The Challenge of a Rising China to US National Security

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A US grand strategy of cooperative security is necessary to address the challenges of a rising China. Traditional instruments of power seldom adequately resolve contemporary international issues. With the world’s largest population, China’s lucrative consumer market and industrious labor force has tightly interwoven its economic power into the fabric of the world’s economy. Further buttressed by its One Belt, One Road initiative, China can strengthen its economic power by leveraging influence to skirt the fair trade and fair labor agreements necessary to maintain a liberally based globalized market. Therefore, the United States must utilize a new source of power to address the China dilemma: its ability to develop and influence liberal multilateral institutions. This grand strategy uses diplomacy to leverage liberal cooperative security and financial institutions to both bound and reshape China’s power within the system to bolster US national security.

A cooperative security grand strategy coopts, rather than excludes, great powers. Grand strategy integrates all aspects of national power into policies that maximize gains at the least expense to the state. Simultaneously, states use international institutions to deter aggression by aligning policy goals in such a way as to enable mutually beneficial collective action. To this end, they establish cooperative security; and diplomacy—adjusting state relations by mutual agreement—is the tool that builds it.

International institutions framed within a liberal order naturally align with American ideals. Adopting a cooperative security grand strategy would therefore advance diplomatic cooperation under the auspices of promoting liberal ideals in relations between states. Despite China’s repeated rejections of Western conceptions of democracy and rule of law at a purely domestic level, the United States—in support of liberal values at the purely interstate level of relations—would seek to engage China as a potential partner in achieving common goals of stability and prosperity. This engagement would occur principally through institutions.

International institutions are the means by which the United States can expand its influence to affect an open and independent global system. Using diplomacy, the United States can leverage power politics to reframe concepts in terms of cooperation. This then shapes circumstances to align state preferences, or interests, with those of the United States—cooperative power. This cooperative power
would form the foundation of institutional restraint, being that the interests of powerful states restrain institutions. Subsequently, to enhance its cooperative power, the United States must guide existing institutions and lead the formation of new ones. Doing so entails promoting openness through enabling states’ independent decision-making as self-determining sovereign powers. Such openness is crucial to those organizations that then manage interstate relations regarding specific policy issues (e.g., the World Health Organization). Openness through independent decision-making compliments the centrality inherent in these organizations to make them viable apparatuses for shaping state interests. Thus, the United States would perpetuate a system among all states that is capable of shaping China’s influence in a US-advantageous manner.

As the UN provides a stable forum for negotiation, the United States must exert influence to bind resulting cooperation within a liberal structure. Considering the fact that the UN endures as an institution containing liberal and illiberal states alike, it presents the most influential conduit for states to communicate interests and find commonalities. Within the UN, the United States can advocate for vital liberal interests. These interests include open trade, transparency, and freedom of navigation at sea. Using cooperative power then ensures that these policies turn into international norms or laws to coax China’s compliance through multilateral pressure. This approach would remand disputed coastal territories—like the South China Sea—to cooperative international control, establish new public-private cooperation concerning internet governance, and promote open trade. Resultantly, the United States would bind China’s actions, spearhead governance in burgeoning policy areas, and avoid conflict.

Promoting cooperative international control through regional institutions provides an effective way to utilize liberal states further to counter China’s power. As a means of propagating liberal ideals championed in the UN, championing adjudication of territorial water disputes through institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) would empower Pacific region nations to pressure China to adhere to a liberal order. Considering that China has a stake in maintaining access to its sources of economic power, it would have no choice but to engage with ASEAN further entangling it in the liberal system.

Delving into the realm of novelty, cooperative security dictates that the United States must institutionalize internet governance. The internet and computer technology have permeated all facets of national power, not just information. Resultantly, it is nearly impossible to separate effects between the public and private sector when it comes to such technology. As such, regulating the internet in a manner consistent with liberal norms must be a crucial aspect of US diplomacy. This requires a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, the United States must
establish acceptable behavior in this realm. On the other, it must regulate growth in this realm. As such, the United States must increase its influence in institutions such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the World Wide Web Consortium, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and even the Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers to shape the development and sustainment of information technologies in addition to standards of behavior. Moreover, the United States must marry these institutions with other institutions of international governance to emphasize the connectedness of information technology and world order. To be sure, this strategy requires the United States to set its own policy on international internet behavior formally, but doing so disallows any narrative that would separate public and private internet activity and so shield the actions of the latter from the scrutiny of international laws and norms.

The United States must utilize financial institutions to combat the barriers of a closed sphere of influence. China’s participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization stands as an example of such a sphere.\textsuperscript{10} Cultivating wider economic interdependence breaks down barriers, which in turn promotes cooperation, access, and influence.\textsuperscript{11} To this end, the United States must take the lead in financial institutions that affect China, such as the World Trade Organization, to remove tariffs, promote transparent currency valuation, and reduce government restrictions to foreign investments. Through multilateral agreement, the United States can establish mutually concerning interests that would create the regulatory power to either encourage China's compliance or discourage noncompliance.\textsuperscript{12} If economic sanctions become necessary, the United States must extend its diplomacy into other institutions, such as the EU and G-7, to solidify the wide-ranging consensus critical to negating uncertain administrative management.\textsuperscript{13} Herein lies the modes of interdependence, and the means to break the barriers of China’s closed sphere.

Institutions that promote security through nonproliferation proffer a unique opportunity for cooperation. The nuclear threat from North Korea engenders a common interest between China and the United States regarding nonproliferation.\textsuperscript{14} Resulting mutual involvement with the UN Security Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) provides diplomatic access to cooperatively engage China. Historical evidence (i.e., its support of the 2013 resolution punishing North Korean nuclear tests) affirms China's willingness to cooperate in the Security Council.\textsuperscript{15} It would behoove the United States to allow a modicum of leadership from China in the multilateral Security Council. China’s diplomatic access to North Korea makes them an influential actor, and their previously failed attempts at unilateral negotiations highlights their need for support. Further en-
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twining them in the institution, the United States should encourage China to both share intelligence with the IAEA and increase transparency in North Korea’s nuclear program, thereby increasing IAEA effectiveness.16 These actions deter armed conflict by cooperatively aligning security interests and strengthening existing institutions, all within a liberal framework.

Notably, a cooperative security grand strategy still requires the United States to maintain a dominant military force. Most importantly, it requires the conventional capability to simultaneously win Pacific and European region wars, as machinations by China and its Eurasian allies stand to affect both.17 Burden-sharing, through alliances, eases this commitment. This too requires cooperative power. Military power alone may encourage initial participation as a product of necessity, but negotiated policy alignment is essential to perpetuate the alliance. NATO stands as an institution ready-made to facilitate such bargaining. Despite its lack of material contribution in the Pacific region, as it possesses other strengths, such as information sharing, capability development, and military skills training, that can be more easily accessible to the region.18 Through NATO, the United States will be able to form expedient military alliances to counter China’s regional power, share the multiregional security burden, and take advantage of knowledge and capabilities sharing gained through multiregional cooperation.19 Finally, such a sizable multilateral coalition provides the legitimacy necessary to use military force that remains consistent with a liberal international order.

Some argue that this strategy threatens China’s security by increasing foreign influence.20 However, China has explicitly made economic growth essential to its security, and that growth is dependent upon the global economy.21 Therefore, China has an interest in remaining integrated with other nations. This strategy keeps them integrated and regulates their actions. It also supplies the means to assuage fears through forums of negotiation and transparency.

Even still, the United States must address the preeminent challenge with such a cooperative security strategy: regulating the amount of pressure applied. Eliciting compliance without completely debilitating the state is paramount to preventing conflict because China’s economic security still necessitates a level of control over communications and transportation to avoid isolation.22 Stated differently, China’s resource requirements mean that excessive economic pressure would compel an armed response as a means of survival. Consequently, the multilateral pressure used to shape China’s behavior could make war inevitable. Therefore, the United States must create mechanisms by which to relieve pressure.

Pairing cooperative security with grand bargaining provides the outlet valve necessary to regulate pressure against China. Grand bargaining allows the United States to negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement on a variety of issues at once.
Such diplomacy provides the United States the means to apply more pressure in one area while simultaneously loosening pressure in another as a means of diplomatically preventing *fait accompli* situation. Grand bargaining signals to China that diplomatic dispute resolution is available for all policy issues in question. The United States and its partners would negate the use of force as a last resort; or at the least, delegitimize its use. At the same time, addressing multiple issues at once prevents China from gaining policy advantages in one arena while the United States focuses elsewhere—as is possible in a sequential approach. To be clear, the agreement would still recognize US predominance; but not in such a way that would invalidate all China’s interests.

Chinese leaders have stated that they are ready and willing to influence international institutions to pursue national interests. Their national interests stand at odds with US interests. As such, to sustain the advantages of a liberal order, the United States can neither abdicate institutional leadership nor ignore China outright. Ultimately, a cooperative security grand strategy maximizes diplomacy to leverage institutions as new sources of power to counter China’s unique rise.

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Notes

3. Freeman, Arts of Power, 72.
11. Freeman, Arts of Power, 46–47.
24. Xi, “Speech Delivered to the 19th Communist Party Congress [Selections].”