

U.S. Role in East Asia

HOW DOES CHINA VIEW THE U.S. PRESENCE IN EAST ASIA?

CHINA BALANCE SHEET

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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 “Cold War relics” and as one of the “factors of instability” in the region.
 - Beijing has promoted a “New Security Concept” that opposes “military alliances” in principle while touting confidence-building measures and informal “strategic partnerships” that do not target other countries 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. China is also wary of U.S.-led security initiatives involving Japan, India, and Australia that appear to be designed to encircle it or to contain Chinese influence.

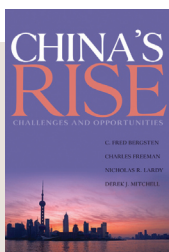
Current Situation

- China has downplayed its concerns over the U.S. regional presence in recent years because of
 - 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 the U.S. presence (excepting the Taiwan issue) for maintaining regional stability and enabling China to focus on its critical internal challenges.
- Increased efforts at dialogue and military-to-military contact with the United States in recent years have fostered greater trust and reduced mutual suspicions.
- Chinese influence in the region is growing, but a recent study confirms that its “soft power”—its ability to wield influence by indirect, nonmilitary means—trails that of the United States.

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.

Implications

- China will not directly challenge U.S. leadership in East Asia in the near term.
- Although the Taiwan Strait and North Korea remain dangerous flashpoints at which U.S. and Chinese strategic interests may conflict, there is also significant potential for enhanced bilateral cooperation toward regional stability.
- Nonetheless, China's interest in promoting regional vehicles that exclude the United States leads some analysts to suspect that, 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 and successfully address a host of regional security challenges that require Chinese involvement (climate change, environmental degradation, energy security, counterterrorism, economic and financial stability, etc.), the United States will need to consider how to integrate Beijing into the alliance-centered regional security structure from which China is currently excluded and of which Beijing views itself as the primary target.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

SEE CHAPTER 10: "CHINA AND THE WORLD" IN *CHINA'S RISE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES* BY C. FRED BERGSTEN, CHARLES FREEMAN, NICHOLAS LARDY, DEREK J. MITCHELL & CHAPTER 5: "CHINA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY: PARTNER OR RIVAL?" IN *CHINA: THE BALANCE SHEET: WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW NOW ABOUT THE EMERGING SUPERPOWER* BY C. FRED BERGSTEN, BATES GILL, NICHOLAS LARDY, DEREK J. MITCHELL