

Peaceful Than Offensive: China's Grand Strategy in the Next Decades

Wang Chengyu

School of Politics and International Studies, Central China Normal University, Wuhan 430079, China

ABSTRACT. *Based on security dilemma and ontology conflicts between China and America, this paper argues that an inevitable prospect for China's rise is a course of forceful actions conducted by the U.S. that isolate China from international benefits and pose threats to Chinese security. A "peaceful than offensive" strategy is raised for China, which argues China should actively expand and exert its force in reaction to American interference, but better if it can persuade or coerce America to be peaceful for a longer time. This article also proves offensive rise is a feasible choice among alternatives as it enables China to expand peacetime or scoop up benefits from its neighbors, meanwhile it wouldn't trigger real war between China and America.*

KEYWORDS: *China's rise, Offensive*

1. Introduction

Since China's Reform and Opening up in 1978, its amazing achievement in economic growth leads to a widely shared belief for Chinese continuous growth. Competing theories has been raised to explain the myth of China's success, and different explanations will lead to different beliefs for future strategies. However, in perspective of Chinese leaders, the situation is much simpler: Diverse theories, combined ideological concerns, make the efforts for finding out the real reason for success too complex. However, as Chinese current policy has led to a success, a wise choice seems to be maintaining the fundamental contents of current policy and making some marginal and gradual adjustment to deal with new problems.

Specifically, in the field of international relations, this logic leads to a strategy that China should try to keep status quo, which refer to the open international market for exporting merchandise, importing raw material and technology as well as the peaceful environment that enables China to allocates more resources in economics development rather than national defense. However, there are two significant political preconditions for western countries, especially the U.S. who dominated the international relations to accept China as a member of international market. Firstly, China has to accept a neo-liberalism rule in international affairs. Secondly, China has to be military harmless or at least act as it's not aggressive. However, these restrains are internally incompatible with China's wish to be a developed and powerful country.

This paper argues that China shouldn't expected to solve the dilemma by self-restrained in its political and military influence as long as American leaders values American hegemony as immortal therefore priceless resource rather than economic benefits from Sino-US corporation. As the current situation benefits China in a general way, China can keep a peaceful strategy until the U.S. tries hard to reshape the international environment for Chinese development. In the way China can both make the best use of status quo and be alert enough in face of the turning point which is inevitable.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part is the introduction. In the second part I'll discuss objective and perceptual reasons that makes Sino-U.S. conflicts inevitable. In the third part I'll introduce "offensive rise" as a necessary and affordable method against American forceful blockade. In conclusion I'll summary the grand strategy for China and some shortcoming for this paper that need further research.

2. Inevitable Sino-U.S. Conflicts

In the introduction, I've pointed out that incompatible goals between China and America will finally lead to ruin the open and peaceful environment that China relies on. In this part I'll put forward security dilemma and ontology conflicts to give a more concrete explanation of Sino-U.S. tension, combined with some empirical evidences to support the theory.

Theory of security dilemma points out America can hardly believe China as it's difficult to tell Chinese certain behaviors are protective or aggressive. These sort of concerns will drive America take tough reactions to avoid the worst consequence and put China into the same dilemma, which finally lead to escalation of conflicts. Security dilemma derives from conflicting explanations for an issue and countries always hold a conservative attitude to ensure their safety. Dilemma occur not only in military field but also economic initiatives which are political sensitive. For instance, conflicts around the Belt and Road Initiative, which is concluded as "offensive for defensive" [1] principle, shows that kind of concerns. The "offensive" side has provided America enough reason to suspect China was challenging its leadership though China claimed that it's for economic purpose of increasing economic ties with its neighbors and other countries or better preparing for structural changes in Asian production market [2] and the world's consumer markets. [3]

Militarily, these sort of concerns will even lead to more direct and fierce reactions. American military voyages in South China Sea and even in Taiwan strait impose shames on China which may trigger conflicts or even evaluation of the war. As for Chinese A2/AD anti-intervention and regional blockade weapons, though China claimed to fund it for defense purposes, it is a threat to the main means of US power projection, particularly an important challenge to the United States' key strategic goals of maintaining stability in the Asia-Pacific region and back-fence countries may unite to compete with China.[4] What make the situation more urgent are American quick developing CPGS and missile defense which have challenged Sino-U.S. nuclear balance and already pushed them to the edge of arm race. [5]

Besides, concerns of ontology security [6] even enhance the security dilemma between China and the America. Thomas Wright points out the reason why great-power rivalry was inevitable is that neo-authoritarian countries "share the objective of targeting free and open societies to make the world a safer place for authoritarianism" but pose threat to liberal world at the same time for fear that the democratic world will threat the security of their regime.[7] A perception that China is taking advantages form America is widely shared by American politicians and public, and Chinese also believe American benefits from its imperialist system, which make trust between the two major actors really hard to establish.

3. Feasibility for Chinese Offensive Rise

In this part I'll firstly analysis the necessity and specific way of offensive rise, followed by the risk analysis of offensive rise.

3.1 Necessity of Offensive Rise

A wise choice for China to solve the security dilemma seems to be self-restrained in military power and political influence. This strategy once worked, for example China limited its numbers of nuclear weapons to a relative low level so as to eliminates American concerns. However, this strategy can at most earn time for China rather than solve the problem of security dilemma, because America's concerns is bases on Chinese growing quantity of economy which has a potential to transfer to massive military and political influence. As long as the trend for Chinese continuous growing isn't interrupted, America will never be satisfied. And the only outcome of China's compromise is a more tough requirement the next time, which impose greater and greater burdens on China's rise. Thus China should take a "peaceful than offensive" strategy. Based on this strategy China should make the most use of peacetime, but start a "offensive rise" when American behaviors reflects its resolve that it will never allow China grow in the current way anymore. Offensive rise has dual meanings. Firstly, China can expand the size of both conventional and nuclear force to make its deterrence more credible. Secondly, China can exert its power to coerce other countries to gain any benefits about territory disputes, commerce clauses and so on, as benefits from peace are decreasing.

A seemingly reasonable query for "peaceful than offensive strategy" is that in history American forceful behaviors occurs just for limited times and each time it persisted for only a short period of time. The "offensive rise" strategy overacts and lead to economic inefficiency. However, there's an endogeneity that American limited behaviors are due to Chinese military deterrence. And this endogeneity suggests two important observations. Firstly, a transition from peaceful rise to military rise isn't a one-way or signal time process. It needs to be flexible and adjusted in time. Secondly, military rise isn't a call for war, on the contrary, it makes peace time persists. Admittedly, the U.S. can make use of China's aggressive response to cause burdens for China, but security dilemma and American desire for its hegemony in East Asia will force itself to undertake the burden at the same time.

Besides, as what I'll discussed in the next part, China indeed has a strong force currently. However, it's just

strong enough to deter invasion, but it's too weak to deter a cold war style strategy as blockade and isolation. In conventional level, as Michael Beckley points out, currently Chinese navy are still too weak to be dominant in East Asia. In nuclear level, China has so limited numbers of nuclear weapons compared with the U.S. and Russia that it's not credible for any goal broader than resisting territory occupation.

Thus in peaceful time China should prepare well for a sharp increase of military production and be alert enough to shift to "offensive" model in time. Specifically, huger size and more reasonable structure contains more ICBMs and SSBNS which can survive better and able to strike American continent are essential for future development of Chinese nuclear arsenal. For conventional force, a stronger navy and conventional missile system should be built to coerce American alliances in East Asia or create conditions for persuasion.

3.2 Risk Analysis of Offensive Rise

Offensive method is a risky but affordable strategy for China. To figure out the worst consequence of offensive rise, a vital problem is to whether America will react against Chinese offensive behaviors in a limited scope, or launch a toe-to-toe war against China. Based on empirical conditions, indeed there're some sensitive actions such as blocking American alliances or bases may trigger wars, however, China still have vast room to expand its force and influence as it has enough capacity to deter America in a much broader range.

In the following part, I'll focus on Chinese current capacity for deterrence as its serves as the base of Chinese forceful "Plan B". Firstly, China owns powerful enough conventional force to block U.S. invasion. Although China has no way to win a toe-to-toe war against America, it has the ability to challenge U.S. in some aspects. To explain more specifically, I'll show some evidence given by Thomas. Asymmetric tool such as sea mine, A2AD can be used to coerce technology superior foes. For conflicts near Chinese continent, American asset is limited and its troop may be trapped in other region which provide a chance for China. These can be concluded as Chinese benefits from a defensive posture.

Secondly, high possibility of nuclear escalation combined with Chinese strong enough nuclear force is able to deter American intervene. Even if PLA fails to defeat U.S. army in Taiwan strait, American will probably give up getting into the war too close to Chinese regime which suggests high possibility to nuclear escalation. To put this clearer, even U.S. strike China in conventional level, some perception reasons will boost the risk of escalation greatly. It can take place either as Chinese overreact because of lack of confident in survivability of retaliation capacity, which leads to "use it or lose it" logic, or Chinese intentional strategy to generate coercive leverage, by method like intermingle nuclear weapons in conventional weapons or C4ISR that make U.S. too costly to strike China.

4. Conclusion

"Peaceful than offensive" is a smart strategy for China in the next few decades. China should seek to rise peacefully at first, as it's a more predictable and reliable way. However, as China's rise internally conflicts with American pursuit of its unchallengeable hegemony, and security dilemma and ontology conflicts makes the process of reaching a consensus even more difficult, China can't always count on peaceful diplomacy as an access to rise, when American forceful actions occurs and compromise hurts so much, China should bravely and actively use its military force as coercive leverage.

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