

# CHINA BALANCE SHEET

## U.S. ROLE IN EAST ASIA

The direction that China and U.S.-China relations take will define the world's future. For the United States, a rising China increasingly affects American prosperity and security, calling for some clear-eyed thinking and tough economic, political, and security choices. As the twenty-first century unfurls, the stakes have never been higher for getting U.S. policy toward China right. By untangling the complex, sometimes contradictory, strands of this vast and dynamic country, *China: The Balance Sheet* lays the foundation for informed and effective U.S. policy toward China, the world's emerging superpower.

### BACKGROUND

- Chinese leaders **consistently deny an ambition to evict or supplant the United States** in East Asia to become the dominant regional hegemon.
- Nonetheless, suspicions about China's long-term intentions persist, given that China expresses tolerance, at best, of the U.S. security structure in East Asia and to the basing of U.S. military forces in Japan, South Korea, and more recently, Central Asia;
  - China refers to **U.S. efforts to strengthen its military alliances in Asia as one of the “factors of instability”** in the region and as Cold War “relics”;
  - Beijing has promoted a **“New Security Concept” that opposes “military alliances”** in principle while touting confidence-building measures and informal “strategic partnerships” as alternatives to the U.S. alliance structure;
  - China has **supported the development of multilateral vehicles** to promote regional identity that **do not involve the United States**, such as the East Asia Summit, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (with Central Asia and Russia), and the ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan, Korea) forum;
- Policymakers in Beijing believe that the **United States is using its alliances and regional force presence to support Taiwan's continued separation** from the mainland and to contain China's development more broadly.

For further information, see Chapter 5:  
“China's Foreign & Security Policy: Partner or Rival?”

*China: The Balance Sheet: What the World Needs to Know Now about the Emerging Superpower*

Authors: C. Fred Bergsten, Bates Gill, Nicholas R. Lardy and Derek Mitchell

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## CURRENT SITUATION

- China has downplayed its concerns over U.S regional presence in recent years due for these reasons:
  - A desire for stable relations with the United States;
  - Clear support from the rest of East Asia for continuation of the **U.S.-centered regional security structure**;
  - Recognition of the **benefits of U.S. presence** (excepting the Taiwan issue) for maintaining regional stability to enable China to focus on its **critical internal challenges**.

## IMPLICATIONS

- **China will not challenge the United States** directly in East Asia in the near term.
- Nonetheless, China's interest in promoting regional vehicles that exclude the United States lead some analysts to suspect that China, having failed to convince the region of the benefits of its new security concept over the traditional U.S.-centered security structure, China has decided to push ahead with its vision in a longer-range attempt to dilute, if not undermine, U.S. regional influence.
- Meanwhile, the region will likely **continue to support a U.S. presence** to serve at least as a tacit counterbalance, or hedge, against the uncertain trajectory of Chinese power, but **will not support a security structure that seeks to pursue a hostile anti-China containment strategy** or that excludes Chinese involvement over time.
- To assist the region in its future strategic calculations, the **United States will need to consider how to integrate Beijing** more fully into the alliance-centered regional security structure – from which China is currently excluded and of which Beijing views itself as the primary target.

*The ultimate test of China's intentions toward the United States in East Asia will be whether China decides to actively support U.S. involvement in regional affairs. Likewise, the United States will need to consider how to integrate Beijing more fully into an alliance-centered regional security structure that currently excludes China.*