

China's Hybrid Warfare and U.S.-China Security Dilemma

Part II

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The literature review is comprised of two sections. The first section describes the current literature regarding the significance and applicability of the security dilemma concept in the current security relations between the United States and China. It provides the theoretical review of the origin and transformation of the security dilemma concept and, subsequently, investigates how international relations (IR) scholars use this concept to characterize some of the critical challenges in the current state of U.S.-China security affairs. The second section familiarizes readers with the contemporary literature about China's hybrid warfare within the framework of the security dilemma. As indicated below, the literature review begins with a review of the security dilemma between the United States and China.

Security Dilemma in U.S.-China Relations

The security dilemma represents an unintended consequence of realism's self-help principle under the conditions of anarchy that is defined as the absence of world government in the international system.¹ The realist paradigm—a methodological and theoretical framework, as often claimed by its proponents—got its beginnings from the thoughts of the prominent

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ancient writers, such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau. Although this paradigm consists of various subcategories, all realist theorists endorse the three main ideas: statism, survival, and self-help. There has been some debate about the influence of anarchy on the security dilemma and inter-state war. In contrast to offensive realists, defensive realists do not believe that security dilemma inevitably leads to conflict and war between sovereign states.² Moreover, the security dilemma theorists have generally agreed that the core argument of the security dilemma concept is tied to the unavoidable uncertainties associated with anarchy.³

John Herz and Herbert Butterfield are considered to be the inventors of the security dilemma concept. As the originator of this term, Herz argued that “uncertainty and anxiety”⁴ about the motivations and intentions of others “places man in this basic dilemma.”⁵

He also believed that, under extreme conditions, such dynamics could result in preemptive or preventive interstate wars.⁶ According to Bruce Jentleson, a preemptive war includes a commitment to initiate military actions in the circumstances of last resort. In contrast, a preventive war is utilized to prevent a possible enemy from initiating conflict on its terms.⁷ Using the term “irreducible dilemma,” Butterfield also advanced this IR concept.⁸ He described the psychological dynamics causing the development of spirals of mistrust between states, even if neither actor had aggressive intentions.⁹ Butterfield also disputed the possibility to overcome these dynamics that created such a condition of “Hobbesian fear.”¹⁰ By contrast, Herz claimed that better mutual empathy between potential adversaries could mitigate the security dilemma.¹¹ As a result, Herz laid the foundation for further theorizing of

security dilemma scholars, such as by Robert Jervis.

Jervis made significant contributions to the transformation of the security dilemma concept. First, this scholar theorized that the intensity of such dilemma depended on two conditions: the degree to which defensive and offensive weapons and doctrines were distinguishable, as well as whether offense or defense was easier or cheaper to implement. In his view, technology and geography represented the primary material/physical regulators that could help ascertain the advantages of the defense versus the offense.¹² Section 4 describes how technology, which is illustrated through the advent of China's cyber weapons, contributes to the current U.S.-China security dilemma. Second, Jervis argued that perceptual/psychological inputs (such as perceptions and misperceptions) could also interact with the physical/material factors in regulating the intensity of the security dilemma.¹³ He emphasized the influence of perceptual biases on this dilemma since the states "are likely to *overestimate* the extent to which an adversary's aggressive behavior is a manifestation of their inherent malign (or non-peaceful) intentions, and *underestimate* the extent to which these actions are in reaction to their own initiatives."¹⁴ Section 3 illustrates how perceptual biases are manifested in the contemporary U.S.-China security dilemma.

IR theorists have used this concept to characterize many challenges in the current state of U.S.-China security affairs, such as the recognition of the security dilemma and interpretation of China's strategic motivations in the international political system. First, theorists have used this concept to discuss the degree to which either the United States or China have recognized the presence of such dilemma in their security affairs.¹⁵ According to Jervis, a security dilemma is magnified if states fail to understand and recognize its existence. In such circumstances, a state does not realize that its military build-up to preserve the status-quo may be misinterpreted as contemplation of aggression that, in turn, will trigger the military preparations of other states.¹⁶

Other scholars argue that the recognition of the security dilemma can benefit states so they can avoid it. Alastair Johnston asserts that this recognition can assist states in a better understanding of their counterparties' interests and threat perceptions.¹⁷ Adam Liff and G. John Ikenberry insist that such a recognition, manifested through "greater transparency can reduce uncertainty, thereby decreasing the risks of miscalculations that lead to war."¹⁸ James Johnson also claims that greater comprehension of the variance between military capabilities and strategic intentions is essential to circumvent misperceptions and misinterpretations.¹⁹ The United States typically conflates them, thus inferring from its assessment of China's military capabilities the non-benign character of China's strategic intentions. Therefore, the scholar argues that the states' aptitude to differentiate between military capabilities and strategic intent represents a "critical analytical step in determining whether a state perceives the other as harboring 'benign' strategic intentions, or otherwise."²⁰

Closely related, there is another vigorous debate about the classification of China as a status-quo ("security seeker") or a revisionist ("greedy") power. Status-quo states strive to preserve the international order and its underlying principles, whereas the ones who seek change are termed as revisionist states.²¹ Also, a status-quo state, motivated by "security-seeking" intentions, means to acquire the power to preserve its position in the international system. By contrast, a revisionist state is driven by expansionist and belligerent military doctrines and foreign policies.²² Based on various contexts, China has been labeled as status-quo, revisionist, or unknown. For instance, China is described as a status-quo state in regards to its insecurity about the U.S.-Japan alliance,²³ Chinese or U.S. military doctrines,²⁴ as well as engagement and adaptation to the existing international order.²⁵ However, because of its assertive foreign policy stance, other scholars classify China as a revisionist state.²⁶ Lastly, other theorists and practitioners warn about the uncertainty behind the state's real intentions behind their mili-

tary preparations. Similar uncertainty is also associated with China's intentions behind the escalation of its hybrid warfare. The next section familiarizes readers with the contemporary literature about this warfare within the framework of the security dilemma.

China's Hybrid Warfare

Since most of the research about the security dilemma was conceived during the bipolar structure of Cold War era's international system, the issue of the security dilemma between an established military power and an aspiring military power is still under-theorized outlines the main measures of "relative" military power (where one power would possess a comparative advantage over another), such as military capabilities, military spending, military technology, military-civil relations, overseas territory and bases, command structures, and training.²⁷ In the after-Cold War international system, Shiping Tang advocates adding the "asymmetric distribution of military power" to the list of material regulators of the security dilemma.²⁸ Scholars believe that the asymmetric U.S.-China military relations may be explained and managed by the better comprehension of how unequal power distribution regulates the security dilemma.²⁹ Moreover, Johnson suggests that the exploration of hybrid warfare, as a "nascent IR sub-[theme] ... could complement and augment security dilemma theorizing."³⁰

Despite much attention in military and academic circles, there is disagreement about the definition and applicability of hybrid warfare as a concept. Some scholars argue that this concept is not useful beyond the explanation of underlying strategies and tactics of this warfare.³¹ Other theorists and the Western security officials advocate the analytical value of hybrid warfare to comprehend the intricacy of contemporary security threats from an actor or actors who can utilize various capabilities, often concurrently, to attain their specific strategic and tactical goals.³² This article employs the DOD's and NATO's definition of hybrid warfare. The DOD uses the term "hybrid threat" to describe hybrid warfare.³³ NATO

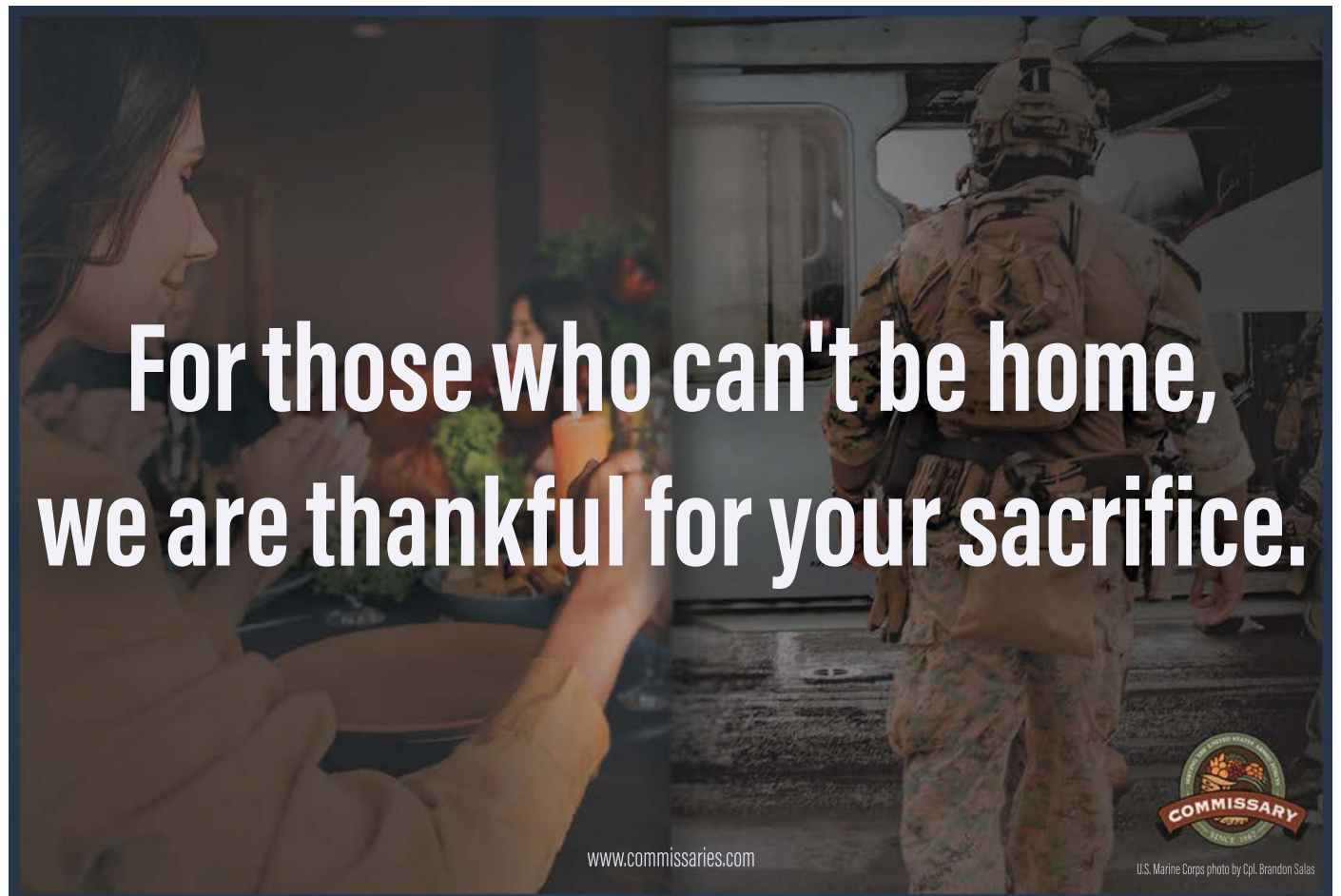
describes the hybrid threat as one that is employed by enemies who can simultaneously utilize conventional and non-conventional methods to reach their goals.³⁴ Such means may consist of traditional and non-traditional warfighting tactics, the use of criminal disorder, and the various asymmetric techniques that can subdue an adversary's strengths.³⁵ Theorists also claim that hybrid warfare also may affect societal, informational, and economic weaknesses.³⁶

Going beyond the debates about the utility and nature of hybrid warfare, scholars take issue with the perspective gap associated with the prevalence of Western views on hybrid warfare after Russia's 2014 actions in Crimea.³⁷ These theorists argue that hybrid warfare in the Asian context has its distinct characteristics. Such unique features include the partiality for hybridity during Asian history, the connection to Asian maritime geography, and the preference of a relatively weak military power.³⁸ Other

theorists also claim that hybrid warfare is a context-specific mode of warfare that differs for both state and non-state actors.³⁹ Lately, there is even more emphasis on its aspects as a context-specific strategy. Alexander Lanoszka classifies Russian hybrid approach as a strategy of a revisionist power.⁴⁰ However, in the Asian context, this warfare "can be a strategy of both anti-status quo and status-quo powers."⁴¹ The previous section describes the debate about the classification of China as a status-quo or anti-status quo power that, in turn, affects the deliberation about the state's intentions behind its escalating hybrid warfare.

The Asian context significantly affects China's concept of hybrid warfare. First, the state's hybrid-like approach to military strategy has been prevalent throughout its history.⁴² According to Weichong Ong, "the roots of the Chinese multi-dimensional approach to war ... harken back to older civilizational

tradition where the relative advantage is more important than immediate battlefield victories."⁴³ Although China seems to be applying Russia's experience in Ukraine,⁴⁴ its multi-faceted approach to warfare precedes Russian military's innovative thinking in "addressing weaknesses and avoiding strengths."⁴⁵ Second, China's maritime geography impacts its choices of hybrid strategies. Francois Joyax argues that, in contrast to Europe, Asia's maritime domain plays "the central role ... in connecting (or dividing) the majority of regional actors."⁴⁶ Ji You informs that U.S-China tension over the maritime domain is "now structured into global geostrategic strife."⁴⁷ Therefore, China's quest for sovereign control over the maritime landscape has generated the development of its hybrid maritime capabilities.⁴⁸ Section 4 describes this warfare in more detail. Third, because of the "asymmetric distribution of military power," China prefers using hybrid war-



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fare as a weaker party.⁴⁹ In doing so, this strategy generates “an impasse in the form of deterrent stalemate” while evading open warfare with the United States.⁵⁰

Lastly, China’s military doctrine, which has been shaped by the “asymmetric distribution of military power” within the U.S.-China security dilemma, also influences its hybrid warfare. According to China’s *White Paper 2008*, the state’s military strategy is “active defense,” which includes “defensive operations, self-defense and striking and getting to the better of the enemy only after the enemy started to attack.”⁵¹ The evaluation of China’s national security publications and the secondary sources associated with its military strategy points out the state’s growing focus on the expansion of its multi-dimensional military capabilities; emphasis on maritime and cyber spheres;⁵² civilian-military integration for cyber warfare;⁵³ and cyber espionage.⁵⁴

As mentioned earlier, the security dilemma, by definition, is a predicament where states can never really be sure of the relative correlations of power. Therefore, in such a context, China’s hybrid warfare, “one that is premised on the constant search of strategic advantage,”⁵⁵ is a calculated viable strategy to offset U.S. military superiority. This article agrees with the IR scholars’ assertions that, in the after-Cold War international system, the “asymmetric distribution of military power” can also materially regulate the security dilemma. The impact of China’s hybrid warfare exacerbates the effect of this regulator, thereby intensifying the contemporary security dilemma. The next sections describe the evolution of the U.S.-China security dilemma as well as the influence of escalating China’s hybrid warfare on this security dilemma.

Section Three: Evolution of U.S.-China Security Dilemma

As presented below, the evolution of U.S.-China security dilemma provides context for the analysis by demonstrating the escalation of perceptions of insecurity from both powers, especially over the past decade. Since during the first two decades of the Cold War, the

United States adhered to the containment strategy against China, the security dilemma between the states did not exist.⁵⁶ Containment is a defensive strategy that serves as an alternative to war.⁵⁷ In the last decades of the Cold War, the United States aligned with China because of the “shared strategic mistrust of the Soviet Union.”⁵⁸ After the evaporation of Soviet Union’s threat

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in the early 1990s, the security dilemma slowly emerged as the United States became concerned about China’s emerging military capabilities while China feared the U.S. reinstatement of containing China.⁵⁹ Subsequently, the U.S. focus on terrorist threats as well as China’s reassurance strategy of building an image of a responsible emerging state kept the security dilemma from spiraling into an international conflict.⁶⁰ As described in the next sections, the current security dilemma between the two countries emerged due to the acceleration of insecurity perceptions from both the United States and China over the past decade.

Understanding The Current Security Dilemma: The U.S. Side

In recent years, the security dilemma between the two powers has significantly intensified. From the U.S. perspective, China, as the rapidly rising power, challenges the established power, the United States, in all aspects of international relations.⁶¹ Under President Barack Obama, the United States generally welcomed the rise of China and sought a constructive relationship to enhance the prosperity and security of both nations.⁶² By contrast, President Donald Trump’s administration identifies China as a long-term strategic competitor.⁶³ The United States also shows its awareness

about the Thucydides Trap: a theory that warns about the unavailability of a war between the rising power (China) and the established power (the United States).⁶⁴ The rising power’s demand for influence and respect triggers insecurity from an established power, and, for this reason, potential conflicts are possible in such an environment. Thus, China’s perceived pursuit of hegemony, namely Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the short-term and global hegemony in the future, based on its growing expansionism as well as its military modernization, represents the primary issue of concern for the United States. Expansionism is defined as a policy focused on territorial or economic expansion.⁶⁵ According to realism, a hegemon is a “state that dominates all other states in the system.”⁶⁶ That is, a leading power that achieves hegemony is the one that projects its power on the other states in its sphere of influence.

The United States believes that China is increasingly challenging its hegemony in Asia. For the past few years, assertive Chinese policies in the Indo-Pacific region have challenged not only the territorial status quo but also the rule of international law in such disputes.⁶⁷ In doing so, the United States fears that China strives to undermine the current international order and its underlying principles. For example, China escalated the East China Sea’s disputes by declaring an “air defense identification zone” above Japan’s Senkaku Islands in 2012 and by sending its fishing boats and powerful military forces into that area in 2016. In the South China Sea, the country did not allow the Philippines to access the Scarborough Shoal and also drilled oil near the contested Paracel Islands while ignoring Vietnamese protests about its historical claims to the area.⁶⁸ In 2014, China also reclaimed land near the seven reefs under Chinese control in the Spratly Islands. By turning these artificial islands into military bases, the country has established the foundation for control over the South China Sea, the primary pathway between the Indian and Pacific Oceans that carries about one-third of international maritime trade.⁶⁹ The United States inter-

prets such actions as a demonstration of China's disregard for international law and its willingness to proceed with its unilateral goals while intimidating other countries in the region. Such moves can not only hinder U.S. alliances and partnerships but also reduce its capability to project its influence in Asia. An emboldened China may also pursue its strategic interests outside the Indo-Pacific region as it continues to undermine the United States' dominance globally.⁷⁰

From the U.S. point of view, following the strategies of past hegemony replicates its behavior under the Qing imperial dynasty (established in 1636 and ruled China from 1644 to 1912) that conquered "all of modern Xinjiang, and Mongolia, and reached Tibet."⁷¹ Therefore, the United States interprets such a military modernization as proof that contemporary China still believes in expanding its influence through the use of military force. For instance, during the past decade, the country has not only increased the rate of its military spending but also reformed its military organizations. Furthermore, China's army has enforced the doctrine of anti-access, area denial (A2/AD), which hinders the U.S. deployed forces.⁷² According to David Ochmanek, the primary elements of this doctrine are

accurate ballistic and cruise missiles; near-real-time surveillance and reconnaissance systems; hardened, redundant command-and-control networks; electronic warfare (jamming) systems; antisatellite weapons, and cyber weapons.⁷³

The country has also built coastguard vessels to patrol its maritime territory and improved its conventional ballistic missiles that can endanger the U.S. naval ports and airbases in the region, as far as Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.⁷⁴ The United States is also concerned that to proceed with its plans for global hegemony China established its first military base in Djibouti in 2017, with the probable intentions of building more military bases on the East African coast.⁷⁵ Thus, such a program may in-

crease Chinese capabilities to constrain the efforts of not only the U.S. military but also the attempts of its allies and partners to maintain both a regional and global balance of power. As discussed above, the perceived Chinese expansionism and military modernization represent crucial matters of concern for the United States.

Understanding The Current Security Dilemma: The Chinese Side

By contrast, China's perception of insecurity stems from the following factors: the U.S. interference in the South and East China Seas' conflicts, the 2011 Pacific Pivot, and the contemporary focus of the U.S. military on the Indo-Pacific region. China's leaders believe that the strategic distrust between the countries, which is defined as "mutual distrust of long-term intentions," is caused by the U.S. attitude, policies, and misperceptions.⁷⁶ First, the U.S. interference in the conflicts of the South and East China deeply aggravates the security dilemma. The Chinese leaders, such as Li Keqiang, claim that "expansion is not in the Chinese DNA."⁷⁷ Instead, they assert that China's current territorial claims indicate a resolve to restore its sovereign territory that was reduced by the

United States stands in its way."⁷⁹ In short, China argues that the country defends its regional status quo from the U.S. threatening posture. China also perceives that the United States aggravates the security dilemma by escalating the tensions in the region by allowing its allies "willfully, or naively ... to pursue their claims at Chinese expense in the expectation that the United States will stand up to China."⁸⁰

Second, from China's point of view, the 2011 Pacific Pivot, a rebalancing initiative in the Asia-Pacific region, also greatly intensified the security dilemma. The primary objective of such a policy was "to devote more effort to influencing the development of the Asia-Pacific's norms and rules, particularly as China emerges as an ever-more influential regional power."⁸¹ China perceived such an initiative to solidify the U.S. hegemonic influence against an emerging China. The DOD's 2014 *Quadrennial Review* not only prioritized the 2011 Pacific Pivot but also described a rebalancing proposal to move the military resources from the Middle East to the Pacific. The strategy included stationing of sixty percent of U.S. naval assets in the region as well as the strengthening of military alliances with Asia-Pacific countries.⁸² Alliances between sovereign

From the U.S. point of view, following the strategies of past hegemony, China is also rapidly modernizing its military.

past foreign conquests when China was weak.⁷⁸ China not only desires the respect it enjoyed as an ancient civilization but also strives for the return to its rightful position in the international system, after having suffered through the "century of humiliation," which was the period between the mid-19th century's Opium Wars and the Chinese Communist Party's 1949 victory in the civil war. During this period, China endured multiple military defeats and agreed to unequal treaties with outside powers. "In essence, it is China's time now to regain what it has lost, but the

states are described as "associations of states for collective security or other mutual interest."⁸³ The fortification of the U.S. security relations with Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam "[augmented] Chinese paranoia and perception of being encircled."⁸⁴ Jianqun Teng claims that "from then on, the Chinese government has been willing to protect its national interests not only through diplomacy but also through law enforcement and use of the military."⁸⁵ Therefore, due to the perception of threat sparked by the 2011 Pacific Pivot, China decided to accelerate its

military capabilities within the South China Sea's maritime theater in 2012.

Third, Trump's administration is expected to continue with the expansion of the U.S. military forces within the Indo-Pacific region. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* classifies China as a revisionist power, a state that strives to change the established balance of power in the "resilient, but weakening, post-WWII international order."⁸⁶ The Trump administration's proposal to undertake a major military modernization program, strengthen alliances, and attract new security partners further demonstrates that the current U.S. approach to foreign policy emphasizes military defense versus diplomacy. Therefore, the U.S. criticism about the rise of China's military capabilities are generally considered as hypocritical: "If China's motives for military modernization are to be questioned, then what explains America's motivation to seek absolute military superiority?"⁸⁷ Since China's leaders are particularly concerned about the U.S. off-shore strike power, they consider the development of A2/AD capabilities as a defensive requirement to counter any U.S. military interventions.⁸⁸ In sum, the current strategic distrust between China and the United States endangers their bilateral relations. China believes that the United States strives to reestablish the containment strategy to prevent the country from obtaining military and strategic influence not only in Asia but also on the global stage.⁸⁹ By contrast, the United States intends to maintain its military superiority to counter perceived China's expansionism and military modernization. The aforementioned factors and subsequent perceptions of insecurity from both countries have contributed to the current security dilemma between the United States and China. The next part of this article analyzes how China's escalating hybrid warfare impacts the contemporary U.S.-China security dilemma.

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