



Executive Summary



Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press

ASIA-PACIFIC: A STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

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This analysis has four objectives: first, it puts the key trends of Asia-Pacific's geo-economic, political, and security affairs in perspective; second, it highlights the defining aspects of this region's complicated interstate relations; third, it points out the dilemmas confronting the key players in the region; and fourth, it draws attention to the most dangerous potential impacts of the region's outstanding conflicts.

Key points are as follows:

- Asia-Pacific, which covers China, North-east Asia, and Southeast Asia, is a region with complex currents. On the one hand, there is an unabated region-wide drive for economic development that has been pushing Asia-Pacific forward for decades. On the other hand, this region is troubled with, aside from many other conflicts, unsettled maritime disputes that have the potential to trigger wars between and among the Asia-Pacific nations.
- On top of these mixed currents, there is an intense competition between China and the United States over a wide range of vital interests in this region. For better or for worse, the U.S.-China relationship is becoming a defining factor in the relations among the Asia-Pacific nations. It is complicating the prospects for peace and the risks of conflict in this region, conditioning the calculation of national policies among the Asia-Pacific nations

and, to a gradual extent, influencing the future of global international relations.

- The U.S. strategic shift toward Asia-Pacific is, as President Barack Obama puts it, not a choice but a necessity. Although conflicts elsewhere, especially the ones in the Middle East, continue to draw U.S. attention and consume U.S. foreign policy resources, the United States is turning its full attention to China and Asia-Pacific.
- In the mid-2000s, the United States and China made an unprecedented strategic goodwill exchange and agreed to blaze a new path out of the tragedy of great power transition. It was a giant step in the right direction. However, it does not take care of U.S.-China relations forever. The two great powers can still overstep each other's core interests and overreact to each other's moves. In addition, the United States is also indirectly and deeply involved in many of China's disputes with its neighbors. These conflicts have the potential to get China and the United States to fight unwanted wars.
- At this time, while the United States makes its strategic shift and rebalances its military toward Asia-Pacific, the most dangerous blind spot is that the Asia-Pacific nations disputing with China can misread U.S. strategic intention and overplay the "U.S. card" to pursue their territorial interests

and challenge China. China, on the other side, believing that the U.S. efforts are only attempts to complicate China's relations with the Asian nations but with no intention of shedding blood for its Asian partners, will take strong and assertive actions to "silence" its opponents.

- For the United States, its dilemma is how to uphold the regional order in Asia-Pacific while not to embolden China and China's disputants to take reckless acts against each other.
- For China, its dilemma is when and how to settle the territorial disputes. It appears that China believes that time is not on its side – the longer China defers the issue, the stronger its opponents have their hold on the disputed territories, further weakening China's position. There is ample evidence that while China is still advocating shelving the disputes for the time being, it is also making efforts to gain control of the disputed territories. Territorial dispute is becoming an urgent issue in Asia-Pacific. A more relevant question thus has become how China settles the disputes with its neighbors. China has promised to settle the disputes peacefully and through

bilateral consultations. China also blames the United States for interference and complicating the negotiations. Can the United States and the Asia-Pacific nations give China the benefit of the doubt?

There is no easy answer to these inextricable dilemmas. All in Asia-Pacific have to walk a fine line in managing the conflicts.

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