

# Competition and Cooperation: Maritime Relations between the U.S. and China<sup>\*</sup>

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In recent years, maritime security in the Asia-Pacific, especially in the East China Sea and South China Sea, has caught great concern from the international community. Struggles among China, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam and the Republic of Korea (ROK) over the territory disputes in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea continue to ferment. With its proposal of the “rebalancing” strategy in the Asia-Pacific region in the so-called “post-terrorism” era, the United States has shifted its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific and has taken China as its potential opponent. In 2015, marked changes have taken place in factors affecting Sino-U.S. relations: in March, the U.S. Navy issued *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, clearly stating that China was on the path of “maritime expansion”; in May, the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) published the white paper titled *China’s Military Strategy*, announcing for the first time that China would implement a strategy of “offshore

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defense and open seas protection”; and also in May, the United States sent P-8 Poseidon aircraft to the South China Sea, challenging China’s sovereignty under the pretext of “freedom of navigation and overflight.” At a time when disputes between China and the U.S. over maritime issues increase, mistrust intensifies over each other’s maritime strategy, and maritime competition grows fiercer, it will produce a vital impact on maintaining Sino-U.S. relations as well as peace and development of the Asia-Pacific region and even that of the whole world to handle well the issue of Sino-U.S. maritime competition and cooperation and establish a new type of major country maritime relations.

#### I. CURRENT ASIA-PACIFIC MARITIME SECURITY SITUATION FACES SEVERE CHALLENGES

Major Asia-Pacific countries are littoral ones, and maritime security is of vital significance in regional affairs. The Asia-Pacific region gathers five strategic powers: China, Japan, the U.S., Russia, and the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN). The Northeast and Southeast Asian countries neighbor one another and the region is a place that is active in geo-economics and complicated in geopolitics, in addition to being a center of global power and potential.

Since 2010, the maritime security situation in the Asia-Pacific has become unusually complicated with the U.S. “rebalancing” towards the Asia-Pacific, which had laid great store by strengthening alliances with Japan, the ROK and Australia, as well as its military ties with the Philippines, all of which indicate an obviously increasing tendency of containing China. In Japan, the Abe administration has actively pushed for revising Japan’s constitution and lifting the right of collective self-defense, and created tensions over the Diaoyu Islands issue, attempting to woo the ASEAN to its side to oppose China. Vietnam, the Philippines and some other countries relied heavily on the U.S. and Japan to constantly challenge China’s bottom line of maintaining its sovereignty in the South China Sea for their own interests. To counter the acts of a tiny number of individual countries challenging China’s

sovereignty over some islands and reefs in the East China Sea and South China Sea and safeguard its maritime rights and interests, China has been forced to take a number of countermeasures. These countermeasures have triggered misgivings and overreactions from the U.S., Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and some other countries. Hence, the maritime version of the theory of “China threat.” Below is a more detailed discussion of the complex maritime security situation in the Asia-Pacific.

First, disputes over the sovereignty of some islands and reefs as well as maritime rights and interests have kept heating up. Sino-Japanese territorial dispute over the Diaoyu Islands issue remains intense, and both countries’ sea and air law enforcement forces often come into confrontation. There is also no sign of resolution of the disputes over the sovereignty of some islands and reefs in the South China Sea as well as maritime boundary delimitation disputes between China and the relevant Southeast Asian countries, and provocative activities of the Philippines and Vietnam challenging China’s sovereignty over those islands and reefs have continued to develop. The ROK and Japan also occasionally make their own claims of sovereignty over the Dokdo islands (called “Takeshima” by the Japanese). In the Russo-Japanese dispute over the sovereignty over the Kuril Islands (“Northern Territories” called by the Japanese), each side claims it holds the territorial sovereignty over them. Finally, there come the fishery issues arising from disputes in maritime boundary delimitation, which lead to frequent occurrences of violent law enforcement.

Second, the involvement of major countries outside this region makes disputes in the South China Sea more complicated. With progress of the infrastructure construction China undertakes in the South China Sea, the struggle between China and the U.S. over the so-called “freedom of navigation and overflight” keeps heating up. Since 2015, the U.S. close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance activities on relevant islands and reefs in the South China Sea have been significantly increased. On May 20, a U.S. P-8A Poseidon carrying a CNN reporter intruded into China’s airspace over the Nansha Islands (also known as the Spratly Islands), and was given a serious warning by the Chinese Navy.

The U.S. even alleged to bring Japan and other external powers to “jointly patrol” the South China Sea, giving rise to a tendency of militarization and internationalization of the South China Sea issues. The U.S. blamed China’s activities in the South China Sea not consistent with international standards and norms, asserting that it would never comprise to ensure the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, including the areas surrounding the artificial islands. China, on its part, insisted that the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea does not mean that foreign military vessels and aircraft can intrude into a country’s territorial waters and air space at will. China would resolutely safeguard its territorial sovereignty.

Third, risk has been increasing for accidents on the sea and in the air. Although a consultation mechanism for military maritime safety was established between China and the U.S. in 1998, the two countries are divergent on the military use of the exclusive economic zones and the application of many provisions of the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), focusing on legality of close-in surveillance by American military vessels and aircraft in China’s offshore waters and China’s exclusive economic zones as well as of the navigation and overflight of American military vessels and aircraft around the Nansha Islands. All these lead to the rise of worries about accidents on the sea. In recent years, Japan has repeatedly questioned the Chinese Navy’s entry and exit of the channels within the first island chain to the East China Sea for training. The U.S. and Japan defied the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and sent aircraft repeatedly in the zone to make provocative activities. The probability of encounters of military vessels and aircraft from the two sides has markedly increased. These, together with the factor of dispute over the Diaoyu Islands, greatly increase the risk in the region.

Fourth, threat to the security of sea lines of communication turns serious. Most countries in the Asia-Pacific practice export-oriented economies, and this means that most of the import of raw materials and energy and the export of products rely on maritime transportation. Now, the number of oil tankers passing the Strait of Malacca into the South China Sea is three times that passing the Suez Canal and five times that passing the Panama Canal. Piracy,

maritime terrorism and other transnational crimes are the main threats to the sea lines of communication. According to an ICC-IMB report, in the Southeast Asian region, on average, small oil tankers are attacked once every other week. Among the 54 armed robberies by pirates across the world between January and mid-April 2015, 55 percent took place in Southeast Asia. Generally speaking, in the past few years the number of pirate attacks has gone down steadily, but the number in the first quarter of 2015 went up by 10 percent as compared to the same period in 2014, with the number of hostages being three times larger.

In addition, natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and tropical storms caused enormous losses in the Asia-Pacific in recent years. Losses caused by serious disasters due to maritime environmental pollution, such as the pollution caused by Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster, also display a rising trend.

## II. SINO-U.S. MARITIME COMPETITION ESCALATES

According to the Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy implemented after the Obama administration took office, the U.S. has viewed China as a "strategic rival" that is to be restricted and guarded against in terms of strategy and military security, and to be taken as a competitor as well as partner in terms of bilateral trade, regional stability and global governance. In addition, the U.S. also regards the Asia-Pacific as the center of U.S.-China strategic competition. In January 2012, the Obama administration released "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," in which it was stressed that the U.S. would rebalance its strategy and resources to ensure its "military superpower" position. On June 1, 2012, Leo Panetta, the then U.S. Secretary of Defense, made a speech titled "The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific" at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, emphasizing that "a forward deployment" by increasing troops would be the core of the U.S. commitment to this region. In April 2015, the U.S. published a new version of the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation, confirming that the U.S. armed forces and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces would be in close

cooperation and coordination responding to not only “regional affairs” but also those at a global level. The Guidelines also stated that the two governments would take measures to ensure that the cooperation and coordination between the two armed forces would be “seamless” from peacetime to contingencies. Overall, at the present stage, the U.S. China policy can be summarized as follows: competition and cooperation, restriction and precaution, regulating behavior, influencing development and avoiding dangers.

From the perspective of security, the main target of the U.S. rebalancing strategy is directed at a leading position in the Asia-Pacific, and its main content is to establish a new Asia-Pacific security system and to adjust military deployment, so as to enforce containment on China in a focused manner, especially on the sea. The three major measures are described as follows:

First, stepping up efforts in the establishment of a U.S.-led Asia-Pacific security system. The U.S. attempts to build an Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) based on alliance with Japan, Australia, the ROK and the Philippines plus India to strengthen strategic encirclement of China. The U.S. lays great store by the important role of the Southeast Asian region in this new type of Asia-Pacific security system and focuses on strengthening a security system of encirclement of China on the sea.

In terms of the approaches, the U.S. is strengthening its alliance with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand in diplomacy in addition to deepening its partnerships with Singapore, India and some other countries. Militarily, it frequently conducts joint military exercises with its allies and partners and keeps expanding the scale of these military exercises. In the regard of regional multilateral system, the U.S. takes the initiative to improve relations with Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and other countries to infiltrate into “China’s traditional sphere of influence.” The naval forces of the United States and Vietnam conducted a joint exercise, and U.S. warships have visited Vietnam for the first time. On June 1, 2015, Ashton Carter, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, visited Vietnam, signed the Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations with that country, and promised to provide US\$18 million to help

Vietnam purchase U.S.-made patrol boats. In its relations with Myanmar, the U.S. has taken more pragmatic steps and made a significant shift from hard to soft policies and from high pressure to dialogue. Regarding maritime disputes, it has got involved more deeply in the East China Sea and South China Sea issues, turning a blind eye to sensitivity of these issues to China. The U.S. has taken the vast ocean as a new frontier of strategic game with China — first maintaining “low-level tension” among the stakeholders in the maritime disputes and then standing out as the mediator or even the “rule maker,” attempting to bring China’s neighboring countries, particularly the Southeast Asian countries, into the U.S.-led multilateral security system.

Second, focusing on military deployment within the island chains to contain China. According to the plan announced by Leo Panetta at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore on June 1, 2012, by 2020, 60 percent of the U.S. naval force would be deployed in the Pacific Ocean. At the same time, the U.S. military would speed up the building of a chain of military bases, from Central Asia, through South Asia and Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia, to improve its military deployment of containing China within the first and second island chains.

Regarding the first island chain, the U.S. is intensifying efforts in beefing up its military presence in Northeast and Southeast Asia. On the one hand, it continues to reinforce its bases in Northeast Asia, stationing great forces in Japan and the ROK with well-developed facilities. In particular, 60 percent of the US forces in Japan, including the most advanced F-22 Raptor, MV-22 Ospreys and P-8A Poseidon, are deployed in Okinawa facing the East China Sea. On the other hand, great efforts have been made to beef up the Singapore-centered Southeast Asian bases. According to agreement made between the U.S. and Singapore, the U.S. troops can make free use of the New Changi, Sembawang and Paya Leba naval bases for a long time to come, so as to control the Strait of Malacca. Moreover, the U.S. also rented 17 military bases and facilities from the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and other countries for maintenance and logistics.

Within the second island chain, the U.S. focuses on strengthening

its military presence in Guam and Australia. It plans to build Guam into a center in the West Pacific to project its forces and new strategic hub to control the strategic development in Asia. For example, in the last couple of years it has deployed B-2 stealth bombers, F-22 stealth fighters, RQ-4A “Global Hawk” UAVs and four nuclear-powered attack submarines. It also has planned to deploy there MQ-4C, a new type of UAV, capable of staying aloft for over 24 hours.

In Australia, the U.S. has built a space surveillance station in Pine Gap. It has also announced a permanent military presence in Darwin. One American official said that the Northern Territory of Australia, compared to bases in Japan and South Korea, were closer to the South China Sea, clearly demonstrating that U.S. presence in Australia is directed at the South China Sea.

Third, getting fully involved in Asia-Pacific economic integration. In recent years, the steps of economic integration in the Asia-Pacific has markedly quickened, giving birth to such economic cooperation mechanisms as the “10+1,” “10+3” and “10+6.” In particular, the establishment of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area established in January 2012 and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank initiated by China have produced an important impact on the economic integration in the Asia-Pacific as well as the global economic order, causing concerns as well as worries from the United States. To disrupt the steps of the Asia-Pacific economic integration and further attenuate the influence of China, Japan and other major countries in the regional economy and politics, the Obama administration has been mobilizing its administrative, economic and diplomatic resources to comprehensively steer the course of the Tran-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) negotiations. The TPP is part of the new process of global economy. But, it is mainly aimed at the establishment of a new U.S.-led global and Asia-Pacific economic order, to contain, economically, China’s increasing influence in this region. Since the gravity center of China’s economy was in the coastal region, it boasts a heavy external dependence. The siege and interception imposed by the U.S. will have a direct impact on China’s economic development and maritime security.



### III. MAIN CAUSES FOR GROWING SINO-U.S. MARITIME COMPETITION

**The maritime competition between the U.S. and China intensified mainly due to recent policies and activities of the U.S.** Meanwhile, China's rise and the expansion of its maritime interests collide with the U.S. maritime hegemony. The following are the specific reasons.

First, The U.S. policy-makers stick to the "zero-sum" mentality. One important feature of the American Cold War mentality is to "look for potential adversaries." Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the American strategic objective has been shifted from competing for hegemony with the former Soviet Union to preventing any emerging power and alliance from challenging the U.S. hegemony, while China, in the eyes of Americans, has the potential to become the one to challenge its status as the hegemon. Since the 2008 financial crisis, unprecedented changes have taken place in the international order, so have the structural relations between China and the U.S. This has made the American strategic community to worry that a rising China may challenge the U.S. leadership in Asia, the system of its alliance, its control of international rules, the dollar's central status in the international currency system, and the right of governance over global commons as well as the Western values. The seas are of extraordinarily special significance to China's rise, as China's future security, economy, resources, environment and politics all rely on the seas. In addition, the capability of China's command of the space is also dependent on the seas. The U.S. control of seas surrounding China is tantamount to restricting China's economic development, energy import, environmental pressure reduction and sustainable development at the national realm, and also the development of China's command of the space. American strategists generally hold that the change of hegemony is closely related to the rise and decline of sea power. They are worried that China's increasing naval strength may weaken the American influence in the Pacific region or in the world.

The second reason is the United States' geopolitical need. The theoretical foundation of the United States' security strategy is its

geo-strategy, the core of which is to maintain the balance of power on the Eurasian continent and an imbalance of power on the sea. It is the vitally important national interest of the U.S. to prevent any single major power or any alliance of major powers from dominating the Eurasian continent. The major strategic means that the U.S. employs on the Eurasian continent is precisely to maintain a balance of power so that it itself can fully exploit the advantage as an “offshore-balancer.” As one of the few major continental powers, China has broken this balance with its vast territory, large population, fast-growing economy and rapidly modernized armed forces, convincing the U.S. that China will be its biggest geopolitical adversary on the Eurasian continent. The American strategic objective is not but to restrict China’s influence within the Eurasian continent and prevent it from expanding outwards to the seas, in order to maintain the balance of power on the Eurasian continent and the imbalance of power in the Pacific Ocean. Thus, China adjacent seas have turned out to be the place where interests of a continental power (i.e., China) and that of a seapower (i.e., the U.S.) collide.

The third reason is the influence of U.S. military transformation. The U.S. is convinced that its security and prosperity are closely related to those of other countries, as the U.S. military presence on the sea is mainly aimed at protecting and maintaining a peaceful global system, which comprises a number of networks, such as that of trade, finance, information, law, personal relations and management. To cater to the post-Cold War situation and needs, the U.S. has started military transformation. In this process, great changes have taken place in the U.S. navy’s operational opponents, concepts and environment. A series of documents issued by the relevant departments of the U.S. military pointed out the direction of the U.S. navy’s transformation and specific contents of the naval new strategy, including such important operational concepts as “from sea to land” and “air-sea battle.” To put these concepts into practice, the naval force must be “forward deployed,” “globally stationed” and “capable of global combat.”

The official document, “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower,” published by the U.S. navy in March 2015, further

stresses the enhancement of global presence and leadership. More specifically, it states that U.S. naval force should have the following five capabilities: (1) all-domain access, which focuses on developing new capabilities as countermeasure to anti-access/area denial strategies, and combining and coordinating all forces to defeat the adversary's combat system as a whole; (2) deterrence, which balances strategic nuclear deterrence and conventional deterrence; (3) sea control, which establishes local maritime superiority while denying an adversary that same ability; (4) power projection, which stresses "the capacity to sustain distant operations has served as a cornerstone of naval power projection"; and (5) maritime security, which supports the broad maritime governance activities of the United States and thus further provides a means of support for global military presence. That explains why the U.S. has expanded cooperation with its allies and partners. For example, at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue, Ashton Carter announced a plan to funnel US\$425 million into partner-building in Southeast Asia, aiming to enable those forces to operate "when it matters, and where it matters."

On the part of China, with the continued rise of its comprehensive national strength and the expansion of its maritime interests, its maritime consciousness has been awakening and changes are taking place in the concept of national security. At the same time, however, the media has over-interpreted China's build-up of its naval force. All these have become causes intensifying the maritime competition between China and the United States. A more detailed discussion is presented below.

The first is China's military modernization. With the expansion of its maritime interests and the modernization of its military, the armed forces of China have been growing increasingly mature, confident and open, willing to develop friendly relations with the military of all other countries and shoulder its due responsibility of maintaining national interests and world peace. In May 2015, China, for the first time, published the white paper titled *China's Military Strategy*, clearly stating the four missions of the Chinese military: to absolutely uphold the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics; to safeguard China's

sovereignty, security and development interests; to safeguard the important period of strategic opportunities for China's development; and to maintain regional and world peace, and strive to provide a strong guarantee for completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The white paper also spelled out the eight strategic tasks, which are: (1) to deal with a wide range of emergencies and military threats, and effectively safeguard the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea; (2) to resolutely safeguard the unification of the motherland; (3) to safeguard China's security and interests in new domains; (4) to safeguard the security of China's overseas interests; (5) to maintain strategic deterrence and the ability to carry out a nuclear counterattack; (6) to participate in regional and international security cooperation and maintain regional and world peace; (7) to strengthen efforts in operations against infiltration, separatism and terrorism so as to maintain China's political security and social stability; and (8) to perform such tasks as emergency rescue and disaster reliefs, rights and interests protection, guard duties, and support for national economic and social development. These missions and tasks cover traditional, non-traditional and new types of security fields. It is clearly stated in the white paper that the PLAN will endeavor to shift focus from "offshore waters defense" to the combination of "offshore waters defense" with "open seas protection," in line with the strategic requirement of offshore waters defense and open seas protection.

In recent years, with an aircraft carrier, a number of large surface combatants and new aircraft put into operational service, the Chinese navy has started marching towards "blue waters," such as sending flotillas to the Gulf of Aden to undertake escort missions, organizing routine training voyages into high seas, and conducted joint military exercises with navies of friendly countries, and its operation space will gradually expand to the Northern Pacific Ocean and the second island chain. Overall, building a blue-water navy is an inevitable outcome of historical development. However, such an objective of military modernization will inevitably collide with the goals of American military transformation. The U.S. is

convinced that “the aim of Chinese Navy in the next ten years is to become a stronger regional power to project its power to a wider area in the Asia-Pacific for long-time and intense operations. High sea maneuvers have become regular in Chinese Navy’s annual exercises.” In the foreseeable future, the U.S. will see China as the only country that has the potential to challenge its influence in the West Pacific and bring threats. Maritime competition between China and the U.S. is an expression of the collision between both countries’ military strategic thoughts.

Second, China’s expanding maritime interests. If the U.S. is a military superpower heavily relying on its navy’s power projection, China is then a big trading country turning increasingly dependent on a secure and stable global maritime system. At present, China imports 60 percent of the oil it consumes. In 2014, the aggregate value of trade in goods reached US\$4.3 trillion, of which that of export was US\$2.34 trillion and that of import, US\$1.96 trillion, ranking China the No. 1 in trade of goods and No. 2 in trade of services with an aggregate value of US\$607 billion. For China, it has turned vitally important to keep the transport channels to the Middle East, Africa and Latin America safe. The ocean has turned into a “blue aorta” for China’s economic development.

In October 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the initiative of building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This idea concerns a new maritime cooperative model that develops from the concepts of “from the near to the far,” “from the easy to the difficult,” from the point to the line,” and “from the line to the region” based on local practical situation, accomplishments achieved and experiences gained. This initiative has caused widespread concern in the Asia-Pacific. Various countries, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, hope on the one hand that China plays a more important role in the maritime connectivity and regional economic cooperation. On the other, however, they have misgivings that China might harbor some sort of political objective behind. China is not only interested in expanding its maritime interests, but also has begun to take some practical steps. It is reasonable to believe that China’s understanding of maritime interests has reached the strategic level. Yet, such understanding, together with its recent

activities, will aggravate the U.S. worries, which, in turn, flame the two countries' maritime competition and conflict.

Third, China has gradually come to some new concepts about the international order and have put them into practice. The first is the "new security concept" that advocates "cooperative security," "common security" and "comprehensive security," discarding "absolute security," "unilateral security" and "security in the narrow sense." The second is the concept of "a community of interests," which advocates seeking to expand the converging interests of all countries and striving to make the converging interests exceed the conflicting interests. Third, the "new-type great power relations," which aims at breaking the logic that a rising power and an established hegemon are bound to come to confrontation. Fourth, the "new responsibility concept," which advocates that the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" should be upheld in defining the connotations that both the developing and developed countries participate together in and share responsibilities of global governance. Fifth, the concept of "rising together," which advocates that the BRICS countries should rise together to form a cooperation framework of the G20 comprising of the traditional Western great powers and emerging powers. And sixth, the concept of "harmony in diversity," which advocates the combination of cultural diversification and different paths of development with the universal value of humankind's pursuit for a better future. The suggestion and practice of these concepts have caused over-interpretation and questioning from the international community, the U.S. in particular, and they tend to conclude that the rise of China is bound to challenge the U.S. world leadership. Related to this, the maritime issue becomes a window of the strategic game and growing confrontation between China and the United States.

#### IV. FUTURE PROSPECTS: COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

The U.S. "rebalancing" has admittedly the strategic objective of containing China. But on the other hand, it also shows the importance the U.S. attaches to economic development in China

and in the Asia-Pacific and its initiative to get involved in it. **Though the risk of military conflict or large-scale war triggered by maritime collision between China and the U.S. cannot be completely ruled out, the possibility is a million to one.** Despite that many strategists in the world, especially in the U.S., have expressed doubts about the “rebalancing” strategy and have little expectation toward the “new type major-country relations” between China and the U.S., both countries have historical responsibilities and are extraordinarily capable of correcting their own mistakes, and they should be able to avoid or make few historical and serious mistakes.

In the future, both China and the U.S. should proceed from safeguarding their own core interests, strengthen strategic dialogue, engage in confidence building, manage and control divergences, endeavor to find converging interests and avoid collisional ones, so as to develop a Sino-U.S. maritime relationship featuring both cooperation and competition.

On the one hand, competition on the sea will keep spiraling up. In terms of intensity, the Sino-U.S. maritime competition displays a gradually intensifying tendency. Still, some people in the U.S. view the competition with China as a “zero-sum game.” Such a view is deeply rooted in the United States. Robert D. Kaplan, editor of *The Atlantic*, wrote in 2009, “China borders Pacific Ocean and has a long coastline, which will bring the U.S. potential collision.” In the future geopolitical layout portrayed by Kaplan, China would inevitably become the most competitive adversary challenging the American hegemony, and the main arena of the “zero-sum game” was on the sea. The best example was the intense debate on the South China Sea issue between the two countries in 2015.

In terms of scale, the Sino-U.S. maritime competition tends to expand. In the 2006, *Quadrennial Defense Review* by the Department of Defense of the U.S., for the first time, cited China as its imaginary enemy. The concept of “air-sea battle,” introduced in 2010, is said to have been a response to China’s increasing “anti-access/area denial” (A2/AD) capability, focusing on preventing China from winning a quick victory and destroying China’s confidence to prevail over the U.S. and its allies. The 2015 version

of the U.S. Navy strategy points out specifically that China's "expanding sea power" threatens the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific. Along with its growing maritime strength and capability of conducting multiple military tasks, China will quicken up its steps toward the blue waters, heralding that the Sino-U.S. maritime competition will expand from China's offshore waters to open seas, and the scale of the competition will also expand.

As for the key area, there is the tendency to shift to the South China Sea for the following reasons. First, the South China Sea is an essential international maritime communication route, very important to China and vital to Japan. Second, the issue of the Nansha Islands is becoming increasingly regionalized, internationalized and militarized, and the U.S. is apparently determined to get involved. Third, territorial disputes in the South China Sea are escalating and conflicts in relation to the exploitation of resources are intensifying. And fourth, the U.S. has strengthened its air, surface, underwater and space surveillance and reconnaissance over the South China Sea. All in all, the strategic position of the South China Sea has foreseen the unavoidable rivalries between China and the U.S. over this area.

On the other hand, the areas of cooperation will expand. Generally speaking, the competition between China and the U.S. on the sea are born of military, political and diplomatic factors. It will be long standing, but unlikely to break the bottom line to escalating into a large-scale maritime armed conflict. There are three main reasons.

First, top leaders of both sides are determined to make cooperation as the main theme of China-U.S. relations. In June 2013, the heads of the two countries had a meeting at the former Annenberg Estate in California. They expressed their commitment towards building a "new type major-country relationship" based on the principles of "no confrontation or conflict," "mutual respect," and "win-win cooperation." Henry Kissinger, in his book *On China*, wrote that the U.S. and China should not have a "zero-sum" relationship. Instead, what should be constructed is a "co-evolution" relationship.

The sixth round of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic



Dialogue (S&ED) and the fifth annual U.S.-China High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange (CPE) were held on July 9-10, 2014 in Beijing. President Xi said in his speech that the China-U.S. “new type of relations” should be built up with the spirit of steadiness as if accumulating droplets to form a pool and heaping earth to put up a mountain. Xi also stated that if China and the U.S. uphold cooperation and avoid confrontation, not only the two countries but also the world will benefit. In his speech, President Obama expressed that China-U.S. relations have been strengthened and the economic interdependence has been deepened. Both countries should continue to construct the bilateral relations based on common interests, common responsibilities and common challenges. In the meeting in which President Xi hosted President Obama at Zhongnanhai in November 2014, again, both stressed the win-win situation through cooperation and responding to various global challenges together to encourage peace and security in the Asia-Pacific and the world. At the seventh round of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) and the sixth annual U.S.-China High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange (CPE) held in June 22-24, 2015, in Washington, D.C., the two sides continued the discussion of expanding cooperation and constraining divergence to reach mutual understanding. A series of achievements were made, including treating the protection of the oceans as a new basic point of cooperation. The talk created a sound environment for President Xi’s visit to the U.S. in September 2015.

Second, positive interactions between the two militaries are maintained. Since the EP-3 incident in April 2001, both sides have made great efforts to prevent confrontation on the sea and in the air. Through the endeavors of top leaders of the two countries, important improvements have been made in relations between the two militaries over the last three years. First, interactions between senior military leaders have become more frequent. The defense ministers and chiefs of general staff of the two countries have visited each other. High-ranking officers like the commander of the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), the chief of staff of the United States army, the chief of Naval Operations (CNO), and the commander of United States Pacific Fleet (USPACFLT)

have all visited China. Meanwhile, even at the time when the U.S. announced its intention to be involved in the South China Sea issue, the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (China), General Fan Changlong, led a high-ranking delegation to visit the U.S. as planned in June 2015 and exchanged views on hot-spot issues. Second, important accomplishments have been achieved through consultation and negotiation mechanisms. On November 14, 2014, the Chinese and American defense ministers signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on establishing the “mutual reporting and trust mechanism on major military operations” and the “code of safe conduct on naval and air military encounters” between the two sides. Besides, on the 14th Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), both sides were active in pushing the endorsement of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES). Third, joint military exercises and trainings have been increased. Since 2012, the PLAN and the U.S. Navy had begun their routine joint anti-piracy drills in the Gulf of Aden. In 2014, the PLAN participated in the RIMPAC exercises for the first time. Furthermore, in 2014, the two navies held a joint military exercise based on CUES and EXTAC 1000 Maritime Maneuvering and Tactical Procedures for the first time. Fourth, the military interactions between the two countries become more active. In the past year, the two militaries tried interactions in different ways and fields, including vessels visits, military academic research, and youth officers’ exchanges. In February 2015, a captain delegation of the PLAN had a four-day tour of the United States. They visited the Pentagon and three military academies, and talked to 28 American naval officers. This was the first communication between frontline commanders of the two navies in more than three decades of exchanges. In April 20-25, the U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* with more than 1,000 sailors visited Zhanjiang in South China for a relation-building post visit. On April 29, the two chiefs of the US and Chinese naval forces had a video call, exchanging views on such issues as the two navies’ cooperation, the U.S. vessels and airplanes’ close-in surveillance and construction of islets in the Nanshan Islands and so on. Even after the intense engagement over sensitive issues such as the confrontations of vessels and airplanes

in the East China Sea and South China Sea, both sides were willing to communicate, cooperate, manage conflicts, increase mutual trust, eliminate misunderstanding and reduce misjudgment to prevent unmanageable military conflicts.

At last, the nontraditional security cooperation has kept developing in depth. Along with globalization, especially after the September 11 Attacks in 2001, nontraditional security threats have become more outstanding, diversified and complicated. These threats include maritime terrorism, environmental damage, infectious diseases and transnational crimes (e.g., drug trafficking, illegal immigration and piracy). Clearly, these threats cannot be solved and dealt with by any single country. In order to counter these nontraditional security threats, the U.S. wishes to build a global navy which can maintain a prosperous and stable global maritime system. The PLAN actively undertakes international obligations. From 2010 to 2014, the *Peace Ark* hospital ship has provided humanitarian medical services in more than ten Asian, African and Latin American countries and the Gulf of Aden. By January 2015, the PLAN has sent out 19 flotillas, including 54 vessels, 42 helicopters, 1300 special operation forces and more than 16,000 officers and sailors, to the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy and escort missions. As its naval force continues to grow, China will play an increasingly active role in ways of providing maritime public security goods in international society to promote international security and world peace. Escort mission in the Gulf of Aden can also prove indirectly that between China and the U.S., maritime cooperation has more advantages than disadvantages, and that it should become one of the developmental trends in the future naval relationship.

## V. CONCLUSION

Though risks and challenges that the Asia-Pacific region faces is increasing, it is still the world's most dynamic region with greatest potential. Peace, development, cooperation and win-win have remained the mainstream in this region. It is the main policy choice of countries in this region, including China, to handle disputes and

differences through consultations and negotiations.

It is China's historical choice to develop a naval force to go to the blue waters; it is also an irresistible trend. China's naval force will implement the strategic thinking of active defense, and it needs sufficient capacity to maintain the country's maritime security and fulfill the country's international obligations. The strategic competition between China and the U.S. on the sea will continue. It is the first time that a status quo power and a rising power engage in a game featuring both competition and cooperation on the sea.

The contradictions between China and the U.S. on the sea will not provoke clash as that between Britain and Germany prior to World War I, not only for reasons described above, but also because that China's development of its naval force is neither aimed at competing for hegemony nor at challenging the U.S. position or the current international order. It is only to protect China's core interests and maintain lasting political stability in the country.

For either China or the United States to realize its aspiration and plan for security and prosperity in the future, the only way is cooperation with the other. The two countries should focus on common security interests and uphold the principles of mutual benefit and mutual respect, proceed from the lowly sensitive areas, make proactive efforts to foster a sense of responding to security issues via cooperation and keep broadening the areas of cooperation, explore new ways of cooperation, seek peace and security through cooperation, and eventually construct a new type of military relations featuring mutual trust, cooperation, no confrontation and being sustainable and a new type of major-country relations featuring mutual respect, avoiding confrontation and conflict, cooperation and win-win.