Global Power Shift

S. Mahmud Ali

US-Chinese Strategic Triangles

Examining Indo-Pacific Insecurity

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S. Mahmud Ali
The Institute of China Studies
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Preface

Interesting how the US sells Taiwan billions of dollars of military equipment but I should not accept a congratulatory call. Donald Trump (Sevastopulo and Dyer 2016)

We are watching the situation very closely. Now is a period of transition. Xi Jinping (Sevastopulo and Dyer 2016)

Any sober-minded politician, they clearly recognise that there cannot be conflict between China and the US because both will lose and both sides cannot afford that. Wang Yi (MoFA 2017)

President Trump agreed, at the request of President Xi, to honour our 'one-China' policy. White House (2017)

Since the turn of the century, Western commentary generally and US geopolitical analyses in particular have focused on US–Chinese strategic competition. This intensifying rivalry is said to pose a serious threat to both peace across the Indo-Pacific region and wider, *systemic,* stability. In the context of 'the challenge posed by China's rise', the then President Barack Obama's notion of an 'Asian pivot' focusing 'all-of-government', but most visibly military, resources on sustaining US dominance across the Indo-Pacific assumed 'a paramount priority' (Goldberg 2016). As America strived to perpetuate military *primacy* by securing force-projection access across China's periphery, Beijing responded with countervailing capabilities to strike at US expeditionary-force vulnerabilities. America counteracted to neutralise A2AD advantages; China's counter-counteraction generated a semiautonomous action–reaction cycle.

The world's two largest economies, bound in unprecedented 'symbiosis' (Al-Rodhan 2013; Tarchalski 2011; McNally 2009), together drove much global economic activity. Even in the non-lethal realm of trade and investment, Washington deployed the TPP as a tool for pursuing strategic objectives. Carter insisted, 'in terms of our rebalance. . .TPP is as strategically important to the rebalance in the broadest sense; passing TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier.' Secretary of State John Kerry said the TPP was 'the center of

defending our strategic interests' (Carter 2015, 2016; Kerry 2016). Obama would only accept Beijing's acquiescent collaboration: 'If. . .China continues on a peaceful rise, then we have a partner that is growing in capability and sharing with us the burdens and responsibilities of maintaining an international order. If China. . .has to resort to nationalism as an organizing principle. . .if it views the world only in terms of regional spheres of influence,' Obama saw 'the potential for conflict with China' and also greater difficulty in 'dealing with. . .other challenges' (Goldberg 2016). Beijing perceived *pax Americana* differently.

America's first post-War deployment of San Diego-based 3rd Fleet warships to China's periphery alongside the Japan-based 7th Fleet in late 2016 reinforced this difference: 'no matter it is the 3rd Fleet or the 7th Fleet, as long as they have compromised China's sovereignty and security interests, the Chinese armed forces will do whatever they can to safeguard China's rights and interests. . . what we see on the ground is an increased US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, increasingly frequent military exercises and training, beefed-up close reconnaissance against China, provocations by military aircraft and ships in the vicinity of China's islands and reefs, and reinforced military alliances targeting the third party.' Crucially, 'If what has happened continues, there will be no balance. On the contrary, it will result in imbalance in regional situation' (Wu 2016). Sino-US divergences generated such tensions as Trump ascended the presidency that without reciprocal statesmanlike geostrategic management, potential threats to stability began to look likely (Hayden 2016; White 2016).

Dialectic dynamics precipitated a dialogue of the deaf between the status quo-orientated *primate* and its dissatisfied 'near-peer rival'. With campaign rhetoric having flared American tempers, and Beijing's five-yearly CPC conclave imminent, sober reflection tamping down tensions was scarce. The Indo-Pacific *subsystem* and, to the extent it was a fuse for wider agglomerations of power and interests, the *system* itself stood on the brink of unknowable potential horrors of uncontrolled escalation. This was the incendiary context in which Sino-US insecurity-rooted competition needed to be examined for meaningful efforts to obviate *system*-threatening consequences of a strategic meltdown.

Western analysts criticised Chinese 'assertiveness' in pursuing 'expansive' regional interests as the trigger behind *subsystemic* tensions. Many urged US military measures to deter or, if necessary, defeat Chinese muscularity and future aggression. Beijing's anxiety, in contrast, underscored not a revisionist bent but the underdog's defensive insecurity (Freedberg 2013; Easton 2014; Chase et al. 2015) vis-à-vis the 'Hegemon's Cold War mentality' allegedly driving US determination to sustain an unfair, outdated, and unequal global order by, if necessary, unilateral application of force. Nationalistic prisms on both shores of the Pacific robbed the discourse of detached objectivity and intellectual clarity, reinforcing the dialogue of the deaf. Instead of providing policymakers with rational choices, analytical bias painted the strategic landscape in monochromatic zero-sum hues, deepening *a priori* prejudices and narrowing the range of practicable policy options.

Those who doubted the risks only needed to recall the global shock waves flowing from Trump's unlikely election victory. Given the strength of US and

Chinese determination to pursue their conflicting objectives, the lethally destructive power they commanded, and their mutual economic integration and intertwined linkages binding them to the global economy, such zero-sum approaches, taken to their logical conclusion, could spell catastrophic disaster.

Seeking clarity via unsentimental detachment in examining contemporary complexities in light of historical experience could help to preclude avoidably Pyrrhic outcomes. This book aspires to contribute to such a discourse. In that context, existing dyadic formulations offered limited insights into the broadly status quo vs. existentially revisionist dynamics triggering *systemic transitional fluidity*. The work adapts the *strategic triangle* model of interstate insecurity to examine granular nuances of the century's most critical geopolitical concerns.

The volume explores *strategic triangles* as the theoretical paradigm applied here, examining seven such *triangles* historically shaping US–Chinese insecurity dynamics, in seven chapters. Chapter 1 outlines evolving geopolitical constructs rooted in terrestrial vs. maritime and continental vs. oceanic formulations used in analysing interstate competition. It introduces the *security complex* framework and builds on it to identify *strategic triangles* as a key tool for assessing the Trump-era Indo-Pacific insecurity milieu. It establishes the form and content of US–Chinese competition defining Trump's strategic inheritance. It traces the trajectory of US post-Cold War policy of encouraging Beijing to acknowledge Washington's systemic primacy while offering it limited shared influence. It records Beijing's rejection of subordination, a hardening of America's views of an apparently intransigent, even revisionist, actor, and China's responsive strengthening of its national substance and its deterrent-and-diplomatic carapace, thereby triggering competitive dialectics.

Chapter 2 examines tensions over Taiwan/RoC's unsettled status, and the Korean Peninsula's partition into antagonistic state-societies, historically challenging US–Chinese relations. US recognition of the PRC as the 'one-China' was subverted by its Taiwan Relations Act (TRA)-based ties with Taiwan. The 'two Chinas' contested legitimacy, rendering Taiwan a 'core' Sino-US contention. Similarly, RoK–DPRK rivalry resonantly deepened patron-power cleavages. Taiwan and the Koreas thus became *systemic* flashpoints. North Korea's *sui generis* politics, insecurity-driven unpredictability, nuclear weapons and BM programmes, and the Korea's mixed relationship with key US ally Japan convoluted combustible complexity. The RoK's quest for reunification, the DPRK's shrill opacity, and destabilising responses to perceived slights challenged stability. Washington's *systemic* concerns, the ambivalent PRC–DPRK alliance, failure to 'denuclearise' the Peninsula, Pyongyang's rumoured power struggles, and feared fallout from its possible implosion meant the parties neither fully engaged with nor disengaged from peninsular histrionics. The chapter examines very uneven Sino-US experiences in this challenging milieu and their impact on relations.

Chapter 3 analyses *systemic–subsystemic* structural tensions characterising US–China–Japan relations. Since the 1950s, the US–Japan alliance was a bulwark against feared communist encroachments in the Western Pacific. America's extended-deterrence umbrella enabled Japan to grow its economic, scientific-

technological, and 'soft-power' assets and push outwards beyond the bounds of limited sovereignty. *Systemic* transitions triggered by the 'Nixon Shokku' and Soviet collapse shook Tokyo. China's 'rise' forced Japan to formally establish its Ministry of Defence (MoD). Since then, disputes over history and geography focused Sino-Japanese rivalry resonating with Sino-US competition. Convergent deepening of the US–Japanese alliance paralleled a loosening of Japan's legal-constitutional restrictions. And yet, post-War US–Japan–PRC dynamics betrayed very different tensions. The chapter examines the atypical evolution of this potentially inflammable triangular relational dynamic.

Chapter 4 assesses the evolution of US–USSR–PRC relational dynamics into the US–Russia–China *strategic triangle*. The former comprised the first Cold War-era *triangle*. In 1969–1971, convergent Sino-US security interests transformed intra-*triangular* interactions, supplanting the hitherto binary *systemic core*, modifying the *system* itself. Russia's early post-Soviet self-absorption amidst transitional turbulence kept elites focused on the Slavic heartland. Economic recovery and power stabilisation around the Kremlin restored Moscow's self-image of a global actor. Western angst over Russian activism in Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East followed NATO-imposed restraints, eliciting efforts to improve Russia's position in the east. A reversal of Russo-Chinese power balances, China's energy needs, Russia's quest for market diversification, financial and diplomatic support, and a shared perception of encirclement rooted in US identification of China and Russia as strategic threats backstopped Sino-Russian cooperation coalescing into a proto-alliance. Given structural divergences, this reversal of a covert anti-Soviet US–Chinese tacit alliance late in the Cold War (Ali 2005) triggering US–Japanese anxiety warrants an explanation. This chapter seeks to provide it.

Chapter 5 evaluates US–China–India triangular power play. Washington secured Delhi's subordination to its early-Cold War strategic interests before India's independence. Since July 1947 to July 1971, when President Richard Nixon upended America's China policy, India was a US client, providing base facilities for US military-intelligence sorties against the PRC, spearheading US covert campaigns undermining Beijing's authority in Tibet, triggering a border war in 1962, and a searing defeat for Delhi (Ali 1999). Following China's 1964 nuclear test, Indian and CIA personnel installed plutonium-powered surveillance devices atop the Himalayas to monitor Chinese nuclear-and-missile tests (Ali 1999, 1–3). Tacit alliance notwithstanding, India often challenged US expectations. After Washington identified China as 'a constant competitor' and Congress legislated to counteract the 'China challenge' in 1999, Bill Clinton revived the Indo-US anti-Chinese front. Since then, US–Indian military, maritime, nuclear, intelligence, and diplomatic cooperation reflected renewed counter-China drives, explaining America's expanded Indo-Pacific focus. This chapter reviews the uneven evolution of the triangular dynamics, especially even when Indo-US security interests apparently converged.

Chapter 6 explores US–China–ASEAN insecurity histrionics. Arguably the most urgently incendiary flashpoints threatening Indo-Pacific peace lay in SCS waters. China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei variously claimed

and occupied islets, reefs, and cays here. Conflicting claims led to Sino-Vietnamese maritime violence in 1974, 1988, and 2014; coercion against Manila occurred in 1995 and 2012. Neutrality notwithstanding, America's strong support for China's rivals reinforced regional fissures along *systemic–subsystemic* cleavages with Sino-US pressures threatening ASEAN's cohesion. Manila's 2013 submission to a UNCLOS-based Arbitral Tribunal (AT) against Chinese actions precipitated fresh tensions. The AT's July 2016 award for Manila, rejected by Beijing, provided a pivotal moment, which was transformed by President Rodrigo Duterte's diplomatic dramatics. The other vocal claimant, Vietnam, adopted an ambiguous course as Donald Trump took office. The chapter examines recent developments through the prism of the past, offering glimpses of an uncertain future.

The epilogue previews the emergent Indo-Pacific insecurity architecture, summarises the study's findings, and infers provisional conclusions on the nature of the *systemic transition* currently redrawing the contours of regional insecurity. The aim is to glean the substantive context in which practicable policy options for peacefully managing strategic uncertainty at both *systemic* and *subsystemic* levels can be fashioned. This requires analyses of the case studies to infer the roles played by both primary and secondary actors in shaping competitive dynamics and patron-client policy perceptions, garnering empirically derived conclusions that, hopefully, generate policy options with which to address the most acutely urgent combustible threats of conflict afflicting the contested Indo-Pacific. The way forward towards collaboratively shaping an evolutionary new security architecture founded on a consensually derived equilibrium will be arduous, if not unrealistic; but alternatives to such an enterprise being possibly catastrophic for all parties, mutually adaptive accommodation appears to offer one probable path to predictability.

Shah Alam, Malaysia S. Mahmud Ali

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Contents

Abbreviations

A2AD	Anti-Access/Area-Denial
AD	Air Defence
ADIZ	AD Identification Zone
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meeting
ADMM+	ADMM-Plus
ADST	Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
AEI	American Enterprise Institute
AFT	Air Force Times
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ALCM	Air-launched cruise missile
AmCon	American Consulate
AmConGen	American Consulate-General
AmEmbassy	American Embassy
AMS	Academy of Military Science
AMTI	Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative
AP	Associated Press
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APFTA	Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASAT	Anti-satellite
ASBC	Air-Sea Battle Concept
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AT	Arbitral Tribunal
AWC	Army War College
BM	Ballistic Missile
BMD	Ballistic-missile defence
BTAS	Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists
C3I	Command, control, communications and Intelligence
CAS	Centre for American Studies
CAT	Civil Air Transport

CCG	China Coast Guard
CD	China Daily
CGS	Chief of General Staff
ChinaMil	Chinese Military online
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIMSEC	Centre for International Maritime Security
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNAS	Centre for New American Security
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMUSK	Commander US Forces in Korea
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPCCC	CPC Central Committee
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CSG	Carrier Strike Group
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies
CTF	Carrier Task Force
CUES	Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
DMZ	Demilitarised Zone
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DoC	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS
DoD	Department of Defence
DoJ	Department of Justice
DPP	Democratic People's Party
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DRP	Democratic Republican Party
DW	Deutsche Welle
EAF	East Asia Forum
EAS	East Asian Summit
ECS	East China Sea
EDCA	Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FMPRC	Foreign Ministry of the PRC
FoN	Freedom of Navigation
FoNOP	Freedom-of-Navigation Operation
FP	Foreign Policy
FPRI	Foreign Policy Research Institute
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
FT	Financial Times
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GoI	Government of India

GT	Global Times
IANS	Indo-Asian News Service
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IBT	International Business Times
ICAS	Institute for China-America Studies
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
IDN	Indian Defence News
IS	International Security
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
JAM-GC	Joint Concept for Access and Manoeuvre in the Global Commons
JCEO	Joint Concept for Entry Operations
JCG	Japan Coast Guard
JDW	Jane's Defence Weekly
JETRO	Japan External Trade Organization
JOAC	Joint Operational Access Concept
JT	Japan Times
KCNA	Korea Central News Agency
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KMT	*Kuomintang*
LAT	Los Angeles Times
LDP	Liberal-Democratic Party
MAC	Military Area Command
MAD	Mutual Assured Destruction/Deterrence
MBT	Main Battle Tanks
MDA	Missile Defence Agency
MEA	Ministry of Economic/External Affairs
MemCon	Memorandum of Conversation/Conference
MFA/MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIRV	Multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles
MND	Ministry of National Defence
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MSC	Munich Security Conference
MSDPRC	Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NBR	National Bureau of Asian Research
NDC	National Defence Commission
NDP	New Democratic Party
NDU	National Defence University
NI	National Interest
NIC	National Intelligence Council
NIDS	National Institute of Defence Studies
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NNS	Naval News Service
NPGS	Naval Postgraduate School

NSA	National Security Advisor/Agency
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
NTIS	National Technical Information Service
NWC	Naval War College
NWCR	NWC Review
NYT	New York Times
OBOR	One-Belt-One-Road
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ONA	Office of Net Assessment
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
PACAF	Pacific Air Force
PACOM	Pacific Command
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PD	People's Daily
PIB	Press Information Bureau
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	PLA Air Force
PLAN	PLA Navy
PLANAF	PLAN Air Force
PLARF	PLA Rocket Force
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTI	Press Trust of India
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
RoC	Republic of China
RoK	Republic of Korea
RT	Russia Today
S&ED	Strategic & Economic Dialogue
S&S	Stars and Stripes
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SASC	Senate Armed Services Committee
SCMP	South China Morning Post
SCS	South China Sea
SLBM	Submarine-launched BM
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communications
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
SRBM	Short-range BM
SSBN	Ballistic-Missile Submarine-Nuclear
SSF	Strategic Support Force
SSGN	Guided-Missile Submarine-Nuclear
SSM	Surface-to-Surface Missile

SSN	Submarine-Attack-Nuclear
TC	Theatre Command
TECRO	Taiwan Economic and Cultural Representative Office
TEL	Trailer-Erector-Launcher
TelCon	Telephonic Conversation
TNN	Times News Network
ToI	Times of India
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
UN	United Nations
UNC	UN Command
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNSC	UN Security Council
USAAF	US Army Air Force
USAF	US Air Fore
USCC	US-China Economic and Security Review Commission
USN	US Navy
USNI	US Naval Institute
VNA	Vietnam News Agency
VoA	Voice of America
VoV	Voice of Vietnam
WFB	Washington Free Beacon
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WotR	War on the Rocks
WP	Washington Post
WQ	Washington Quarterly
WSAG	Washington Special Actions Group
WSJ	Wall Street Journal

Chapter 1
US-China Strategic Triangles: Theory and Reality of Indo-Pacific Insecurity

Amid an increasingly difficult security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, the US will strengthen its presence in the region, and Japan will assume larger roles and responsibilities. . . The two leaders affirmed that Article V of the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security covers the Senkaku Islands. The US and Japan will deepen cooperation to safeguard the peace and stability of the ECS. The US and Japan also call on countries concerned to avoid actions that would escalate tensions in the SCS (White House 2017). Donald Trump, Shinzo Abe

We agree on the need for bold steps to lower tensions, including pledging to halt further reclamation, new construction and militarization of disputed areas in the South China Sea (Obama 2015a). Barack Obama

Islands in the South China Sea, since ancient times, are China's territory. We have the right to uphold our own territorial sovereignty and lawful and legitimate maritime rights and interests (White House 2015a). Xi Jinping

On 20 January 2017, Donald J. Trump, real-estate mogul and reality TV-star, assumed the US presidency. Six days later, nuclear physicists, discerning increased dangers of atomic warfare, moved the minute-hand on their Doomsday Clock closer to midnight (Mecklin 2017). Trump's 'stunning' election victory precipitated concerns over the world order and America's place in it (Levy 2017; Rothkopf 2017; Fischer 2017; Kagan 2017; Vaisse 2016; Crowley 2016; Nuzzi 2016). Vowing to 'make America great again', Trump castigated policies pursued by President Barack Obama and his first-term Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, Trump's electoral-rival. He presented more robust rhetoric than Obama on Beijing's commercial praxis, threatening to impose trade-killing tariffs on China's exports. He responded to Beijing's assertion of its interests in a hitherto US-dominated geopolitical milieu with pledges of a rapid military build-up: expanding the Army from 450,000 troops to 540,000, the Marine Corps from 182,000 to 200,000, the USAF combat-ready frontline inventory from 1141 aircraft

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to 1200, the Navy's order-of-battle from 272 to 350 warships, and a much bigger nuclear force (Boot 2016; Capaccio 2016).[1]

Trump broke a convention adopted since the 1972 Richard Nixon-Mao Zedong summit and formalised when Sino-US diplomatic relations were established, acknowledging the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the 'One-China', by speaking to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. Responding to Beijing's protests, Trump tweeted, 'Did China ask us if it was OK to devalue their currency (making it hard for our companies to compete), heavily tax our products going into their country (the US doesn't tax them) or to build a massive military complex in the middle of the South China Sea? I don't think so!'[2] When he suggested the 'one-China' policy could be leveraged to secure trade concessions, contain North Korea's nuclear programme, and thwart Beijing's South China Sea (SCS) policy, China threatened to 'offer support, even military assistance to US foes', and end restraint vis-à-vis Taiwan, if the policy were abandoned (Editorial 2016). Beijing flew a nuclear-capable H-6K strategic bomber over SCS waters and shipped 'hundreds' of missiles which US intelligence-analysts believed would defend China's SCS airbases from US attacks (Tomlinson 2016; Sun 2017). Prospects for Sino-US conflict looked realistic (Farley 2017; Hilton 2017).

Three weeks into office, having first met or talked to 18 other counterparts, Trump wrote to Xi, extending Lunar New Year- and Lantern Festival greetings. Two days later, in a phone call, Trump assured Xi America adhered to the 'one-China policy' which Xi described as 'the political basis of China-US relations' (Report 2017a, b). These events restored a measure of normalcy to relations but between these, a third contact betrayed challenging divergences. A PACOM P3 anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft patrolling the contested Scarborough Shoal in the SCS had an 'unsafe close encounter' with a People's Liberation Army (PLA) KJ200 Airborne Early-Warning (AEW) aircraft which approached within 1000 feet of the P3, forcing it to veer away. Both being unarmed aircraft, this was considered an inadvertent non-combat intercept, but the risks of accidental collisions and escalation looked all too real (Yeo 2017).

Trump's campaign remarks on such allies as Japan and the Republic of Korea (RoK), hitherto described as 'linchpins' of America's Asia-Pacific 'hub-and-spokes' alliance-network undergirding its *systemic primacy,* too, proved disconcerting. He suggested these protectees either hike payments for their protection by forward-deployed US forces on their territories, or defend themselves, if necessary, with their own nuclear arms, negating decades-old US extended-deterrence and non-proliferation policies (Condon 2016; Trump 2016). Faced with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) increasingly threatening nuclear- and-ballistic-missile (BM) programmes, Trump initially offered to talk with its leader, Kim Jong-un. After Kim stated that an ICBM capable of striking the USA was being readied for test-launch, Trump tweeted, 'It won't happen, no thanks to China', without explaining what he would do (Kopan 2016; Kwon and Berlinger 2017; McCurry 2017).

[1] @realDonaldTrump, 23 December 2016.

[2] @realDonaldTrump, 4 December 2016.

When the Japanese automaker, Toyota, announced plans to shift a Canada-based factory to Mexico, Trump tweeted its cars, when imported to America, would face a 'big border tax'. Toyota politely reminded him that it had invested over $20 billion in the USA over six decades and employed a large number of Americans, as well as sold cars and services (Kageyama 2017).[3] Trump's occasionally-contradictory comments, expressed informally outside diplomatic channels, long before he took office, and some of his senior-level appointments, threatened to upend decades of global policy, and institutional structures and praxis.

His endorsement of Vladimir Putin's Russia, praise for Putin's 'strength' and hopes for US-Russian security collaboration promised dramatic policy shifts (Ignatius 2016; Editors 2016). When the US intelligence community reported Russians had hacked the Democratic- and Republican parties' servers and leaked confidential Democratic Party emails, damaging Hillary Clinton's electoral prospects, helping Trump to win, he ridiculed such notions. When the intelligence community provided detailed reports of its investigation and findings, Obama expelled 35 Russian diplomats and closed two Russian facilities. Putin rejected his Foreign Ministry's proposal to reciprocate and received Trump's approbation. Even after the intelligence community briefed Trump on Russian intervention in the elections, Trump evinced scepticism, underscoring a breach with the intelligence community, the Obama Administration and his own Party colleagues (Cowan and Devitt 2016; DNI 2017; Gaouette and Acosta 2017).

Trump's pre-presidential 'twitter-diplomacy' indicated a new approach to power-politics and national-security pursuits, although the precise contours of his policy-perspective remained unclear. It suggested competitive tendencies characterising US-China interactions, possibly planned initiatives to improve US-Russian relations, and an unsentimental, transactional, perspective on secondary actors. Whether divergences were of nuance or substance could only be conjectured. Whether President Trump, unlike his post-1945 predecessors, would focus domestically, and away from the world beyond, remained uncertain. Evidence suggested what the US leader did or said affected the international security system. Conversely, America could not insulate itself either from major powers e.g., China and Russia, and secondary players like Japan, India, the Koreas and Taiwan.

If America's 'greatness' resided in sustaining its 'all-domains' dominance (Work 2016), then, in employing his massively-expanded military, Trump would find his predecessor's strategic template useful. Obama's quest to restore America's post-Cold War *systemic primacy* had extended US strategic focus from the Western-Pacific, or Asia-Pacific, to the Indo-Asia-Pacific, or the Indo-Pacific (Clinton 2011; Greenert 2016). The superstructure of that endeavour, Obama's 'Asia-Pacific Pivot/Rebalance', generated mixed results; the framework's naval-air core marginalised other elements, but to limited effect. Trump's renunciation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Rebalance's US-designed 'gold-standard',

[3]@realDonaldTrump (2017) 5 January 2017.

geo-economic infrastructure, and his critique of Obama's record, triggered uncertainty over not just America's China policy, but also Trump's global vision (Baker 2016; Chan 2016; Sherlock 2016). Shock reflected profound unease over prospective change.

Trump's strategic inheritance proved resilient, however. In his ninth and last meeting with China's President, Xi Jinping, at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Peru, Obama underscored a post-1979 Beltway consensus: 'The relationship between our two nations is the most consequential in the world.' Despite growing differences, 'a constructive US-China relationship benefits our two peoples and benefits the entire globe.' Xi's response resonated with that general thrust, leavened with strategic-competitive complexity. With an uncertain, potentially turbulent, transition imminent, Xi noted: 'We meet at a hinge moment in the China-US relationship,' hoping the two sides would 'focus on cooperation, manage our differences and make sure there is a smooth transition' (Obama and Xi 2016). The optics betrayed anxiety over Trump's acerbic approach to China.

Trump alone was not, however, responsible for strategic uncertainty. A widely-perceived power-shift from the *system*-manager to its 'near-peer-rival' framing a complex reality, including growing risks of inadvertent and unpredictable escalation, appeared very real (Fels 2017). Obama's countervailing 'Rebalance' generated a dialectic-dynamic as Beijing pushed back, triggering tensions with US allies-and-partners populating China's periphery. With this added complexity, regional turbulence born of geopolitical tectonics could colour the Trump presidency's national/regional-security pursuits and order-management labours, re-engineering his 'America First' pledges. Would he build on existing perceptual, institutional and policy-praxis palimpsests to maintain pressure and sustain US dominance, or seek alternatives to demanding and dangerous competition, and fashion imaginative options adapted to an evolving and challenging landscape? What exactly would America's leadership under Trump mean for the USA and others? Against a backdrop of structural fluidity, the world awaited answers to these questions.

This work examines Trump's geostrategic inheritance through a post-War theory-praxis lens. Although history may not repeat itself, documentary records suggest the past and the present are linked in a non-linear time-event continuum. Comparing and contrasting early-Cold War experience and current phenomena promise a granular grasp of what has changed and what has not. Academic discourse has examined structural challenges confronting the enforced rigidity of the post-War order early in the twenty-first century (Klieman 2015). This work takes that approach in examining *systemic*-vs.-*subsystemic* transitional tensions flowing from and manifest in US-Chinese strategic competition reverberating across the Indo-Pacific region, precipitating an inflammable insecurity dialectic concentrating minds across the Pacific. Catalysed by the PRC's growing ability and willingness to assert its interests in a hitherto US-dominated milieu, fluidity triggered anxiety among neighbours, especially Japan, India and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member-states, notably US-allied Philippines and US-aligned Vietnam. As President Xi Jinping demanded 'reforms to the global governance system' in the context of a 'shifting international balance of power',

and sought to make 'the international order more reasonable and just', transitional tectonics bred fear (Xinhua 2016a).

America's order-managerial determination to indefinitely extend its *primacy* by 'rebalancing' to the Indo-Pacific, defending its all-domains dominance, and protect allies and partners, added to volatility. America and China, protagonists in this classic status quo-vs.-revisionist diarchy, engaged in cooperative diplomacy wherever convergent interests allowed, while seeking advantage and still manage intractable differences (DoS 2016). Maritime aspects of the dynamic, focused particularly acutely on insular/territorial disputes roiling the SCS, reinforced symptoms of a power-shift, and the status-quo orientated response to it (Fels and Vu 2016). President Obama hosted ASEAN leaders in the first US-based summit in February 2016 in California; underscoring the partnership's military edge, Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter received ASEAN counterparts in Hawaii in September. Chinese diplomacy, less spectacular, was equally persistent. Still, at the leading edge of interactions, US and Chinese militaries prepared for battle in 'exquisite detail'. As America reformed its forces structurally, operationally and doctrinally to this end (Dobbins 2012; Rowden et al. 2015), China's responses reinforced the dialectic dynamic (Garafola 2016; Saunders and Wuthnow 2016; DoD 2016b, pp. i–ii).

The organisational, arms-procurement and conceptual evolution of both US forces and China's PLA focused on deterring and, should deterrence fail, defeating each other in battle. The rapid growth of the PLAN's order of battle, firepower and sophistication elicited a matching response from the US Navy across the western Pacific. The PLAN emerged as both a symbol of China's renascence as a major power and an instrument of its existential challenge to the post-Cold War order. Nonetheless, this naval resurgence offered no definitive clues to the future trajectory of Chinese power (Kirchberger 2015). Geopolitical dynamics apparently shaped force-posture, not the reverse.

Since Obama's first year in office, when his November 2009 visit to Beijing chilled relations, Sino-US warlike preparations and rhetoric paralleled induction of advanced platforms targeting each other's strengths and weaknesses, and fashioning appropriate operational frameworks. China's 'counter-intervention/anti-access/area-denial' (A2AD) model, and America's 'AirSea Battle Operational Concept' (ASBC), refined into the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) framed an adversarial dynamic (Cooper 2010; DoD 2012, 2013; Heath and Erickson 2015). Shortly before Trump's election, Carter identified 'Russia, China, Iran and North Korea' as the 'state-actors' challenging US *systemic* interests; China and Russia allegedly posed grave threats (Carter 2016b; Dunford 2016a).

Carter explained Washington's quest to ensure America played 'a pivotal role from the sea, in the air, and underwater', with 60% of naval and aerial assets, including the most advanced platforms and systems, homeported regionally. Deepened 'jointness' with allies and 'strategic partners', e.g., Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia, forged a diplomatic-military carapace covering the Indo-Pacific (Nye 2016). The object of this endeavour? 'China's model is out of step with where the Asia-Pacific

wants to go; it reflects the region's distant past, rather than the principled future the US and many others want.' To counteract China's challenge, Washington fashioned a 'principled and inclusive security network (Carter 2016a).' Beijing took notice.

It could have gone differently. A week before Obama took office, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Democratic Party strategic thinker who, as President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser (NSA), shaped US-Chinese diplomatic normalisation, forging a tacit anti-Soviet alliance, posited China did not wish to upset the US-designed-and-led order. It sought the order's refinement granting China and other 'emerging' non-Western actors greater space beyond the narrow confines afforded them. Brzezinski proposed a US-PRC 'Group of Two' (G2) with China as junior partner, sharing burdens and responsibilities of managing global affairs under American leadership while enjoying greater *sub-systemic* autonomy (Brzezinski 2009).

Obama's perspective diverged from his predecessor's. Rationally-empirically attuned to the history of over-extended former empires while also devoted to America's 'indispensable' leadership in forging coalitions for managing challenges, deploying diplomacy and, only if necessary, strategic coercion, Obama sought willing partners (Obama 2016a). Conscious of the limits of America's lethally destructive capacity to shape long-term outcomes on a complex and evolving planetary landscape, and Sino-US power asymmetry (Roy 2016), Obama believed few major tasks could be accomplished without US leadership (Goldberg 2016). How formally his team presented a 'G2' proposal during his November 2009 China trip was unclear, but Premier Wen Jiabao's curt rejection of 'any G2' did not endear Beijing to Washington (Xinhua 2009). Relations went downhill.

1.1 Modelling Paradigms

Sino-US strategic competition has spawned a discourse and a fast-growing body of literature. Authors noted deepening US engagement with secondary actors e.g., Japan, India, Korea, Taiwan and ASEAN member-states. Given the power-asymmetry between America and its clients, alliance-level decision-making could reasonably be construed as a leader-led process suggesting Washington enjoyed unquestioned advantage in shaping patron-client relations, garnering supportive dynamics consonant with US self-interest, and that secondary actors merely aided the erection of structures, institutions and praxis reflecting patron-defined objectives. As the Indo-Pacific emerged as the focal point of *subsystemic*-and-*systemic* transitional fluidity, the nature of these relations, and their role in shaping the contours of the emergent insecurity architecture, acquired salience in both academic- and policy-analyses.

Policy-community anxiety did not, however, catalyse theoretical modelling efforts. US concerns vis-à-vis secondary actors' role in US-Chinese dynamics

were evident in the debate over RoK President Park Geun-hye's presence as an honoured guest at the September 2015 commemorative military parade in Beijing (Snyder 2015; Yi 2015). Australian-Chinese commercial links provided another instance. A Chinese firm's 99-year lease and investment in Darwin Port, several miles from US-Australian garrisons, triggered debates over possible Chinese espionage, surveillance and sabotage, even strategic threats, to the US-Australian alliance. Canberra rebutted such concerns (Krepinevich 2015; Kehoe and Tingle 2015; Forsythe 2015; McDonell 2015). Still, at his first meeting with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, complaining that Washington received no warning, Obama asked, 'Let us know next time (Donald 2015).'

Most studies do not illuminate secondary actors' roles in Sino-US competitive dynamics. It is appropriate, in a work analysing US-Chinese strategic insecurity, to examine how true assumptions of linear patron-client hierarchies are across the Indo-Pacific: are nuances visible in granular examinations of the dynamics' record and texture? Do secondary actors notably influence US-Chinese insecurity dynamics? Are they passive recipients of Sino-US attention in fashioning the strategic milieu, or do they actively define the discourse's parameters and contours? Does China exercise any leverage in the diplomatic backstage drama? Has the role of other actors, e.g., Russia, in shaping the process, been neglected to the detriment of appreciating the 'big-picture' reality? What role does Russia play in rearranging this rapidly changing strategic landscape? Could the field benefit from a theoretical paradigm that eased modelling complexity? Is it possible empirically to ascertain answers to these questions?

Only detailed examinations of specific cases can reveal if the pattern is monochromatic, i.e., secondary players take the lead from *greatpower* patrons and follow advice from on high, or if the picture is more complex, with a dialectic give-and-take colouring, if not defining, the dynamic. Given the salience of Sino-US strategic competitive tendencies in IR- and international security studies, and the challenges they pose to regional and *systemic* stability, these questions merit analytical attention. By comparing and contrasting the record of post-1945 structural reconstruction to contemporary transitional reverberations, that is what this book attempts to provide.

Geopolitics, the science of analysing, appreciating and explaining the geographical reality's impact on political power, had many fathers, foremost among them being the British scholar, Halford Mackinder. A series of books and commentaries penned in the late-Nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries laid the foundations on which successive generations of geopoliticians built. 'The Geographical Pivot of History', a 1904 lecture to the Royal Geographic Society, London, triggered substantial follow-on work (Mackinder 1904a). Mackinder noted that over the previous four centuries, the planet's surface had been explored, mapped and claimed. With little left for further exploration or occupation, he embarked on establishing 'a correlation between the larger geographical and the larger historical generalizations', by exhibiting 'human history as part of the life of the world organism (Mackinder 1904b).'

Describing history as a narrative of reactive coherence triggered by foreign pressure—'European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion'—Mackinder posited that successive waves of Asian hordes bursting westward from the Russian steppes forged reactive European civilizational impulses and consciousness. Tracing major movements over the millennium across 'Euro-Asia', Mackinder illumined geographical forces shaping history. Naming the 'Euro-Asian Heartland' the historical 'Pivot Area', he divided the Eurasian landmass into three 'natural seats of power': the wholly continental Pivot Area, the wholly-oceanic Outer Crescent, and the partly-continental-partly oceanic Inner Crescent.

The struggle by powers occupying the Heartland, the Outer Crescent and beyond to control the Inner Crescent, defined history. Modern transport, communications, trade and industry reinforced this reality. Russia, Mackinder postulated, occupied 'the central strategical position' globally, a status 'held by Germany in Europe (Mackinder 1904c).' He examined the balance of power among the major empires ruling the 'Heartland/Pivot Area' and the Crescents, suggesting ways for Britain, Europeans and America to shape future geopolitical dynamics. He then analysed Britain's sea-faring power-potential, but his work was best summarised in the 1919 formulation: 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World (Mackinder 1962).' Mackinder's work, supplemented with comparable studies of the impact of sea-power and later, air-power, on state-capacity, influenced thinking for a century.

As scholars began examining aspects of power flowing from human action relating to ends, ways, and means, geopolitics segued into strategic studies. Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's equally influential, if US-centric, work on sea-power preceded Mackinder's. He argued that given a general decline of European maritime capabilities, rising sea-power had established Britain as the dominant political-military and economic empire. Later, as an admiral, President of the US Naval War College, and an eminent historian, his 'Mahanian school of sea-power' suggested that lessons drawn from Britain's rise to hegemony be applied to US policy, if primarily for opening up markets, rather than imperium (Mahan 1890). US reading of Mahan influenced America's quest for sailing the largest, strongest, and best-equipped-and-trained navy for sustaining supremacy (Richardson 2016). Its presumed rival, the PLAN, too, adhered to Mahanian formulations of sea-power as an instrument of national strategy (Wolf 2013; Holmes and Yoshihara 2009).

An Italian army officer, Giulio Douhet's 'The Command of the Air', published in 1921, revised in 1927 and translated into major European languages, became the classical platform on which interwar-period airpower discourse flowered. Visualising the liberating advantage of three-dimensional aerospace over the limits imposed by two-dimensional terrestrial-maritime surfaces, Douhet wrote, 'the aeroplane is the offensive weapon par excellence. . .No longer can areas exist in which life can be lived safely and tranquilly, nor can the battlefield any longer limited to actual combatants.' Airpower enabled 'maximum bombing power' over land- and naval forces, trumping terrestrial advantages and altering the balance of

power. Douhet urged that air forces be given equal status to that of armies and navies (Douhet 2009). These classics excited the imagination and shaped strategic- and operational thinking well into the Cold War.

However, the association of geopolitics and geostrategy with the German soldier-scholar Karl Haushofer, whose work (Haushofer 1931) allegedly inspired Nazi expansionism triggering the Second World War, discredited some of these concepts after Germany's defeat. Post-Cold War analyses further eroded geopolitical formulations' 'eternal' merit (Fettweis 2000). Geopolitical thinking and resultant theoretical models evolved as European empires decolonised and myriad new state-actors of varying attributes burst onto the IR realm. As Cold War bipolarity deepened, strategic studies acquired greater salience. The two parallel disciplines evolved to shape temporal-spatial analyses of the application of resources to defend the state and secure state-objectives. Discussions of nuclear/thermonuclear weapons, their impact on combatants and non-combatants, and consequent policy-constraints and choices, engendered deterrence, compellence and war-fighting as distinct strategies, triggering elaborate discussions of threats and countermeasures, and the minutiae of delivery systems, throw-weights, payloads, basing-modes, escalation-ladders, and proliferation.

Strategic studies evolved horizontally and vertically; geopolitical exercises betrayed fragmentation as myriad models framing analyses of a complex and dynamic reality competed (Brecher 1963; Thompson 1973; Feld and Boyd 1980; Acharya and Buzan 2010). The impact of geography on actors' threat-perceptions and ability to influence events, e.g., proximity to adversaries and deployment of lethal force for deterrence, compellence or combat, renders geopolitical frameworks relevant to examinations of the role of secondary actors in Sino-US competition. US-Chinese power-dynamics, and the flurry of secondary actors active around that 'central diarchy', in shaping how each party acts, and how the action of one colours the perceptions and policies of others, challenge standard geopolitical- and strategic-studies formulations. This explains the need to adapt existing frameworks to suit contemporary complexity.

By the 1970s, the two fields had been refined to aid scholarly assessments of planetary politics against the backdrop of a bipolar landscape. The US-Soviet *superpower* dyad comprised the *systemic core*. The two adversaries and their antagonistic *blocs* appeared precariously poised on the brink of catastrophic mutual nuclear annihilation. Forces arrayed 'eyeball-to-eyeball' as in Berlin, or along the ironically-named intra-Korean 'Demilitarised Zone' (DMZ), ready to 'fight tonight' to stop anticipated aggression, rendered 'hair-trigger' warlike preparations accident-prone. Washington, confronting conventional-force inferiority, fashioned 'linkages' between America and Western Europe and East Asia with forward-deployed forces but, most potently, tactical- and theatre-nuclear weapons, whose endangerment or use would precipitate escalation beyond the dreaded nuclear threshold. Theory and praxis were constantly refined to preclude that eventuality and secure the tiniest advantage in a perennially dynamic dialectic.

Against that anxiety-tinted backdrop rooted in zero-sum rivalry between conflicting ideological-political-economic affiliations, strategists drew from