

Divergence or Convergence? The Path to Building a New Model of Major Country Relations^{*}

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Since 2012, China's top leaders have repeatedly advocated the development of a new model of major country relations between China and the United States that is defined as "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation." The initiative has received positive responses from the Obama administration. Top decision-makers in China and the US have both realized that the key to developing such a new model of major country relations is to break the "curse" of conflict that has historically befallen emerging and established powers.

Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China-US relations witnessed over twenty years severe conflict and confrontation, which included "hot wars" in Korea and Vietnam, confrontation across the Taiwan Straits, the ideological Cold War, and mutual economic, cultural and diplomatic exclusion. Since President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972, during which the Shanghai Communiqué was issued, China-US relations have experienced steady development overall despite a number of

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severe crises that have occurred; no extended periods of intense strategic confrontation have ever emerged. If “no conflict” and “no confrontation” are to be considered a fundamental attribute of the new model of major country relations, its embryonic form has already appeared. In recent years, the top leaders of both countries have reached the consensus that China and the US should and must avert conflicts and confrontation, a wish that has been repeatedly expressed by Chinese and American top leaders in different ways and different languages over the last 42 years. What is worth contemplating and discussing is why, despite 42 years of steady development and countless proclamations from both countries’ leaders aiming at averting confrontation and developing cooperation, many international public opinions as well as influential public figures from both countries still postulate that the China-US relationship will eventually become one of rivalry and conflict.

This is the first question this article tries to answer, that is, what are the reasons and what is the significance of proposing the thesis of “constructing a new model of major country relations between China and the United States”? Other questions the article wishes to answer are: what are the criteria for a new model of major country relations between China and the United States? What are the prerequisites for their establishment? In which areas should China and the US work on individually and jointly to build such a new model of major country relations?

I. WHY ARE CHINA AND THE US INCREASINGLY HOOKED BY THE CURSE OF CONFRONTATION?

Why do conflict and confrontation between China and US remain a curse of history and an eventuality from the perspective of strategic studies? There are several different explanations.

First, leaders of either country do not trust or completely trust the strategic reassurance made by the other country. That is to say, Beijing does not feel the US leadership is being honest when it proclaims that “it is in the US interests to see a stable, strong and prosperous China.” Rather, it believes that America’s China policy

is essentially to “contain, Westernize and divide” China. Inversely, nor does the US trust that China speaks the truth when it says that it will take a road of peaceful development, that it does not seek to squeeze the US out of the Asia-Pacific region, and that it does not compete with the US for hegemony. Americans tend to believe that the thinking of “keeping a low profile” China advocates now is simply a tactical reckoning under the current conditions when there are great gaps in strength between itself and the United States, rather than a long-term strategic consideration. The US is worried that once China’s strength reaches some sort of relative parity with that of the US, it is bound to challenge the US hegemony. This is what is referred to as China-US strategic distrust.

Second, few researchers and observers believe that the proclamations of “no conflict, no confrontation” made by the leaderships of the two countries are of sufficient practical significance. They may reason that, even if the wills expressed by the top leaders of both sides were sincere, they still could not steer and change the long-term trajectory of the relationship between the two countries, which would ultimately lead to confrontation. Some Chinese hold that the goal of the United States is to spare no effort to halt China’s rise, that China can only avoid confrontation by sacrificing its core interests and succumbing to the United States, which is utterly unacceptable to China. Conversely, in the United States there are also some Americans who are convinced that conflict between the United States and China can be avoided only when the United States implements a policy of “appeasement” towards China and leaves the Chinese government alone to do whatever it pleases domestically and internationally. Yet, this is against the faith and fundamental interests of the United States. Such judgment that China-US relations are essentially a zero-sum game is deeply rooted in part of the social elites of both countries.

Third, due to substantial differences in their political systems, ideology and development paths, the two countries are gradually drifting apart. Confucius once said that “it is not worthwhile teaming up with someone with divergent values from you.” On the surface, the bilateral relations between any two countries depend on how their governments handle bilateral relations and

international affairs. In reality, however, the most fundamental factor is, in this age of globalization and interdependence, whether the two great powers will go separate or opposite ways in their paths of development or they are heading in the same direction. The bilateral relationship also depends largely on whether the two powers intend to cooperate in maintaining and reforming the existing international political and economic order or want to create their own tangible and intangible spheres of influence according to their own world outlooks and interests. To put it more simply and vividly, do leaders of the two countries believe in “one world, one dream” (the slogan of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games), or “one bed, different dreams,” meaning to divide the world in two? This kind of mentality is an extension of “system determinism.”

Some of these speculations have turned into reality, or at the very least, have become real considerations for a number of political elites in both countries. The proposal of the topic of establishing a new model of major country relations between China and the US is precisely because the rise of doubt in the possibility that China and the US can avoid conflict and rivalry, as represented by strategic distrust between the two sides, zero-sum game theory and system determinism. Moreover, such doubt is based on rational instead of irrational extrapolations. One such extrapolation is the need of national cohesion. Over two millenniums ago, Mencius, an ancient Chinese thinker, reasoned, “A nation without any enemy or foreign invasion is bound to perish.” In contemporary China, the US is obviously the biggest “enemy” in domestic politics as well as ideological context. Samuel Huntington, the late American political scientist, said, “The ideal enemy for America would be ideologically hostile, racially and culturally different, and militarily strong enough to pose a credible threat to American security.”¹ In the light of these statements, both China and the US have reasons to regard the other as its “ideal enemy” to arouse domestic crisis awareness, stir up patriotism, enhance national cohesion and strengthen social stability. To certain extent, keeping an adversarial relationship with the other side, be it the US or China, complies with the thinking of some people and serves the material interests of certain sectors (e.g., the military-industrial complex in America).

If these three mental factors and material factors are deemed as the Sword of Damocles hanging over China-US relations, the likelihood that this sword may drop increases. One can identify at least five new factors to illustrate the pressing need to build a new model of major country relations between China and the United States.

1. The power disparity between China and the US is narrowing, while the world political structure is undergoing considerable changes.

Now, the relations between China and the United States are regarded as relations between a rising great power and an existing great power. In recent years, the scale of power between the two countries is tipping swiftly towards China. In 2003, China's GDP was \$1.4 trillion, only approximately 12.5% of the \$10.9 trillion of the United States. In 2013, China's GDP exceeded \$9 trillion, accounting for 56% of the \$16 trillion of the United States. China's national defense expenditure is increasing rapidly, and the growth of Chinese military power has attracted a great deal of attention, while the US has been forced to cut down its own national defense budget in recent years. No matter how these GDP and military expenditure figures are interpreted, the fact that the hard power of China and the US is converging is beyond controversy. Many research institutes have drawn the conclusion that China's economic aggregate is expected to surpass that of the US in 2030 or even earlier, thus becoming the world's largest economy. China's influence in world affairs is also expanding rapidly. In the structural transformation of global governance regime, China is gradually moving closer to the center of decision-making in G20 and other international mechanisms.

Whereas a dozen years ago, the Chinese public was generally worried about the US strategic momentum and its intention to create a unipolar world. Today, China's general public tends to think of the US as a declining hegemony with waning soft and hard power. At the international level, the rise of the BRICS and their mutual cooperation has forged a new feature of international politics. Since the outbreak of the global financial crisis, the

developed countries, including major European countries, as well as Japan, have suffered from a decline of overall strength and influence. A community consisting of many non-Western middle economies is expected to outweigh the European Union and Japan in terms of global power within the near future. If the political world is divided into *the West* and *the non-West*, then the scale of global political power is also tipping toward China. The US has been crowned the largest economy in the world for over a century, sitting on the throne of the sole superpower in the world for over two decades. Now both of these titles are being challenged by China and other non-Western countries' rise, it is impossible for the US not to take any significant strategic and policy adjustments. As for China, under the circumstances that its overall national strength and global status is on the rise, it must also adjust its foreign strategies and policies.

2. The ideological rivalry between China and the US is intensifying political discord between the two powers.

For over four decades, some Western strategists and intellectual elites have all along harbored the illusion that China would eventually embrace Western multi-party parliamentary politics, a growing middle class would foster a civil society and the growing role of the market economy would weaken the power of the state-owned enterprises in the course of its reform and opening-up. In recent years, especially since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, this illusion of theirs has gradually been shattered. Some Americans have come to be increasingly worried that China's political system, path and experience of development (known as "Beijing Consensus") would pose a challenge the American type of democracy and the American-advocated mode of market economy (referred to as "Washington Consensus"), thus impacting fundamentally the post-Cold War world political and economic order the US has dominated. Henry Kissinger, the renowned American strategist, revealed, "Neoconservatives and other activists would argue that democratic institutions are the prerequisite to relations of trust and confidence. Nondemocratic societies, in this view, are

inherently precarious and prone to the exercise of force... regime change is the ultimate goal of American foreign policy in dealing with nondemocratic societies; peace with China is less a matter of strategy than of change in Chinese governance.”²

Currently, one of the mainstream views in China is: the world political and economic order is undergoing a great deal of reform and adjustment, ideological struggles are acute and complicated, and the exchanges, integration and confrontation of various ideas and cultures have become more frequent. The West sees the rise of China as a challenge to their values and system model. Therefore, it has been doing everything possible to intensify their efforts to Westernize and split China, and to use the Internet and other channels to infiltrate China. It is imperative for China to remain vigilant at all times in ideological struggle both at home and abroad; otherwise, the eventual outcome could be serious calamity, as committing an irrevocable historical mistake. It is necessary for China to seriously study and analyze lessons of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of the Soviet Communist Party, the radical changes in East European countries some two decades ago, and the more recent turbulence, war and government changes in the Middle East and North Africa. The aggressive posture of the West and the West’s malicious accusations, slanders and rumor mongering of China’s political system, economic situation, social policies and cultural traditions have fostered an international public opinion pattern featuring “stronger West and weaker China.” In face of such a situation, China should hasten to act and dare to express its views loudly to make them heard in the world.³ This widely held view serves as evidence that the Chinese government is becoming politically more vigilant, and is intensifying its countermeasures against American intrusion into China’s internal affairs.

3. Political barriers increase in economic and trade relations whose “ballast” role has been diminishing.

On one hand, rapid development has been witnessed in bilateral economic and trade relations between China and the US, though there is still huge space for development. On the other, political

resistance has also increased on mutual investment. The US has complained that it is hard for its firms to penetrate into the financial and service sectors in China, as China has kept “transfusing blood” to its state-owned enterprises, strengthening indigenous innovation industries and restricting the procurement of products with foreign technology, all which hurt American enterprises and their prospects in China. In recent years; and that China has launched a number of anti-corruption investigations against foreign corporations, manipulated price charges against several foreign firms, and launched official media attacks against such activities. The US has also accused Chinese corporations (mainly state-owned enterprises) of hacking American firms, with government connivance and even support, in order to spy technological and commercial secrets to make up for their insufficient R&D investment.

China, in turn, argues that the US Congress and administration are willfully creating political obstacles for Chinese enterprises to make investment and make mergers and acquisitions in the US under the excuse of “national security”. In the business and media circles, there are also many criticisms against China’s holding of an astronomical sum of American treasury bonds, as well as suspicions that a number of American policies, such as the depreciation of the dollar exchange rate and the “quantitative easing” of the dollar supply, are aimed at hurting the Chinese economy and disrupting the internationalization of RMB. Hence, there has been an increasingly louder cry from the Chinese public to unload dump American treasury bonds. In the past, economic and trade relations served as the “ballast” or “pressure-relief valve” in China- US bilateral relations. Now, however, economic and trade disputes have been intensifying and extending; they have been mingled together with ideological struggle to produce a negative impact on relations between the countries.

4. China-US bilateral relations are subject to the impact of a number of uncertainties on both sides, deepening distrust between both societies.

In recent years, a number of uncertain factors and emergencies have occurred in both China and the United States. Although most

of them have nothing to do directly with China-U.S. relations, they have nonetheless produced certain negative effect on the image of each in the other, as they have rapidly disseminated through mass and social media. Frequent occurrences of severe water and air pollution, food safety and public health incidents, incessant disclosure of corruption cases, increasing numbers of mass disturbances — all have sparked from time to time disputation among American political elites. Meanwhile, the Chinese public has also left with a bag impression about the United States because of such events in the U.S. as the “occupying Wall Street” protest movements caused by the financial crisis, the couple of shooting accidents, explosions and domestic terrorist incidents, the shutdown of the federal government for weeks due to disputes between the Democrats and Republicans in Congress. The national image of China was tarnished when Wang Lijun, former vice-mayor and head of Public Security Bureau of Chongqing, defected to the US consulate-general in Chengdu in February 2012. Yet, the United States did fare well either when Edward Snowden, a former employee of the CIA, fled to Moscow from Hong Kong in May 2013 to expose the American government’s violation of civil rights and eavesdropping on foreign leaders. This incident revealed the dark side of American politics and diplomacy. A number of authoritative opinion polls conducted in recent years reveal that Chinese and American ratings of each other’s image are turning downwards; the ratings are especially unfavorable when the questions touch on the other country’s politics and diplomacy.

5. The competition between China and the US in the Asia-Pacific region tends to turn increasingly serious.

In its first term of office, the Obama administration forcefully put into implementation the “pivot to Asia” strategy, claiming to “turn around” to the Asia-Pacific to achieve a “rebalance” of US strategic focus. This aroused China’s vigilance. Chinese strategists generally hold that the purpose of the US in carrying out this strategy is to pin down the expansion of China’s power.

On the one hand, China has turned increasingly attentive to developing strategic and economic relations with its neighbors, and

has become the biggest trade partner of almost all major economies in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, China has increased military deployment in the East China Sea and South China Sea, reiterating its sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands (known as “Senkaku Islands” in Japan), islands in the South China Sea and surrounding maritime areas. As a result, China’s disputes with Japan, the Philippines and some other US allies over maritime rights are becoming more intense. Many Chinese observers have concluded that the United States is the “driver behind the curtain” and “troublemaker” in China’s disputes with its neighbors.

On the part of the United States, what it worries about is that China’s strategic intention is to crowd it out of Asia to seize for itself dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. To strengthen its economic competitiveness, develop oversea markets and retain the right to make rules, the Obama administration has vigorously promoted the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations, which mainly cover the liberalization of capital, state-owned enterprises, labor standards and protection of intellectual property rights. When China tentatively expressed its wish to take part in the TPP, US officials stated that it was only possible for China to join the arrangement after negotiations with Japan, Australia and some ASEAN countries are concluded.⁴ In terms of military and security, the U.S. and its allies Japan and South Korea have established a Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS) of considerable scale, in addition to a Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) under development. These moves are considered responses to the rapidly

increased military strength of China. The competition between the two countries in diplomacy has also been turning increasingly hot in the Asia-Pacific region.

Among the five new trends discussed above, the change of power balance and differences in political system and ideology are fundamental, while the other three are extensions of these two.⁵ The issues in relation to changes in power disparity and paths of development are not something

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diplomatic decision-makers can control from the perspective of interstate relations. Bilateral relations can be seen as the “surface,” with power and development is the “core.” Only by identifying the “surface-core relations” is it possible to find way to break the curse of China-U.S. confrontation in terms of strategic thinking and practical policies.

II. AN ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT PATHS AND FOREIGN POLICIES OF CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

As Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, points out in his book published last year, “Foreign policy begins at home.”⁶ A country’s development path determines how it defines its national interests, as well as the general direction of its foreign policy.

1. Development Path and Foreign Policy of China

Looking back at the 65 years of Chinese diplomatic history, we can clearly divide it into two phases, each with a prominent theme. The theme of the first 30 years was “war and revolution,” and the following 34 years, “peace and development.”

The theme “war and revolution” ran through the first 30 years of China’s international strategy; it was determined by China’s path of development. In the early years after the founding of People’s Republic of China, a policy of “leaning toward one side” was implemented; and it not only determined the country’s path of development but also its foreign policy. The “cultural revolution” made China a detour, during which an obvious deviation was also appeared in its foreign policy.

“War and revolution” does not mean that China, then under the leadership of Mao Zedong, wished to launch a war, nor that China had always advocated for radical revolution throughout the globe. In fact, the PRC urgently called for a peaceful environment to develop its economy. Compared with the 110 years of chaos following the 1840 Opium War, the three decades were for China a period of peace, stability and development. During this period, however, China was shadowed in dark clouds of war, prompting

the then Chinese leaders to draw the conclusion that a war was unavoidable and made strategic decisions accordingly. Until the 1970s, when discussing the possibility of another World War, Mao Zedong still said, "There are no more than two possibilities: one is that war triggers revolution, and the other is that revolution prevents war."⁷ Since the 1950s, China fought a number of small-scale wars against various sorts of enemies, such as the ones in the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Straits, in the China-India and China-Vietnam border area, and on the border line with the USSR. The construction of the Third Front (remote regions away from coastal areas) in the 1960s and slogan of "digging deep tunnels, storing more grain and never seeking hegemony" raised in the 1970s were both to make preparations for "fighting an early, large-scale, nuclear war". The keynote of foreign policy at the time was "support the revolution of the oppressed nations and the oppressed peoples all around the world." Until the Third Plenary Session of the Tenth CPC Central Committee in 1977, it was still stated that "China should adhere to proletarian internationalism and firmly carry out Chairman Mao's revolutionary line and policies in foreign affairs."⁸

In the 35 years since China embarked on the road of reform and opening up, the subject term of foreign policy has changed to "peace and development". This is not a complete negation of the diplomatic thinking in the earlier years, but rather an expression, an expectation and a statement of China's international strategic thinking based on its central task at home in the new era.

Ever since the founding of the Communist Party of China, it has all alone been a prerequisite for it to determine its central task(s) in line with an overall judgment of the "times," the international situation and the possibility of war. In fact, looking back at the recent 65-year political history of China, it is not so much that the judgment of the international situation has determined China's domestic central task(s), but rather that the redetermination of the central task(s), in turn, has determined the overall judgment of the international situation. For example, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh CPC Central Committee decided to shift the gravity of domestic work to economic construction, and this went with a

greatly reduced judgment of the threat of war. Objectively speaking, it was hard for the US to say that the international environment for China had changed considerably in 1982 as compared with 1977. It should be said, by rights, that the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 were both signs of the degradation of the international environment and danger of war, not to mention the counterattacks China in self defense China launched against Vietnamese incursions along the China-Vietnam border in 1979.

Notwithstanding this, Chinese top leaders made the unexpected judgment in 1982 that war was avoidable. When the Chinese said that the “first decades of this century are an important period of strategic opportunities for China’s development” and regarded it as a “scientific judgment,” not much academic argumentation is needed, because it was determined by the central tasks of the CPC. The CPC’s history of more than six decades has clearly revealed that “diplomacy is the extension of domestic policy.” From this point, one can arrive at the following conclusion: China’s judgment of whether the international security situation and economic environment are favorable for it or not, and optimistic or pessimistic, depends largely on Chinese decision-makers’ expectations for the development of the country’s domestic political situation and their values. The Third Plenary Session of the Eighteenth CPC Central Committee was held in November 2013, where an array of daunting domestic reforms, development objectives and stability tasks were identified, while the global environment was just briefly described as “very complicated”. This shows the CPC’s understanding of interrelationship of domestic situation with international situation.

Although China’s foreign policy is mainly decided by domestic politics, it does not mean that foreign policy cannot influence and shape the global environment. The major decisions China made in the first dozen years after the founding of the PRC, such as those about the Korean War and China-India border conflict, still influence China’s relations with relevant countries, and stay as significant factors in the global environment. In the past dozen of years, China remained extremely cautious in handling its territorial

and maritime disputes with some other countries, the cross-Straits relations, the Korean nuclear issue, China-U.S. trade frictions, the global financial crisis and other major issues involving foreign relations. Although backed by its actual strength, China has never resorted to threat by force or sanctions, which demonstrates its diplomatic maturity, enhances its credibility and helps further improve its international situation.

Viewing PRC diplomacy from a historical perspective, despite the watershed period from 1979 to 1980, continuity is self evident. Diplomatic work has always been aimed at serving the objectives of internal political stability, national security, economic development, sovereign unification. To maintain the domestic political stability, it is necessary to uphold the leadership of the CPC and the mainstream ideology, and resist infiltration and sabotage by external hostile forces, which are the principles that China has seriously observed for more than 60 years. China's concept of national security has developed from the traditional territorial and political security to today's comprehensive security and non-traditional security, but the core content of which has never changed ever. From "leaning solely to the Soviet Union" to joining the G20, one of China's objectives has remained boosting economic development by way of developing relations with other countries. With regard to China's policies toward Taiwan, it has evolved from "we are determined to liberate Taiwan" in the 1950s to today's "win-win cooperation across the Straits and peaceful reunification," with a great difference in the wording, but the core objective has remained as it is, i.e., safeguarding national sovereignty and achieving national reunification.

Looking ahead, the "peace and development" theme will last without any doubt, but profound changes will take place in its content and perspective. In terms of "peace," the focus in the past was on whether another great war would break out, or whether China could coexist with the two superpowers, i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union, peacefully. Now when the overall global situation and the relations among the major countries are basically stable, China's main concern in terms of "peace" is increasingly tied to regional conflicts, terrorism, extremism and separatism, as

well as China's overseas interests. With regard to "development," China's focus in the past was on getting rid of poverty and backwardness and promoting GDP growth. Now, China lays more stress on changing the mode of economic growth, the improvement of economic quality, the realization of sustainable development and balanced social progress, and the modernization of the country's governance system and ability. All this means that China's foreign policy will continue to serve the country's general task of reform and development while maintaining a strong level of continuity.

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2. Development Path and Foreign Policy of the United States

The domestic course of the United States in winning the Cold War was tortuous and full of contradictions and conflicts. At the primary phase (1946-1960: during the terms of President Truman and President Eisenhower) and secondary phase (1961-1980: during the terms of President Kennedy and President Carter) of the Cold War, the US was keenly alert to the so-called "Communist menace" and it had withstood a serious test in its domestic political issues and social cohesion. However, during the final phase (1981-1991: during the terms of President Reagan and President George Bush), Americans' confidence in national governance was increasing, its economy was prosperous, its political situation turned stable, and a simultaneous growth was witnessed in its hard and soft power. As Melvyn Leffler, an American scholar, pointed out: the turning point was in the 1970s when American capitalism began to gain new vigor and move forward. This made President Reagan boast the superiority of capitalism to the world.⁹ Domestic reforms and changes had been the basis for the US to win the Cold War.¹⁰

The triumphant end of the Cold War has boosted the confidence of the United States in its own development path and at the same time inflated its ambition to dominate the world.

Looking back on the trajectory of the US grand strategy in the post-Cold War years, we can clearly identify its continuity and periodic changes. Since the fading out of the USSR from the history arena, the strategic objective of the United States has remained safeguarding its “leadership,” or hegemony, as the sole superpower in the world. The core objectives and interests of the post-Cold War U.S. overseas strategy is to ensure its own economic development, national security and values. Theoretically speaking, the three elements are interdependent and inseparable from one another.

In the era of globalization, the prosperity of the US economy is totally inseparable from global trade, investment and financial stability. It is an core economic objective of the post-Cold War US grand strategy to maintain the financial order under the dollar hegemony, fair trade, the protection of intellectual property rights and other norms of capitalist market economy, and ensure the acquisition of oversea resources.

In the wake of the Cold War, major objectives of the US security strategy are to focus on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, and international terrorism. The September 11 terrorist attacks prompted the Bush administration to list anti-terrorism a central task, while the Obama administration has given more highlight to the threat of “nuclear terrorism.” Through the September 11 attacks and other terrorist incidents, in the eyes of Americans “terrorism” is linked up with Al-Qaeda and other radical Islamic forces. As the mainstream values in the US are based on Christianity, a so-called “clash of civilizations” has arisen between Christianity and Islam. This comes in addition to the complicated network of US economic and security interests in the greater Middle East region. Hence, the main threats to US national security interests are thought to come from nuclear proliferation, terrorist organizations, and countries that seek to develop nuclear technology in the greater Middle East region. In terms of US relations with North Korea, the US has always kept close watch over North Korean’s plan to develop nuclear weapons, as well as the latter’s cooperation with Islamic countries in this regard.

Safeguarding economic development and national security is the objective of almost every country's foreign policy. What makes the US different from the most countries in the world is that it is a country that is founded on its values, in other words, ideology, and maintains its internal cohesion on the basis of the values. The United States would not be the United States itself and would fall apart without such ideological doctrines of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and religious freedom. From President Clinton, President George W. Bush to President Obama, they all hold fast to the criteria of ideology, values and political system in measuring US interests and determining US relations with other countries. However, just as any other country, the US has never used ideology as the sole criterion to identify its friends and enemies.

The post-Cold War United States has never regarded any major country as its enemy or major security threat. Instead, it has attempted to maintain its dominant position as the sole superpower by way of consolidating its former alliances, incorporating China, Russia, India and any other major countries into the current international order, and establishing a "balance of power that favors freedom". This grand strategy will remain unchanged in the foreseeable future.

The periodic features of the grand strategy of the post-Cold War United States are expressed in the different strategic emphases and diplomatic instruments during the terms of the three presidents. The administration under President Clinton gave more stress on safeguarding the economic interests of the US in the era of globalization, underlining multilateralism and the establishment of international regimes, and the national security strategy of the US at the time was apparently "mission-oriented," that is, carrying out strategic expansion by relying on the super strength of the country. The strategic priority of the Bush Doctrine was national security, especially anti-terrorism and homeland security, resorting more to unilateralism in international institutions. The security strategy of the Bush administration was "threat-oriented," directing explicitly at radical Islamic forces as the greatest threat to the United States. Its security strategy was expansion in nature, while its economic strategy was relatively conservative.

The Obama administration has carried forward the characteristic of the Clinton period, i.e., “economy first,” laying great store by the establishment of international regimes and multilateral diplomacy. Although its security strategy was also “mission-oriented,” it is different from the one of the Clinton administration in that the strength of the United States has declined apparently and increasing economic and social challenges have arisen, both domestically and internationally, as compared with the period of the Clinton administration after the 2008 financial crisis, as well as political and diplomatic pains suffered in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Before the 2008 presidential election, three quarters of American voters held that the country “is headed in the wrong direction”.¹¹ Since President Obama took office, especially since his second term, the “introversive” trend has become much apparent. Fiscal balance, economic rebound, enlarging employment, political polarization, health care reform, gun control, the anti-drug campaign and migration policy — all are on the top of the Obama administration’s agenda. Therefore, the US has to take a defensive stance in foreign relations to heal the wounds of the Afghanistan and Iraqi wars, as well as wounds inflicted by the financial crisis. This also has made the United States more cautious over such issues as overseas military intervention. In view of the characteristics of the information-based world, the Obama administration has ditched the security strategy prioritizing anti-terrorism, and given emphasis on “smart power” and public diplomacy as well as a series of non-traditional security issues, thus significantly broadening the connotation of the US global strategy.

The strategic adjustment and correction by the Obama administration is, in essence, an attempt to correct the country’s deviation from its developmental path. Richard Haass has pointed out: the biggest threat to the US does not come from the outside, but rather from the inside; the rise of China, climate change, terrorism, Iranian nuclear plans, unrest in the Middle East and a rogue North Korea all pose serious challenges to the US. According to Haass, a great deal of the foundations of American power has being eroded; the US would be able to safeguard

its national security, advance its overseas interests, enhance its international competitiveness and augment its global influence unless it takes measures to upgrade its infrastructure, improve its educational quality, amend its outdated immigration policy and reduce its public debts. He added; the global political power now becoming more distributed and today's world is relatively relaxed, as no any major country poses a direct threat to the US; therefore, it is an era in which the US can put its house in order and focus on itself.¹² This is the viewpoint held by a considerable number of mainstream American strategists.

By analyzing and comparing the developmental paths and foreign policies of China and the United States, it is not difficult to see that, although the paths of development of the two countries are different, they both put domestic tasks their first priorities, and both think the paths they take are the "right ones": while China follows the path of reform, opening up, development and stability, the US takes the path of economic rebound, fiscal balance and reform in technological innovation. These two paths run parallel and should be conducive to the steady development of the two countries' bilateral relations for the interdependency of their economies, and exchange and cooperation in the cultural, educational, scientific and technological fields. Any major mistake made by each side in relation to its developmental path may not only result in heavy losses in its own interests, but also make the two countries "drift apart" in international politics and thus cause splits of the international community. When the two countries would stick to the paths of development they think to be correct, it might be possible for them to avoid confrontation and reach the same goal via different paths. "Reaching the same goal" does not mean that the two countries' developmental paths become increasingly similar or converge, but rather that they both would help in building prosperous, powerful, democratic, civil and harmonious countries respectively, and that the development of the two countries would be mutually complementary. As Henry Kissinger wrote in his book *On China*, the relationship between China and the US should not be a zero-sum game, but rather appropriate label for the bilateral relationship the two should establish is less partnership than "co-

evolution.” This means that both countries pursue their domestic imperatives, cooperate where possible and adjust their relations to minimize conflict”.¹³ This is what we mean by “reaching the same goal via different routes”.

III. THE PATH TO BUILDING A NEW MODEL OF MAJOR COUNTRY RELATIONS

What is “a new model of major country relations?” Although the two sides do not use the same concepts, nor are their understanding and expectations the same, a basic consensus is there: The China-US relations in the 21st century must stay off confrontation and the historical mistake of zero-sum game, and effectively blaze a new path. According to China’s argument, the core attributes of China-US relations should be a partnership of “no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, mutual benefit and win-win.” In the wording of the US, it is to “break the historical curse of inevitable conflict between a rising power and an established power,” and to solve an “old problem” with a “new solution.”

The different expectations of the two countries on the new model of relations, either understood literally or analyzed in line with the actual situation, give expression to their different core concerns. Mr. Dai Bingguo, then a state councilor in China, published an article in 2010, which aroused a wave of international responses. In the article he said, “What are our core interests? In my understanding, firstly, they are China’s state system, polity and political stability, namely, the leadership by the CPC, the socialist system and the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics; secondly, China’s sovereignty and security, territorial integrity and national reunification; and thirdly, basic guarantee for China’s sustainable economic and social development. These interests brook no violation and disruption.”¹⁴

The *White Paper on China’s Peaceful Development*, released by the State Council Information Office of the PRC in 2011, also included the “country’s political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability” in China’s core national interests.¹⁵ As understood by us, why China has always laid

great store by the principle of “mutual respect” in handling its relations with the US is, first and foremost, to require the US to respect China’s state system and polity, i.e., the leadership of the Communist Party of China domestically and China’s political order. The major sensitive issues touching on China’s core interests in China-US relations are the issues of Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang and human rights, all of which can be connected to China’s “state system and polity.” China’s views and policies regarding international affairs are also primarily concerned with maintaining lasting domestic stability and order. It is particularly true in its relations with the US.

In contrast, the American definition and expectations of a “new model of major country relations” are all related to its global “leadership” and the current international political and economic order it seeks to maintain. Whenever discussing building a new model of major country relations, the US has always expressed the hope that China will cooperate with it on major international security issues that the US considers to be its key interests, such as North Korean and Iranian nuclear crises. Besides, it always hopes that China will give consideration to its concerns in handling issues of global governance, such as financial stability (the dominant position the US dollar) and climate change. For the United States, China does not pose any threat to its own state system, political system, polity, national unification, or territorial integrity. The main concern of the US is that China, with its growing power and influence in the world, poses a challenge to the position of the United States in the world and the international order that it champions. This explains why the US focuses its attention on avoiding “confrontation between a rising major country and an established major country,” known as the “Thucydides trap.”

The key to building a new model of major country relations between

The key to building a new model of China-US relations is to understand their different thoughts and expectations for the future, to pinpoint where their interests will cross and to avoid clashes.

China and the United States is to understand their different thoughts and expectations for the future, to pinpoint where their interests will cross and to avoid clashes. Only when the US respects and stop challenging China's fundamental political system or its domestic order subjectively can China come to respect and accept US leadership in the world and the international order it champions. The reverse is also true.

An important change has taken place in China's view of the international political and economic order, i.e., from proposing "establishing a new order" in the 1990s to "actively promoting the development of the international political and economic order towards a more fair and rational direction."¹⁶ This indicates China's determination and confidence to fit into the international community. China has repeatedly made clear to the American side its views on US global leadership and the existing international order, and has got actively involved in the formulation of international rules. The United States, however, out of various considerations (including a misunderstanding of China's major concerns), has never explicitly expressed its respect for the Chinese political system, domestic order or development path, while keeping ask China for cooperation on major international issues that it shows concerns about.

It should be noted that most of the concerns of the United States are moving targets. Several years ago, the US was concerned with such problems as Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule, Libya under Gaddafi's rule, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, and the RMB exchange rate. When these problems were resolved or alleviated, it then turned its focus of attention to the North Korean nuclear issue, the Iranian nuclear issue, cyber security, etc. If the mission of creating a new model of major country relations between China and the United States is bundled together with such infinite moving targets, it will come to no avail.

Some strategists in China and the United States interpret "avoiding confrontation" as "avoiding war." In fact, under today's global and domestic circumstances, the risk that a severe military conflict breaks out and triggers a large-scale war between the two is, though not to be ruled out completely, is slight. To reduce this

risk further, it is necessary for the two sides to strengthen military exchanges, establish a reliable early crisis warning mechanism and a crisis management and control mechanism.

What is more worrisome is the danger of “new types of conflict” and “new types of confrontation.” The “new types of conflict” would include cyber, space, currency and trade warfare that might turn out to be “smokeless wars” that would hurt both sides. By “new types of confrontation,” it refers to tangible or intangible international alliances or counter-alliances against each other, division of “sphere of influence,” costly arms race (including building cyber armies that mainly target at each other), just to name a few. Such cutthroat competition has already taken place, and it has to bring under control by way of strategic dialogues and establishing effective mechanisms.

Here, we might make a bold prediction of the time and symbol of accomplishment of the new model of major country relations between China and the United States. Now, both China’s new leadership formed at the 18th CPC National Congress and the Obama administration of the United States are committed to the stability of China-US relations. In ten years time, that is, by 2024, China will have a leadership of the younger generation, while the US will have had two administrations. By then, people born in the 1960s and 1970s will become the major players in the leaderships of both countries. The ideological stigma of the Cold War will basically have disappeared on them, to be replaced with a global vision of the information age. By then, the economic aggregation of China and the United States will be roughly on a par, and both sides will have already got used to such a power structure. Economic cooperation and social exchanges will have been further expanded between the two countries that will share wider interests. Despite great differences in their political values and social systems, the two countries will face similar global challenges and their perspectives about the international order and global governance may become increasingly similar. The two countries will establish more robust mechanisms for crisis prevention and control, but neither will form international alliances obviously aiming at the other, nor will they establish respective spheres of influence in the

Asia-Pacific region. The strength of all major countries will be in relative balance, and better established international coordinating mechanism in the financial, environmental, trade and energy sectors will have been in place. Such a situation will mark the basic formation of a new model of major country relations between China and the United States.

1 Samuel Huntington: *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Cheng Kexiong trans., Beijing, Xinhua Publishing House, 2005, p. 217.

2 Henry Kissinger: *On China*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2011, p. 520.

3 "Always Adhere to the Party's Absolute Leadership over the Military — Important Instructions President Xi Gave at a Work Conference on Party Work in the Armed Forces," *People's Liberation Army Daily* (Editorial), November 10, 2013; "Dare to Fight in Ideological Field," *Beijing Daily* (Commentary), September 2, 2013, p. 1.

4 He Yafei, "China-US Common Interests in the Asia-Pacific," *China Newsweek*, November 4, 2013, p. 42.

5 From an academic perspective, explaining the possibility of China-US confrontation is the traditional realists' viewpoint on the theory of international politics, while the belief that the political system and ideological differences lead to conflicts between US and China belongs to international political theory of the liberalists. The latter also covers such ideas as "democratic peace".

6 Richard Haass, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order*, New York, Basic Books, 2013.

7 Pang Xianzhi, "The Theory of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics Is Continuation and Development of Mao Zedong's Thought," *Qiushi*, No. 1, 1994, p. 23.

8 *Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Tenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* (passed on July 21, 1977), available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64562/65368/4429440.html>, May 1, 2014.

9 Melvyn Leffler, "The Grand Strategy of How United States Won the Cold War," in Niu Jun eds, *The Curse of Strategy: Research in America's Grand Strategy during the Cold War*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 9-17.

10 Wang Jisi, "Domestic Changes: America's Grand Strategy and the Basis and Driving Force for Its Victory in the Cold War," in Wang Jisi and Niu Jun ed., *Creating Hegemony: US Strategy and Decision-making during the Cold War*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2013, pp. 1-16.

11 Richard C. Cook, "The 2008 Presidential Election: A Revolution or a Bust," *Global Research*, March 15, 2008, available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-2008-presidential-election-a-revolution-or-a-bust/8350>, May 1, 2014.

12 Richard Haass, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order*, New York, Basic Books, 2013.

13 Henry Kissinger, *On China*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2011, p. 526. In the paper, "co-evolution" is translated as "gong tong jin hua". It is a concept that Joshua Cooper Ramo applies to China-US relations. Some Chinese contenders translate it as "gong tong yan jin," but this translation does not take into consideration the original biological connotation in this concept.

14 Dai Bingguo, "Stick to the Road of Peaceful Development," December 7, 2010, available at: <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2010/12-07/2704984.shtml>, July 1, 2014.

15 State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: *China's Road of Peaceful Development*, a white paper, September 6, 2011, available at: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2011/Document/1000032/1000032.htm>, July 1, 2014.

16 Wang Jisi, "No Matter Seen from Which Direction, China Is in the Middle — a General Strategic Thinking," *The World Affairs*, November 1, 2013, p. 21.