital importance, but Far Eastern questions are only secondary... the doctrine of ‘special relationship’ must be agreed upon. Japan is right in its claim that it has a special relationship in China.”<sup>75</sup> Hughes himself would make America’s genuine interest in multilateral disarmament clear on the opening day of the conference when he presented the following three proposals: “(1) a ten-year ‘naval holiday’ during which each power would cease construction; (2) limitation of the fleets of the great powers by tonnage according to the ratio of 10:10:6 for the United States, Great Britain and Japan; and (3) an itemized plan for scrapping ships in accord with a ‘stop now’ formula.”<sup>76</sup> In the final treaty signed on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1922, the two core issues of fleet ratio and Pacific fortification were resolved as such: Japan accepted the 10:10:6 fleet ratio, and “the United State promised to maintain the status quo regarding bases in the Philippines and Guam.”<sup>77</sup>

The Pacific security dilemma and the impetus for both sides to fortify their existing possessions had been halted in their tracks. The agreement, it could be argued, was actually more

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<sup>74</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Sadao Asada, *Culture Shock and Japanese-American Relations: Historical Essays* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 96.

<sup>76</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 73.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

favorable to Japan: while the 10:6 fleet ratio was less desirable than the original negotiating position of 10:7, it nonetheless maintained Japanese naval dominance in East Asia- especially considering that the agreement to abstain from fortifying regional American possessions meant that those territories could easily be captured by Japan in the event of hostilities breaking out, a fate that would indeed befall the Philippines when Japanese forces attacked the day after the Pearl Harbor raid. As for the British, Lisle A. Rose notes that “the British Admiralty surrendered for the life of the agreement (that is, practically up to 1935) buildup of the Singapore base, thus leaving the Royal Navy ‘without a berth east of Malta capable of accommodating and refitting a capital ship.’”<sup>78</sup> This, too, would prove prophetic: the fall of Singapore in 1942 dealt a shocking blow to the wartime government of Winston Churchill. On a broad scale, Rose contends that the U.S. “had sacrificed a fleet of sufficient size to ensure effective power projection in the Atlantic and the Pacific.”<sup>79</sup>

Paul Kennedy surmises that “despite the protests of admirals on all sides, the leading statesmen in Whitehall and Washington had decided that the economic and social costs of an arms race were not justified by the international situation, and would be unpopular domestically; while in Japan a quasi-liberal regime was not intent, in those years at least, in challenging the *status quo* by force.”<sup>80</sup> Prior to the Washington negotiations, the British, through their conversations with the Dutch, had begun to sense the potential for conflict with Japan over British and Dutch colonial possessions in Southeast Asia. Following conversations with his Dutch counterpart in Batavia in September 1915, the British consul related that “In fact so

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<sup>78</sup> Lisle A. Rose, *Power at Sea: The Breaking Storm, 1919-1941* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 38.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Paul Kennedy, *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945: Eight Studies* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1983), 169.

greatly are they [the Dutch] obsessed with the idea that Japan is only waiting her own time to take possession of the Netherlands East Indies, that they regard Japan as a more serious menace than Germany.”<sup>81</sup> This prompted the British consul to muse that despite the Anglo-Japanese alliance, “Perhaps the British should obtain from the Japanese Government some declaration of their policy..., which if communicated to the Netherlands Government might go far to allay the apprehensions” of the Dutch, and demonstrate the solidity of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Following World War I, the British Foreign Office’s Japan expert, Frank Ashtwon-Gwatkin, argued that “with Netherlands India, the Philippines, and British India all on the way to autonomy, ‘the future of South-East Asia’ was in an ‘unsettled condition’ and required ‘careful and anxious watching... the result of a further upheaval, such as a Japanese – American war, might be most unwelcome both to us and to the Dutch.”<sup>82</sup> At Washington, from the Dutch perspective, “The Anglo-Japanese alliance – which had seemed to encourage, though it had also operated to restrain, the Japanese – was ended.”<sup>83</sup> The alliance, which had come to be viewed as a less effective long-term restraint against Japanese ambition than the conclusion of the “quadruple treaty” between the United States, Britain, Japan and France, was replaced with the promise from the signatories that “as between themselves to respect their rights in relation to their insular possessions and insular dominions, in the region of the Pacific Ocean.”<sup>84</sup> Each great power also submitted identical but separate notes “declaring their intention of respecting the island possessions of Holland.” The Washington treaty, of course, also had the additional benefit

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<sup>81</sup> Nicholas Tarling, “A Vital British Interest” in *Japan and Southeast Asia*, ed. Wolf Mendl (London: Routledge, 2001), 178.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-185.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

of ending the emerging naval arms race, something that could not be accomplished by maintaining the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

For the Americans, it ensured that the Japanese could do nothing to attempt to rectify the naval imbalance, preserving an absolute American advantage in overall naval strength from which they could quickly build from in the event of war. Furthermore, delegates to the Washington Conference “quickly agreed that there were to be no restrictions on the construction of what had traditionally been considered fleet ‘auxiliary’ vessels. Britain, Japan, the United States, France and Italy were free to build as many ships carrying 8-inch guns and below as they liked, so long as a 10-10-7-3.67-3.67 parity was maintained among the five signatories in the 6-inch-gun ‘light’ cruiser category and a 10-10-6-3.67-3.67 parity in ‘heavy’ 8-inch-gun cruisers.”<sup>85</sup> In line with Hughes’ initial proposal, “there would be a widely hailed ten-year ‘holiday’ on the building of battleships and battle cruisers, which could mount at most 16-inch guns on a 35,000 ton hull.”<sup>86</sup>

Whether the failure to restrict vessels in the “auxiliary” category favored Japan or the U.S. more is an open question. A strong argument in favor of the Japanese position could be made given that one attractive way to offset Japan’s industrial inferiority would be to pursue an “interceptive” strategy by which Japanese submarines and fast cruisers would harass and degrade the American fleet as it made its way from Hawaii to Japanese waters.

The other crucial consequence of the Washington treaty was the emboldening of the naval hardliners led by Vice Admiral Kato Kanji. Following Kato Tomosaburo’s death in 1923, the pro-negotiation naval moderates would increasingly find themselves marginalized by a growing cohort of hardliners who believed Japan’s national security had been deeply wounded by the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 29.

Washington Treaty. Rose suggests that “by 1925 Kato Kanji’s Fleet faction, with its growing belief that the U.S. Navy had become ‘*the* arch-antagonist with whom hostilities were unavoidable,’ threatened to dominate opinion within and beyond the Imperial Japanese Navy.”<sup>87</sup>

Yet even a broad shift in strategic thinking within the IJN was not nearly enough to justify Japan as having shifted from security-seeker to greedy state. As we will see, it was the combination of a number of factors including the rise of IJN hardliners that effected that shift following the Japanese annexation of Manchuria in 1931. Had Kato Kanji and his disciples merely advocated for abrogation of the treaty and a resumption of arming on a national security basis, this would have returned the broad contours of the American-Japanese relationship to that of a traditional security dilemma. Yet, as we will see, something far more dramatic occurred: the Japanese navy became convinced, for a variety of reasons stemming from a sense of national insult at the Washington Treaty to competition with the army for resources, that a national policy of “southward expansion” into European-held territories was necessary to justify massively increased naval budgets. This is where the United States finally drew a “red line:” Southeast Asia, for strategic reasons, simply could not be permitted to fall into Japanese hands.

### *III: Road from Security to Greed – the Washington System breaks down*

The key events that serve as signposts on Japan’s transition to a greedy state bent on complete regional domination are as follows: the rise to power of the hardline faction in the IJN, the annexation of Manchuria, Japan’s position at the London Naval Conference of 1935, and finally the national policy of “southward expansion.”

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

The London Naval Treaty of 1930, which served primarily to renew the terms set by the Washington treaty, is described by Asada as a “pyrrhic victory” by the moderate government leadership. A sense of the growing political chaos in Japan over military and foreign policy is captured by Asada’s summary of the events surrounding the London treaty: “the internal division over the treaty was accompanied by a head-on collision between the government and the navy. This in turn brought about a major political crisis that triggered a series of assassinations, starting with the attack on Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi in November 1930.”<sup>88</sup> From this point onward, the Naval General Staff – home of the “fleet faction” headed by Kato Kanji – would dominate naval, and eventually foreign policy in a quest to rectify the perceived slights of the Washington system. One consequence of this, however, would be a national policy of imperial expansion that could not be rationalized as a security-seeking move. The men in charge of this policy knew full well that to expand south into European-held possessions – first by moving into Vichy French-controlled Indochina, and then (and much more problematically) into the Netherlands East Indies – would be to put Japan on an inevitable collision course with the United States.

How did the rise of the naval hardliners contribute to a greedy foreign policy? It goes without saying that foreign policy should inform military policy, not the other way around- yet this is precisely what happened with the Japanese navy in the 1930s. Following the conclusion of the London treaty, which saw a repeat of the same arduous debates over fleet ratios at the Washington Conference, “most of the supporters of the Washington and London naval treaties – heirs to Kato Tomosaburo’s legacy – were systematically ‘purged’ in 1933-1934 by Navy Minister Osumi Mineo, who was backed by the anti-treaty group, including especially Kato

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<sup>88</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 126.

Kanji... The navy was now under the control of the fleet faction.”<sup>89</sup> These efforts were aided by Fleet Admiral Prince Fushimi Hiroyasu, a “Germanophile” who served as the head of the Naval General Staff from 1933-1941.<sup>90</sup> Having a thoroughly sympathetic member of the Japanese royal family would be a great boon to the hardliners, who would use Prince Fushimi to legitimize their policies and gain access to the emperor’s ear.

Prince Fushimi would be instrumental in pressuring the government to release funding to rapidly expand the Japanese navy in the early 1930s – as Asada notes, “the United States did not start building to treaty limits until 1933, and by this time Japan was building close to the 70 percent ratio.”<sup>91</sup> The Manchuria incident of 1931 severely aggravated relations with the United States, and the Japanese navy regarded the outbreak of fighting in Shanghai in 1932 as a “godsend, an opportunity to demonstrate its *raison d’être* and enhance its armaments in competition with the army.” By this point, the primary concern of the Naval General Staff – now firmly in control of naval policy, was to secure massively increased funding for a naval building program. This meant looking to foreign crisis as justification for naval expansion and, if need be, creating those crisis themselves. Following the failure of the Second London Naval Conference, where Japanese demands for absolute naval parity with the United States were (predictably) rejected, the U.S. and Japan found themselves locked in another naval arms race with little chance of negotiated settlement.

At the First London Conference, “the last harmonious international disarmament conference to convene for a half century,” Japan’s representative Isoroku Yamamoto remained committed to negotiated settlement, even as he found himself increasingly in the naval minority.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

Yamamoto argued that “for Japan to engage in a shipbuilding race with the United States would be an act of incredible folly that would strain the national economy to the breaking point.”<sup>92</sup>

Rose summarizes the impact of the pyrrhic victory of the moderates in concluding the London treaty when he writes that “the London treaty and apparent Anglo-American efforts to intimidate Japanese sea power not only radicalized the Imperial Navy and its public but also helped fuel the anger that sent the army careening down a path of uncontrollable aggression toward China.”<sup>93</sup>

The annexation of Manchuria would shortly ensue.

Against the backdrop of the rising power of the “fleet faction” in the Imperial Japanese Navy, the erosion of moderate civilian control over the military, and the resumption of a naval arms race with the United States, a certain Colonel Ishiwara of the Kwantung occupation army would foment the Japanese takeover of Manchuria. This marked the first clear break with Japan’s policy of negotiation and reconciliation with the Western powers in the 1920s: while the Japanese annexation of the Shantung peninsula was one thing, the forced takeover of an area larger than France and Germany combined could not be ignored. Following the “fake Chinese attack near the city of Mukden in southern Manchuria,” the Japanese army would spread itself across the whole of Manchuria.

As Maiolo notes, “defying the League of Nations’ efforts to mediate, Japan recognized Manchukuo in September 1932 and in 1933 withdrew from the organization altogether.”<sup>94</sup> Also important was that the impetus for the Japanese creation of a puppet state came “not from the government or army headquarters in Tokyo, but from a conspiracy of Kwantung army officers, with the sympathy of others in Japan.”<sup>95</sup> The impetus for Colonel Ishiwara’s brash move came

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<sup>92</sup> Rose, *Power at Sea*, 52.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>94</sup> Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, 24.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

from his deep-seated conviction that Japan must be prepared to fight under the conditions of total war: “Japan must be a great power or someday fall pretty to one; Manchuria contained many of the industrial raw materials and the rich farmland that Japan needed for autarky; therefore Japan must take Manchuria.”<sup>96</sup>

While Ishiwara may have been radically out of line in his decision to foment the Mukden incident, Tokyo quickly fell into line. Recognizing the vast industrial potential of the newly-created puppet state, “a legion of civil servants, engineers, accountants, managers, clerks, skilled workers and farmers marched in from Japan.” In short, “the creation of Manchukuo helped shift power away from the party politicians to the military-bureaucratic elite.”<sup>97</sup> Following the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi by “ultranationalist naval cadets” in May 1932, “Japan’s prime ministers would be drawn from a mixed bag of admirals, generals and senior state officials and one from the nobility.”<sup>98</sup> The impact on military policy was dramatic: under finance minister Takahashi Korekiyo (1931-1936), “the military budget rose from 462 million yen in 1931 to over one billion yen in 1935.”

The Japanese creation of the Manchurian puppet state helped to accelerate the a process that had begun with the dissatisfaction of hardline naval officers with the Washington Treaty of 1921: Japan increasingly rapidly became a state governed by a “military-bureaucratic elite” that saw conflict with the West as inevitable; the best thing to do would be to prepare Japan for a condition of “total war.” This philosophy directly informed the navy’s policy of “southward expansion” into European-held colonial possessions in Southeast Asia: much like Manchuria, these were areas rich in strategic resources, and Japanese military control over French Indochina

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 31.

and the Dutch East Indies was viewed as crucial to creating a self-sufficient, autarkic industrial state. To justify such moves as purely “security-seeking” would require a remarkable feat of mental gymnastics, as these men knew full well that such expansionist policies would bring Japan into direct conflict with the United States. Moreover, such moves were only necessary to sustain Japan under a condition of total war- as the arms treaties of the 1920s demonstrate, alternative policies were entirely possible that would have eliminated the need for such dangerous strategic thinking. The United States was, after all, the source of nearly 90% of Japanese oil imports until 1941, when the Roosevelt administration froze all Japanese assets in the United States in response to the invasion of Indochina.

Even prior to the Japanese abrogation of the Washington / London treaty system, Rose argues that the Japanese had begun building beyond treaty limits, largely in an effort to revitalize Japan’s shipbuilding industry that during World War I had seen “the half-dozen commercial shipyards” increase “to 57, the number of workers in the shipbuilding industry” grow “from 26,000 to 95,000.”<sup>99</sup> Rose notes that a dozen heavy cruisers of the *Myoko* and *Takao* class, constructed following the Washington Treaty, “displaced well over that figure [the 10,000 ton limit], though Tokyo never admitted it.”<sup>100</sup> In response to Japanese aggression in Manchuria and the Shanghai region, the Japanese withdrawal from the Second London Conference as well as her withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, the Roosevelt administration finally began asking Congress to appropriate enough funds to permit the U.S. navy to build up to the Washington treaty limits.

This was the moment the United States began shifting from a policy of cooperation and accommodation to a policy of competition, which also saw the first material indications of what

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<sup>99</sup> Rose, *Power at Sea*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

the U.S. economy was truly capable of. By January 1934, the U.S. building program “included three carriers, seven heavy and four light cruisers, thirty-two destroyers, and a half-dozen submarines.”<sup>101</sup> The Japanese response was unambiguous: “when the Roosevelt administration showed no inclination to back off... the Fleet faction within the Japanese navy seized the initiative, and moderates like Yamamoto were overwhelmed and at least temporarily silenced.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, “the Japanese navy announced in March 1934 a ‘second supplemental building program’ for 1934-1937. It projected forty-eight ships, the maximum allowed under the London treaty. It augmented air power by eight squadrons. By the end of 1935 Japan had exceeded the quotas set by the Washington and London treaties. Its ratio compared to the United States at the end of that year was to be 80 percent, because the United States did not build up the treaty limits.”<sup>103</sup> As worrying as the resumption of a serious naval arms race between Japan and the United States was, the continued erosion of government authority over military policy was equally concerning.

After the IJN and the army reached a deal where the navy would support the army’s policy of continental expansion in China in return for army support of massively increased naval budgets, Naval Minister Osumi “used the threat of resignation to get his way: Japan now demanded total naval equality with all other powers, anything less was unacceptable.”<sup>104</sup> Despite the deliberate restraint of the Hoover administration in response to Japanese provocations in China, “suspicion of American motives and objectives had become entrenched in the Japanese psyche. Whatever the Americans said or did was considered a direct threat to Japan.”<sup>105</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>103</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 205.

<sup>104</sup> Rose, *Power at Sea*, 64.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 65.

negotiation was off the table: a game of naval bluffing and deterrence was underway, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Expansion into Southeast Asia was particularly problematic because the United States derived a majority of its critical strategic resources from European-held colonial possessions in the region. When war came, and Southeast Asia fell to Japan, the U.S. would feel the squeeze of being cut off from these materials. For example, “when Japan took Singapore in February 1942, cutting off over 90 percent of the world’s supply of natural rubber, the United States had less than ten months’ supply in the stockpile.”<sup>106</sup> Following advances in the early and mid-1930s into Manchuria and southern China, Japan announced in 1938 its grand plan to create the “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere;” an empire of Japanese military rule by other words. Jonathan Marshall contends that Japan’s push into Southeast Asia in 1940 “brought the war into a ‘new and ominous stage’ that ‘all but snuffed out any hope of commercial amity between the United States and the Japanese Empire.’”<sup>107</sup> If the annexation of Manchuria marked the first major step in Japan’s attempt to create, by force, an autarkic empire in East Asia, then the navy’s policy of southward expansion in the late 1930s marked the culmination of this policy. It was also, by far, the most risky. As we have seen, the U.S. was willing to acknowledge and, to a degree, respect the “special relationship” Japan had with China. The Roosevelt administration, however, drew a red line when it came to Japanese expansion into European possessions in Southeast Asia. For the first time, core U.S. strategic interests were being directly threatened with Japanese military power.

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<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Marshall, *To Have and Have Not: Southeast Asian Raw Materials and the Origins of the Pacific War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd., 1995), 41.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

The rise of China in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has coincided with a wave of economic globalization, but it is not the first time that the vitality of the U.S. economy has become deeply interlinked with East Asian manufacturing, exports and markets. As Marshall notes, “in the period 1901-1937, the United States’ import level from Asia and Oceania jumped more than sixfold, to a level 25 percent higher than U.S. imports from Europe.”<sup>108</sup> More importantly, the U.S. was not importing – as it does today – finished consumer goods from Chinese factories. The trade situation as it related to Japanese military expansion was much more problematic because “by 1940, the United States was consuming 60 percent of the world’s rubber, 45 percent of its chromium, 40 percent of its tin, and 36 percent of its manganese, mostly or entirely purchased from foreign suppliers.”<sup>109</sup> As it happened, most of these war-critical resources were being imported from the Philippines and European possessions in Southeast Asia. A 1940 Army and Navy Munitions Board study concluded that the “Far East, especially Southeast Asia and India” supplied the “most important” of the fourteen strategic materials that could cause “insurmountable” production difficulties if shortages occurred in wartime.<sup>110</sup> As an example, “Ninety-eight percent of U.S. rubber imports came from Southeast Asia – largely from British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, Japanese military expansion into these areas ceased to be merely a problem of violating international norms for acceptable state behavior- it threatened the lifeblood of the U.S. industrial economy which would, in a few short years, be converted into the “arsenal of democracy” described by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Perhaps, under very different circumstances, the U.S. could have turned a blind eye: if these areas were not already controlled by the U.S. or friendly European states, if the U.S. was

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<sup>108</sup> Marshall, *To Have and Have Not*, 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

cooperating with Japan to deter Great Britain and not the other way around, or if the U.S. did not have strong reasons to believe that Japan would stop exporting the raw materials under its newfound control. None of these conditions applied, however. On the last question, Marshall suggests that Japan's "deep hostility to the Western powers and aggressive, militaristic foreign policy gave no reason for optimism."<sup>112</sup>

Japan's policy of southward expansion was born of an aggressive, militaristic foreign policy created by the same men who sabotaged the Washington and London naval arms treaties. An important precondition to the military advance into Southeast Asia was the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact with Fascist Germany and Italy, signed on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1940. The pact "recognized Japan's sphere of influence in Asia in return for recognition of German and Italian interests in Europe. Each party pledged to assist the other if attacked 'by a power at present not involved in the European War or in the Chinese-Japanese War.'"<sup>113</sup> Japan concluded the pact despite personal reservations by important figures in the Japanese navy, especially Navy Minister Oikawa. Asada contends that "if he [Oikawa] had had the courage to say, as Yonai did in 1939, that the navy could not fight the United States, in all likelihood the Tripartite Pact would have been aborted."<sup>114</sup> But there were enormous pressures to forge ahead with Japan's militaristic policy of arming, expansion, and collusion with the Fascist powers: in addition to Oikawa's reluctance to voice his concerns about the navy's capabilities to stand up to the United States, which could threaten the fundamental reason for naval expansion, "the navy's desire for a larger share of appropriations and war material was an important, perhaps the most important,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>113</sup> Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, 223.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 224.

factor. I had been anxious to reverse the priority given to the army since the outbreak of the China war.”<sup>115</sup>

Just as Japan could have predicted the hostile response of the U.S. to the previous provocations in China, the abrogation of the naval treaties, and withdrawal from the League of Nations, “on 28 September 1940, the Intelligence Division estimated that the United States would be ‘greatly shocked’ by the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact and would tighten its economic ‘oppression.’ (On 26 September, President Roosevelt had placed the export of all grades of scrap iron under government control.)”<sup>116</sup> Clearly, Japan and the United States were no longer engaged in a security dilemma: there was no confusion about U.S. attitudes toward Japanese foreign policy given its fundamentally greedy motives. Japan was willing to dramatically escalate Pacific tensions in order to fulfill its dream of creating an autarkic empire capable of supporting the necessary industrial-economic conditions of total war.

In April 1940, Roosevelt ordered the Pacific Fleet to Pearl Harbor to deter Japan from expanding into the East Indies.<sup>117</sup> Asada provides more evidence of how military policy continued to influence foreign policy: in the face of a rapidly escalating arms race, and seeking a clear rationale for obtaining appropriations dominance over the army, “in late March 1941 the navy restated its position on war. ‘Japan must resort to force,’ it held, ‘when the United States, alone or in cooperation with Britain and the Netherlands, imposes total embargo,’ thus threatening Japan’s ‘self-existence and self-defense.’”<sup>118</sup> Such concerns would have been irrelevant had Japan stayed the course set in the 1920s; negotiation and restraint would have

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

given little reason to fear the effective total oil embargo from the U.S. that ultimately occurred in August of 1941.

Moreover, the Roosevelt administration did what it could to communicate resolve in the face of Japanese expansion: as Sagan tells it, “the United States government began a concerted effort to persuade the Japanese government that America would intervene in such a contingency. ‘On February 14, Roosevelt was, he [British ambassador Lord Halifax] told Adolf Berle, ‘really emotional’ when he warned [Japanese ambassador] Nomura [against Japanese aggression:] while everybody here was doing their best to keep things quiet, ... should the dikes ever break (three sobs), civilization would end.’”<sup>119</sup> The Japanese would not be deterred. Faced with the choice of fighting now, in 1941, or continuing to hemorrhage fighting capability under a near-total trade embargo, Japan began preparing for the Pearl Harbor attack.

Some international relations theorists belonging to the school of “offensive realism,” like Mearsheimer, contend that states frequently seek expansion for security purposes: for example, to create buffer zones between themselves and other great powers. Yet Japan’s policy of imperial expansion by force in the 1930s places Japan firmly in the category of a greedy state. Japanese policymakers knew full well what the potential consequences of such an aggressive foreign policy would entail; moreover, they also knew full well that Japan did not possess the economic or industrial wherewithal to stand up to the United States in a condition of total war. For these men, such measured considerations were irrelevant, a negotiated settlement was out of the question. As Glaser put it, “in a world with one or more greedy states, the [security dilemma] puzzle largely disappears: the incompatibility of states’ goals provides a straightforward explanation for competition and conflict.”<sup>120</sup> Starting with the annexation of Manchuria in 1931,

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<sup>119</sup> Sagan, “The Origins of the Pacific War,” 902.

<sup>120</sup> Glaser, *Security Dilemma Revisited*, 190.

Japan made a series of dramatic foreign policy decisions, where she deliberately *chose* competition with the United States and her European allies. As we have seen, this did not have to be the case: Japan and the U.S. successfully ameliorated the security dilemma in the 1920s through cooperative policies. Yet the 1930s tell a story of a very different Japan, with disastrous outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

### *Evaluating the Sino-American Strategic Relationship*

#### *I: Lessons from Pearl Harbor*

Japan and the United States did not have to go to war in December of 1941. This is not to say that the attack on Pearl Harbor was irrational; indeed, it was a rational response to the strategic dilemma that Japan found itself in following a potentially crippling oil embargo placed on her by the United States. The puzzle is not why Pearl Harbor, but rather why the embargo, and why the spiral of events that led to the embargo.

I answer, in chapter two, that the dangerous action-reaction process that led to Pearl Harbor was initiated by Japan's shift from a security-seeking state to a greedy state. In the 1920s, Japan recognized the existence of a security dilemma between herself and the United States, driven primarily by growing naval power in the Pacific. Crucially, Japanese negotiators also concluded that the United States was a security-seeker, not a greedy state. Thus, Japan was able to pursue a strategy of negotiated settlement with the United States without excessive fear of being placed in a "cooperate-defect" scenario, where the United States would use the negotiating process to bide its time and enhance its military capabilities at Japan's expense.

In the 1930s, a diverse set of factors led Japanese foreign policy to shift from its emphasis on negotiation and cooperation to a strategy of imperial expansionism. The key elements in that story were the creation of a Japanese puppet state in Manchuria, the domination of naval policy by a hardline group of naval officers determined to overthrow the Washington-London treaty system, the decision to unilaterally abrogate the Washington-London treaties, and finally the policy of southward expansion that put Japan and the United States on a collision course.

Japan in the 1930s became a state that was uninterested in negotiated settlement, and that was very difficult to deter. The men in charge of Japanese foreign policy during this period felt that Japan *must* expand in order to cement its status as a great power, and to ensure its survival in a condition of total war. Asada called this mindset “neo-Mahanian determinism,” where influential military men like Kato Kanji and Ishiwara Kanji became convinced that Japan and the United States were destined to clash over military and economic interests in East Asia. In the 1930s, it was no longer a question of if a Pacific clash would occur, but when.

Despite the tragic endpoint of the Japanese-American strategic relationship in the interwar years, it provides a useful case study for evaluating the Chinese-American strategic relationship today. Despite an enormous degree of economic interdependence, China and the United States have begun to clash over military-strategic issues such as the deployment of greater U.S. naval power to East Asia and the militarization of disputed islands in the South China Sea. Aaron L. Friedberg has characterized the Obama administration’s Pacific policy as “conengagement,” where the U.S. simultaneously engages with China on pressing international issues such as climate change, but also appears to be pursuing a strategy of containment through the military aspects of the “pivot to Asia.” Two important questions present themselves: are

China and the United States engaged in a security dilemma, and are there signs that either state could become “greedy”? The two key variables in the security dilemma, capabilities and intentions, can help us answer these questions.

## *II: Chinese foreign policy through 2008*

Some Chinese scholars suggest that up through 2008, China primarily pursued a cooperative foreign policy designed to maintain amicable relations with China’s neighbors, while allowing CCP leadership to focus on the country’s varied, and pressing, internal issues. One of China’s primary goals is to sustain its remarkable economic growth, which requires maintaining stable relationships with regional powers such as South Korea, Japan, Australia and the ASEAN community. China’s domestic challenges, to be sure, are great: as Robert Kaplan observes, “China is able to feed 23 percent of the world’s population from 7 percent of the arable land – ‘by crowding some 2,000 human beings onto each square mile of cultivated earth in the valleys and flood plains,’... It now is under popular pressure to achieve something similar – that is, provide a middle-class lifestyle for much of its urban population.”<sup>121</sup> Consequently, CCP leadership cares little about democratization and transparency- such concerns are trivial when attempting to guide a nation of almost 1.4 billion souls from her former status as a developing country to her emerging role as a regional superpower.

Citing a speech from former Chinese President Hu Jintao (in office 2003-2013), Li Qingsi notes that “China’s development goal for the next 20 years is to reach a \$4 trillion GDP with \$3000 per capita income. The medium and short-term objectives are to catch up with Europe and the

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<sup>121</sup> Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House Inc., 2012,) 199.

United States so as to improve the people's living standards, rather than to challenge the U.S. hegemony and the existing international order."<sup>122</sup> Moreover, Qingsi claims that "Chinese leadership has clearly recognized 'the negative experiences of earlier rising powers, such as Germany and Japan in the twentieth century, to conclude that China cannot reach its goals of economic modernization and development through confrontation and conflict.'"<sup>123</sup> However, even prior to 2009, when Chinese foreign policy in the South China Sea started to become much more assertive, growing Chinese wealth and power began to engender concerns among some of China's neighbors: Qingsi argues that disputes over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) islands, differing interpretations of international law regarding Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), and bitter historical memories of Japan's occupation of China during World War II have contributed to "a widening gap between the economic and political relations between China and Japan."<sup>124</sup>

With regard to the contemporary development of Chinese foreign policy, Tang Shiping argues that "at the very least, most analysts reject the notion that China is an offensive-realist state (i.e., an expansionist, revisionist, or imperialist one) today."<sup>125</sup> Shiping argues that four factors support this conclusion: China has "toned down its revolutionary rhetoric," Chinese leaders since Deng Xiaoping have "clearly recognized some of the most critical aspects of the security dilemma and its implications," China has "demonstrated self-restraint and willingness to be constrained by others," and finally that "security through cooperation, the hallmark of defensive realism, has become a pillar of China's security strategy under Deng."<sup>126</sup> While China's more aggressive post-

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<sup>122</sup> Li Qingsi, "The International Conditions of China's Peaceful Rise," in *China's "Peaceful Rise" in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 144.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>125</sup> Tang Shiping, "From Offensive to Defensive Realism" in *China's Ascent* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 154.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

2009 foreign policy has challenged the notion that China is wholly committed to “security through cooperation,” at least with the U.S. and her regional treaty allies, Shiping’s summary of China’s understanding of its contributing role in the security dilemma remains convincing: “China’s leaders now understand that, because of China’s vast size and power potential, most small and medium-sized regional states do have reasons to feel uneasy about China’s growing power and to demand Chinese self-restraint, even if China does not intentionally threaten them.”<sup>127</sup>

Still, through 2008 Chinese foreign policy could be characterized as largely benign, with military power rising in proportion to economic growth. Concern among China’s neighbors about the PRC’s growing regional influence is, to a degree, inevitable. For the first time since 1945, a slow but steady shift in the regional geopolitical balance is occurring, and absolute U.S. hegemony in East Asia is being challenged. Yet prior to recent flare-ups over freedom of navigation and territorial disputes, Beijing appeared to be committed to maintaining a focus on domestic development, abstaining from leveraging its newfound military power to challenge the existing international order in East Asia. From a structural perspective, Zhu Feng argued in 2008 that “the unipolar ‘American system’ and ongoing U.S. efforts to make its hegemonic position ‘unchallengeable’ have reduced China’s balancing options and compelled China to bandwagon with the United States.”<sup>128</sup> While the more aggressive Chinese foreign policy pursued since 2009 indicates that China is not yet satisfied with mere “bandwagoning,” a corollary to Feng’s argument remains relevant: “even if China attempted to balance U.S. power through cooperation with other great powers, it would ultimately have no choice but to conciliate the United States; it would be impossible for Beijing to find great powers willing to participate in a rival coalition against the

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>128</sup> Zhu Feng, “China’s Rise Will Be Peaceful” in *China’s Ascent* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 37.

United States.”<sup>129</sup> The last observation is astute: both the regional, and global, balance of power remains firmly in favor of the US. As G. John Ikenberry argues, “China faces an international order that is fundamentally different from those that past rising states confronted. China does not just face the United States; it faces a Western-centered system that is open, integrated, and rules-based, with wide and deep political foundation.”<sup>130</sup>

The regional balance of power is not in China’s favor. Regional U.S. allies include South Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, none of which seem poised to bandwagon with China. While Russia remains a potential balancing partner against the U.S., Feng counters that although “the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has been perceived as Beijing-Moscow-centered ‘counterbalancing’ against the United States... the SCO is a subregional organization and Beijing is primarily motivated by its security and energy interests in Central Asia rather than by the U.S. presence in East Asia.”<sup>131</sup> The ASEAN community remains a final option for China to persuade regional states to bandwagon with her against U.S. hegemony: Jorg Friedrich argues that without clear Chinese or Japanese leadership, “the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remains the most important institutional hub, or focal point, for security cooperation in East Asia.”<sup>132</sup> Yet there is no evidence that China is seeking to dominate ASEAN for its own purposes; rather, it serves as a useful forum to “socialize” China into the region and provides an outlet for informal Chinese leadership on economic and security issues. As Friedrichs contends, “precisely because ASEAN constitutes an enticing block of follower states, it has some leeway to balance the great powers against each other... This is

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>130</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (January 2008): 24.

<sup>131</sup> Feng, “China’s Rise Will Be Peaceful,” 41.

<sup>132</sup> Jorg Friederichs, “East Asian Regional Security,” *Asian Survey* 52, no. 4 (July 2012): 754.

important because it offers the regional giants an opportunity to exercise various kinds of informal regional leadership but without incurring the considerable cost of openly exerting regional hegemony.”<sup>133</sup> In short, “the importance of multilateral regional institutions such as the APT, EAS and ARF to peaceful change should not be overstated. They complement but by no means replace the traditional U.S. – centered security regime. In fact the importance of the U.S. as an offshore balancer seems to be increasing, not declining, as a consequence of China’s rise.”<sup>134</sup>

In short, the period of Chinese history from Deng Xiaoping’s ascension to power through 2008 has been marked by Beijing’s emphasis on internal development and peaceful international relations. There were no serious indicators that China was interested in becoming a “greedy” state bent on military expansion and coercion of its smaller neighbors. However, following the election of Barack Obama, there have been indicators that Chinese foreign policy in East Asia has become more assertive, and more willing to use newfound military power to challenge the status quo. These provocations have come primarily in the form of territory disputes in the South China Sea, as well as Chinese-American clashes over freedom of navigation through disputed waters.

### *III: The “Pivot,” military competition and South China Sea disputes*

Since 2009, Chinese foreign policy has become more assertive, causing significant consternation among leaders of the United States and the network of US allies in East Asia. China has embarked on a vigorous campaign to overhaul the People’s Liberation Army (and its associated air and naval branches), which last year contributed to a defense budget of at least \$216 billion, according to SIPRI. GDP and estimated defense spending indicate that China is

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 764.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 766.

now the world's second-largest economy, and the world's second-largest defense spender. In particular, China is transforming the PLA from a land-based force with limited power-projection capabilities into a 21<sup>st</sup> century military with heavy emphasis on air and naval power. Beijing is also increasingly willing to demonstrate China's growing regional power. The most prominent examples are ongoing South China Sea disputes over maritime borders, fishing, and hydrocarbon production rights, as well as Chinese land reclamation efforts to turn tiny rocks and reefs in this hotly contested body of water into useable military installations.

The change in Chinese tone beginning in 2009 was no coincidence, and was informed by two important developments. First, Beijing observed, correctly, that the 2008 global financial crisis would hurt the Western economies much more than its own. Second, Beijing likely gauged that the newly minted presidency of Barack Obama would be less hostile toward Chinese power and influence in East Asia than his predecessor, giving Beijing a window of opportunity to test the boundaries of acceptable international behavior. As Friedberg argues, “within a year of taking office, the new president was forced to confront troubling evidence that his initial attempts at ‘reassurance’ had not only failed to cause Beijing to moderate its behavior, but may actually have encouraged it to act more assertively than it might otherwise have done.”<sup>135</sup> While official Chinese policy continues to fervently eschew force as a solution to international problems, Beijing's strategy since 2009 has been one of “costly signaling” as it seeks to clarify its role as an emerging great power. China's claim to nearly all of the South China Sea through the “nine-dash line” and its militarization of the regions' small islands and reefs have shifted the strategic dialogue away from economic and diplomatic issues, and toward traditional hard power competition.

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<sup>135</sup> Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*, 115.

China has compelling reasons to expand its military (and particularly naval) power in East Asia. The South China Sea region has, in recent years, become flush with international disputes: “China and Japan have conflicting claims of sovereignty to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands; in the latter, China has conflicting sovereignty claims with Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam to some or all of the Spratly Islands, and with Vietnam over the Paracel Islands. (China also has other serious territorial conflicts in the South China Sea with Malaysia and Brunei).”<sup>136</sup> Resources, as they did in Japanese foreign policy in the 1930s, play an important role in incentivizing Chinese boldness: “there are also significant deposits of oil and gas that China hopes to exploit, making the South China Sea a ‘second Persian Gulf’ in some estimations.”<sup>137</sup>

Well before the current round of maritime crises in East Asia, the United States and China have found themselves at odds over Taiwan. During the 1996 Taiwan Straits crisis, the United States dispatched “two carrier battle groups to the region to signal resolve,” after China “twice lobbed dummy missile warheads into the Taiwan Strait in a vain attempt to frighten voters away from an avowedly pro-independence candidate.”<sup>138</sup> For the time being, however, headlines have shifted away from Taiwan and toward the South China Sea.

First elucidated in 2011, the current U.S. response to Chinese military moves has come in the nebulous “Pivot to Asia” strategy. While there are diplomatic, military and economic components to this strategy, the military components are the most prominent. Robert Ross argues that “Beijing’s tough diplomacy stemmed not from a confidence in its might... but from a deep sense of insecurity born of several nerve-wracking years of financial crisis and social unrest.”<sup>139</sup> The Obama administration responded to Chinese provocations by expanding “joint naval

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<sup>136</sup> Kaplan, *Revenge of Geography*, 214.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>138</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*, 97.

<sup>139</sup> Robert Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” *Foreign Affairs* (November / December 2012): 72.

exercises with Japan to prepare for the defense of disputed islands, reached new agreements to sell arms to the Philippines, and, most recently, in April 2012, agreed to send U.S. marines to Australia.”<sup>140</sup> The Obama administration also made important diplomatic contributions to the pivot, when it “improved relations with Burma (also called Myanmar); signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the founding document of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; joined the East Asian Summit; and saw to it that the EAS and the ASEAN Regional Forum... actually addressed important issues.”<sup>141</sup>

While such diplomatic moves have helped to bolster the status quo international order in East Asia, and reassure U.S. allies in the region, Thomas J. Christensen also contends that “none of these laudable diplomatic moves required the exaggerated language about a pivot, which fed into Chinese conspiracy theories about alleged U.S. containment and encirclement.”<sup>142</sup> Attempts by a security-seeker to signal benign intentions are difficult to calibrate; they can either go too far in suggesting a complete reorientation of a state’s foreign policy toward a potential competitor, or do too little in failing to communicate resolve in the face of aggression. As of late, military concerns have dominated headlines: “...China has triggered worries throughout the region by pursuing large-scale land reclamation and infrastructure projects on disputed reefs, leading U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter to castigate Beijing at the May 2015 Shangri-La Dialogue.”<sup>143</sup>

In response, “the United States finds itself using military assets on a fairly frequent basis to send signals to Beijing about U.S. interests in the East China and South China Seas.”<sup>144</sup> In the

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (September 2015): 29.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

1930s, the U.S. began building up its naval forces and deploying more military power to the Pacific too late to have any significant deterrent effect on the Japanese. While probably not making a deliberate historical comparison, the Obama administration is seeking to deter any potential Chinese aggression before it can emerge. Simultaneously, in order to avoid communicating that the U.S. is a hostile power bent on containing any growth in regional Chinese influence, the pivot pursues diplomatic and economic engagement China, regional U.S. allies and the ASEAN community.

#### *IV: The Naval Balance*

Andrew Scobell and Andre J. Nathan discuss Chinese naval strategy in a three-part timeline: by 2000, according to Admiral Liu Huaqing, the PLA-N would be able to operate in the “First Island Chain.” Expanding its “operational reach” to the “Second Island Chain” would occur by 2020, and finally, the PLA-N would attain “global sea power on par with the U.S. Navy by 2050.”<sup>145</sup> Is, or was, this timeline realistic, and does it change the threat calculus with respect to American interests and security?

According to a 2015 report from the Office of Naval Intelligence, the PLA-N has already attained the capacity and capability necessary for the first two objectives. China now possesses 63 diesel-electric submarines, five nuclear attack submarines (SSNs), and four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs)<sup>146</sup>. Furthermore, China possesses at least 21 modern

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<sup>145</sup> Andrew Scobell and Andrew J. Nathan, “China’s Overstretched Military,” *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 137.

<sup>146</sup> “The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *United States Navy Office of Naval Intelligence*, 2015. See figure 2-1, pg. 14. [http://news.usni.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015\\_PLA\\_NAVY\\_PUB\\_Print.pdf#viewer.action=download](http://news.usni.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015_PLA_NAVY_PUB_Print.pdf#viewer.action=download)

destroyers, the backbone of modern naval power, and at least 170 missile-armed small surface combatants- frigates, corvettes and patrol boats.<sup>147</sup> Taken together, these assets represent an enormous amount of anti-ship firepower in the South China Sea region, without including over a thousand short to medium-range ballistic missiles operated by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Force, some of which are DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs). However, this force structure- a emphasis on small, agile missile platforms and hunter-killer submarines, does not conform to the objective of seeking “global sea power.” China will likely never achieve the 2050 goal of matching American global naval dominance, which has important repercussions for balance-of-threat theory regarding the United States and China. The U.S. Navy, by contrast, fields approximately 71 nuclear-powered submarines, 85 cruisers and destroyers, and eleven nuclear-powered, catapult-equipped aircraft carriers.<sup>148</sup> The force structure of the USN is a true blue-water navy, with the carrier battle group as its centerpiece.

The downside is that the USN only operates approximately 26 small surface combatants, the Littoral Combat Ship, which possess a 57 mm cannon as its sole offensive armament. Thus, in a conflict with China, the USN would be well suited to cut off commercial shipping to China not within the South China Sea (where Chinese naval power is strongest), but even farther out, likely in the Indian Ocean. This strategic reality provide a very strong hedge against a worst-case scenario involving a war with China. On the other hand, the Chinese military is well positioned to assert naval dominance in the South China Sea region. Taken together, these differing naval strategies provide good counterweights to each other, and incentivize bilateral cooperation on

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> “2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength,” *The Heritage Foundation*, 2015.  
<http://index.heritage.org/militarystrength/chapter/us-power/>

pressing security issues. Thus, Thomas M. Kane concludes that “for the ‘foreseeable future, the primary task of the PLA Navy will continue to be defined at the regional level.’”<sup>149</sup>

The Obama administration has concluded that demonstrating resolve is important at this stage in the security dilemma in order to avoid communicating any sort of ambiguity over what American interest are in the region and how far the U.S. will go to protect those interests. Much as war between Imperial Japan and the United States in 1941 was far from inevitable, conflict between China and the U.S. today is not a foregone conclusion. However, successful resolution of the outstanding issues requires both sides to recognize each other’s legitimate interests and concerns, much as Japan and the U.S. were able to do through the Washington naval arms treaty. There are few indicators to suggest that China today is truly a “greedy” state: Xi Jinping and the CCP leadership appear to remain firmly in control of the PLA, and there are no signs that China is preparing to go on the warpath in East Asia. A serious possibility remains, however, that an arms race between China, the U.S. and American allies in the region could accelerate, which would aggravate the Sino-American strategic relationship with potentially disastrous consequences. In the future, the Japanese case provides a set of “warning signs” that could indicate a shift in Chinese foreign policy toward something more aggressive and less accommodating to the interest of her smaller neighbors and the US. Among these would be increasing control of the PLA over Chinese foreign policy, the deployment of greater naval power to coerce smaller states in the region over territory and resource disputes, and rhetoric from Beijing that paints the U.S. as an enemy whose regional interests cannot be reconciled with Chinese objectives.

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<sup>149</sup> Thomas M. Kane, “China’s ‘Power Projection’ Capabilities,” *Parameters* 44, no. 4 (2014): 31.

History need not repeat itself. As former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd notes, the counter-argument to the inevitability of the structural security dilemma lies in “that politics, diplomacy and leadership all matter; that individuals shape history, sometimes incrementally, other times decisively; and therefore that alternate futures are always possible.”<sup>150</sup> The bottom line is that if there is a nascent security dilemma between China and the United States, it is not nearly as severe as the one that characterized Pacific geopolitics in the interwar years. The web of U.S. treaty allies in the region serves as a strong deterrent against blatant Chinese aggression, and the elimination of European and American colonial possession in East Asia has removed one of the primary factors that contributed to fear of rising Japanese naval power in the 1920s. Yet tensions in the region, particularly over disputed territory in the South China Sea, continue to mount. Some commentators now speak of the “militarization” of the region, and a case could be made that a region-wide arms race is beginning to emerge. Thus, now is a crucial time for the U.S. and China “get it right” in terms of their strategic relationship, in order to ensure economic and military stability in the region that Barack Obama has repeatedly identified as “the part of the world of greatest consequence to the American future, and that no president can take his eye off of.”<sup>151</sup> The last time an aspiring great power challenged the East Asian status quo, the results were disastrous. Today, incentives for Sino-American cooperation are strong, and barriers to regional militarism are higher than they were in the 1930s. The next several decades will decide whether conflict or peace is the dominant paradigm in East Asia.

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<sup>150</sup> Kevin Rudd, “Lessons from Europe 1914 for Asia 2014” in *The Next Great War?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 196.

<sup>151</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine,” *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

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