

# Deep Engagement

The key to global authority over an emerging China

by 2ndLt Ramarro D. Lamar

Observers have speculated that in the near future the international climate will transition from a unipolar world, where the United States is the dominant power, to a bipolar world where power is split between the United States and China. Assuming this speculation comes to fruition, peaceful coexistence between the two states will not be feasible being that states are motivated by the pursuit of fulfilling their own self-interests of foreign policy in an anarchical climate of international affairs. Such a transition will undoubtedly cause an imbalance of power on the international stage, which will be detrimental for the United States. Peaceful coexistence between the United States and China will be difficult. China's ties to North Korea and Iran have strengthened in recent years, a move that is both strategic and economical. The United States views each of these actors as hostile nations. China views the United States relationship with Taiwan in a similar manner. China's intentions to compete with the United States as a global superpower is no secret. China has expanded aid to Africa, increased weapons sales around the world, and actively formed alliances with nations who have hostile relationships with the United States. All signs are indicative that China is attempting to shape the global space for their ascendance to hegemon. Nations exercise their foreign policy through diplomacy, information, military, and economics. Similar to the rationale behind the "Strategic Corporal," actions from a single echelon can cause a ripple effect throughout the entire system. Be that as it may, China's rise as an economic and maritime power emphasizes the need for the United States to integrate Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard operations and multi-domain operational concepts

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and capabilities in order to deny this advancement and compete to sustain position as ruling global authority.

Competition is a fundamental aspect of international relations. As states and non-state actors seek to protect and advance their own interests, they continually compete for an advantage. There is a very delicate power balance between states that, when shifted, disturbs the peace. Democratic states have a large impact on reducing conflict and maintaining peace as long as possible. With that being said, there are times where war is necessary and balance needs to be restored. To this end, the Marine Corps plays a multi-faceted role in the United States' competitions. Foremost

among them is to fight and win our Nation's battles and to be ready to do so at all times. The Marine Corps' existence itself is a competitive act. It signals to potential rivals that there are vital interests our Nation will go to war to protect, specifically those of a maritime nature that we have invested in a dedicated naval expeditionary force to protect. The capabilities the Marine Corps generates in preparation for battle are also competitive, as these capabilities are what help deter a potential rival from selecting a course of action above the threshold of violence.<sup>1</sup>

Another way the United States maintains its status as a world hegemon and premier democratic institution is by means of naval deep engagement. This encompasses ensuring safety of goods and services by protecting the movement of shipping, ensuring means of war on the ocean as well as safeguarding stationary forces, and having the ability



**Regular training exercises with partner nations is a key element of deep naval engagement.**  
(Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Bill Larned.)

to quickly put land forces ashore to seize and hold territory and deliver air and missile strikes for a variety of purposes.<sup>2</sup> There are arguments the United States should scale back its forward presence and pursue retrenchment; some of the pros to this would be the reduction of anti-Americanism, saving capital on the defense budget, and an overall safer America by upsetting less adversaries. However, it is hard to deny that the U.S. forward projection of force role in sustaining global peace and order is effective. According to the *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, adversary advances in long-range precision fires make closer naval integration an imperative. Traditional power projection will need to shift in order to meet the new climate of challenges associated with maintaining persistent naval forward presence to enable sea control and denial operations.<sup>3</sup> Maintaining a forward projection of power to pursue interests of security, prosperity, and domestic liberty by controlling external environment to reduce near and long term threats, promoting liberal economic order with allies to expand the global economy, as well as establishing a global institutional order to ensure cooperation from other states allows the United States to have the position as ruling global authority.

Peace is something that is unnatural. There needs to be a greater force counteracting the friction between states seeking to establish a democratic nation—a large percentage of this figure is composed of illiberal states who contribute very little to maintain the order. These states are often more of a liability than an asset to the well-established democracies, as these illiberal states can be volatile and unstable. Consequently, this questions the basis of the democratic peace theory that democracies are hesitant to engage in armed conflict with other identified democracies. Considering the world has no central government, it is important to understand the Hegemonic Stability Theory. This theory explains the impact of having a Hegemon, the United States, which is a single dominant world power that maintains stability in the international system. To make this concept simple, Hegemonic Stability Theory ensures

that each state knows its place in the international system.<sup>4</sup> Regardless, when this hierarchy is disrupted and there is a power shift, the rest of the international system has to adjust to the change. This could mean the reforming of alliances, treaties, and possibly the functionality and purpose of NATO as well. According to Power Transition Theory, the largest wars come as a consequence of when the power of the state at the head of the hierarchy is contested by an uprising power. With that being said, it is hard to imagine the United States sitting idly by as China continues to progress and makes advances toward becoming an equal power. Furthermore, a power transition will grant China more leverage on the international stage and have an even greater influence on the international economy than it already has. The United States and China have a long-standing relationship as trade partners; however, considering this power transition, it is not likely that this relationship will remain cordial.

In true realist fashion, making the assumption that power is the end all be all—especially in regard to military might and force—a bipolar world power split between the United States and China raises a huge security dilemma for the United States.<sup>5</sup> As a rational actor, it is in the best interest and of top priority for the United States to hold onto a unipolar international system. Increased power for China in terms of military might and GDP is not an ideal situation for the United States. This becomes especially alarming considering that United States and China are not on the same accord in regard to the handling of North Korea. Now having China as an equal power, the United States would not be able to flex its diplomacy as effectively.

Everything considered, it is not reasonable for the United States and China to share the international stage as equal powers and coexist peacefully. If China happens to surpass or become equal to the United States, it will be everything but peaceful and cause insurmountable friction amongst other states as alliances will break and reform. Without a single hegemon, there simply will be no stability within the international sphere. The

transition of power will be met with great resistance as the United States will not willingly allow China to be an equal. The security dilemma that is caused by having a bipolar world would not be in the best interest of the United States as a rational actor. It is paramount for the United States to integrate Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard operations and multi-domain operational concepts and capabilities in order to deny this advancement and compete to sustain the position as ruling global authority. This effort to safeguard security and prosperity has promoted a liberal economic order and established close defensive ties with allies in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. The specific details of U.S. foreign policy have differed from administration to administration, but for over 60 years, every president has agreed on the fundamental decision to remain deeply engaged in the world.

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#### Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, (Washington, DC: 2020).
2. Wayne Hughes and Robert Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018).
3. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
4. John Pevehouse and Joshua Goldstein, *International Relations*, (London: Pearson, 2017).
5. Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, June 2011).

