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Managing Asia: A 21st Century “Chingbirok”? Opportunities in Trade Balanced Against Risk Factors In East, South, and Southeast Asian Security

Abstract

Asia requires management in areas that interface, including manufacturing and assembly of goods, quality control, transportation of raw materials, delivery of finished products to markets, protecting intellectual property, providing services. Some management should be domestic, subject to different traditions and values within each country. Domestic Asian management, even pan-Asian management, is not working optimally. A “Chingbirok” or “Book of Corrections” seems required. Implicitly, this is an invitation for foreign partners to join into this conversation, because the welfare of all nations concerned depends upon effective and efficient management of Asia, especially the economies of populous Asian countries themselves. Actual and rhetorical belligerence should subside, Sino-American and Sino-European investment should be optimised, freedom of maritime navigation maintained through deterrence strategies. This paper will outline essentially an Anglo-American plan to secure a competitive maritime corridor across the “Near” Seas from Japan through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean, an overland railway and highway across the Russian Federation, plus an alternative seaway across the Arctic Ocean, rendered navigable by global warming. America’s primary responsibility may focus on protecting Taiwan plus East Asian countries, with Britain’s to concentrate on safeguarding the Indian subcontinent and Malaysia as its former colonies. Functionally, the United Kingdom and United States should assume a proactive role in providing investment and oversight across China’s “New Silk Road” to ensure harmony

and deter the outbreak of hostilities within Eurasia, exerting muscular intervention in cooperation with their Asian Allies as required. Concrete objectives should be to maintain self-governance of Taiwan and all Asian states, unfettered South China Sea navigation, preservation of Western technology from Chinese plunder or coerced acquisition, together with an opportunity for a rising Asian middle class to purchase Western goods without restriction, each a component of America's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy articulated by President Donald J. Trump.

Keywords: *Asia, ASEAN, China, "Chingbirok," FOIP, Japan, Korea, security-centric, Taiwan*

1. Introduction

Ever since World War II ended in 1945, Asia has become a "roller coaster," calm and prosperous periodically, intermittently belligerent with economies that have become fluctuating or fractured. As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, some signs forecast that Asia is coming undone economically and in terms of state security. On the face of it, this appears be the fault of China, a function of its internal political factions fighting and of its unwillingness to accept its place in the global order that is far from at the lead. This does not mean that China cannot rise. It does mean that it cannot, that it should not, displace the United States or the Western Alliance anytime soon, either economically or militarily. To try will mean to fail.

If China tries and fails, this may cause the Chinese economy to relapse, at the least stunt its economic growth, and render China less attractive as a trading partner. At the end of 2018, China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate had declined to 6.6 percent, a 28-year low, amidst its trade war with the United States (BusinessToday.In, 2019; Clinch, 2019). That may maintain the balance of power in Asia militarily and economically or even enhance American hegemony, whilst at the same time it is likely to precipitate price increases in products manufactured in China but purchased by Western consumers, leaving aside the issue of tariffs, retaliatory tariffs, or tariffs imposed multiple times on the same products. In addition, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has captured maritime shipping between Asia and Europe

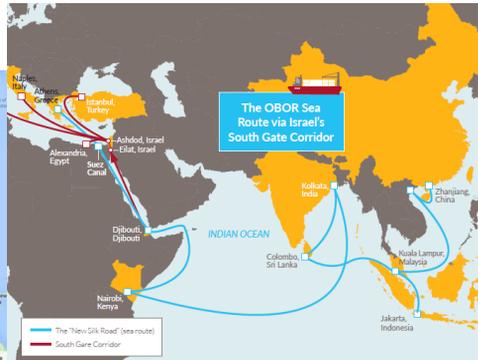
almost entirely, as Figure 3.1 below reflects (not necessarily between Europe and Asia in reverse, however), become embroiled in controversy and debt across BRI’s land route, as Figure 3.2 above reflects, almost entirely avoided aviation opportunities except for testing the East-West airways with Hainan Airlines, as Figure 3.3 above reveals (CAPA Center for Aviation, 2018).

Figure 3.1. Belt & Road Initiative, Overland Routes



Source: CAPA Centre for Aviation, 2018.

Figure 3.2. China’s Maritime Belt & Road Initiative



Source: Lin, 2016.

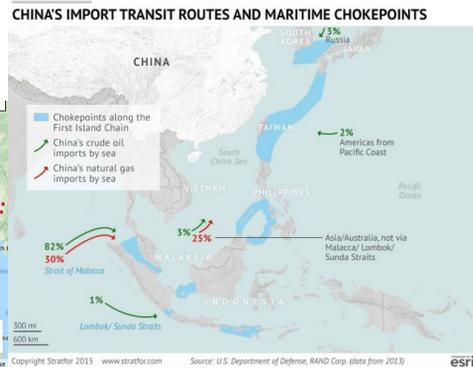
As Figure 3.4 above attests poignantly, the United States controls several “choke points” along with its Western Allies across what China calls its “Near Seas,” meaning the Yellow Sea plus the East and South China Seas (Lin, 2016). Rather evidently, the maritime component of BRI is dependent upon freedom of navigation (Bodeen, 2019; CSIS, 2016). Does this explain why China seems to have prioritised land routes from East Asia across South Asia to Europe (Arduino, 2016; Blanchard & Goh, 2019; Casarini, 2015, 2019; CNBC Video Project, 2019; Dunford & Liu, 2019; EEAS, 2018; Gere, Czirják & Pálvölgyi-Polyák, 2019; Gode ment & Kratz, 2019; He, 2017; Hillman, 2018; Kembayev, 2018; Liu, Dunford & Gao, 2018; Meltzer, 2017; Meyer, 2019; Owen, 2017; Pen netier & Irish, 2019; Qoraboyev, 2018), together with why suddenly China has come to behave obstreperously across its “Near Seas”? Managing Asia appears to mean reining-in China, primarily, diversifying Eurasian trade routes, precluding China from *encircling* Eurasia, the Russian Federation, South Asia, or Europe, as academic and military strategists alike have warned (Jones, 2015; Ayres, 2017; Mallick, 2019).

Figure 3.3. Hainan Airlines Eurasian Routes



Source: CAPA Centre for Aviation, 2018.

Figure 3.4. China’s Import Transit Routes and Maritime Chokepoints



Source: Vien, 2015.

This chapter addresses six challenges related to trade, another six related to national and commercial security, each as a precursor to a “Book of Corrections” or “Record of Reprimands and Admonitions” [*Chingbirok*] that seems to be urgently required in order to preclude a disaster such as that which befell Japan during and after its Samurai-led invasion of Chosŏn (Northern Korean Peninsula) between 1592 and 1598, known as the Imjin War, in Japan’s ill-fated effort to conquer both Korea and Ming Dynasty China at once (Hawley, 2014). Chosŏn’s chief state councilor (prime minister), Yu Sŏngnyong, wrote his *Chingbirok* as an aftermath contemporary analysis in an effort to warn Asia “never again” to embark upon needless warfare without hope of victory (Choi, tr., 2002). Hopefully, 21st century Chinese leaders will heed that admonition, as American warships sailing through its Near Seas “red lines” evidence it should (Martin, Wadhams, Sink & Lin, 2019).

Challenges related to trade are (1) diversion of manufacture and/or assembly of products away from China to the ASEAN bloc or elsewhere in order to safeguard Western technologies; (2) diversion of agricultural harvests away from United States farm belt suppliers toward competitors in Canada, Latin America, ASEAN countries, although post-Brexit United Kingdom might purchase much of an available American harvest, sometimes with United States funding; (3) encouragement of Western countries to manufacture their own components for 5G technology as well as future technology that goes beyond 5G, instead of delegating that task to China or potential adversaries that seem bent on consumer eaves-

dropping or technology piracy; (4) motivation of China to pour resources into the development of its own 5G and future technologies domestically, instead of relying upon availability of component parts from the West; (5) emergence of governmental regulation to promote more Western manufacturing competition; (6) implicit invitation of Asian countries, including China, to manufacture or assemble a larger fraction of their products abroad, in effect becoming domestic competitors with European and North American manufacturers in Western markets, creating an ability of Western companies to return fire by seizing Chinese technology in retaliation when China seizes Western technology, and by delisting Chinese companies from American stock exchanges for lack of transparency.

Challenges related to security risk include (1) driving China and other Asian competitors toward control of pockets of international waterways along Asia’s coastline (“maritime pockets”) in order to control, tax, limit, or preclude without their explicit consent the transit of foreign cargoes, thereby creating functional Asian embargos; (2) substantially increasing the cost of transporting raw materials and finished products between Asia and Europe, primarily, then potentially between Asia and the Western Hemisphere as well; (3) as a consequence, compelling more nations to become self-sufficient, particularly in products that impact Western national security, thus reducing “globalisation” across the foreseeable future; (4) motivating developed and developing countries to enter into alliances some of which will resemble neocolonialism, induce the improvident reconstruction and return of Asian empires or fiefdoms; (5) expanding instead of restricting international trade with tariffs and shipping restrictions, replicative of 18th century British actions that catalyzed the American independence movement; (6) weaponisation of tariffs plus non-tariff barriers (NTBs) coupled with an economic arms race that is burgeoning into an Occidental-Oriental naval and space race, with China crunched at the core of an ever-tightening spiderweb encirclement (Jones, 2015; Jones, 2020). Some ASEAN nations seem to be playing with imposition of restrictive Internet regulations, a rather transparent litmus test of an ideological shift they may be considering, however subliminally (Calonzo, 2019; Chen & Lee, 2019). Security and trade go hand in hand. United States negotiators relaxed some of their demands for China’s concessions, such as those on subsidies (Alper, Prentice & Martina, 2019). In this respect, the Trump Administration may be displaying weakness, inadvertently buttressing China in its quest for domination. United States military and naval strength require expansion (Apps, 2019).

2. U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy

Core to managing Asia as the 21st century's third decade approaches is the United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy, crafted by the Donald J. Trump administration in 2017, early in his presidency when critics contended that President Trump lacked a foreign policy. It has been labeled as an "accurate diagnosis, imperfect prescription" by Asian graduate students including Hong (2018). More accurately, FOIP itself has been diagnosed by prominent scholars as posing "challenges for India and Japan" because FOIP is becoming "security-centric," forcing Asian nations to take sides with either China or the United States (Lema, 2019; Palit & Sano, 2018), instead of riding a Sino-American fence as they seem to prefer doing, and have done, for decades. Even some European countries seem to be concerned about losing China's business, although some developing countries say China's business benefits only the rich (Miriri, 2020). By August 2019, China's factory prices had fallen significantly (Agence France Presse, 2019), with both its imports and exports down significantly, although China's trade surpluses with the United States were down by only USD One Billion (from USD 27.9 Billion to 26.9 Billion in August 2019 compared with July 2019) (Zhang, Chen & Lee, 2019). In August, 2019, China's industrial profits were down two percent from August 2018 to 517.8 billion Yuan (USD 72.59 Billion), according to National Bureau of Statistics data, compared with a 2.6% gain in July 2019 (Qiu & Crossley, 2019). According to China's *Beige Book* that has a good track record forecasting upward and downward curves in China's economy, Chinese factories were "stressed" even before American tariffs were imposed (Bloomberg, 2019). As China's economy tottered, so did that of other Asian countries, such as the Republic of Korea (Roh & Kim, 2019). Managing Asia is managing China as the third decade of the 21st century begins. Some call for revival of Alexander Hamilton's "American System" sooner rather than later (Zepp-LaRouche, 2017).

Visiting China in September 2019, German chancellor Angela Merkel strongly urged Chinese premier Li Keqiang to increase Chinese investment in Germany, a country heavily-dependent on exports (Lee, 2019). This came as United States defense secretary Mark T. Esper warned European leaders that China and the Russian Federation pose increased security threats to the United States and the Western Alliance (Burns, 2019): he "accused China of using its economic power and stealing tech-

nology to gain greater global influence,” asserting that “[t]he more dependent a country becomes on Chinese investment and trade, the more susceptible they are to coercion and retribution when they act outside of Beijing’s wishes” (PressTV.com, 2019). It came at a time when “China’s GDP Decline[d] to a 28-Year Low” (2019), when “[China’s] [i]ndustrial output rose 4.4% from a year earlier, versus a median estimate of 5.2%[,] [r]etail sales expanded 7.5%, compared to a projected 7.9% increase [and when] [f]ixed-asset investment slowed to 5.5% in the first eight months, versus a forecast 5.7%” (Han & Sato, 2019). When a country or a group of countries pose increased threats alongside weakened economies, this is not the time to shore-up adverse economies unless one desires to increase security threats posed by those countries with declining economies (Burns, 2019). In this situation, the Trump Administration is right, the Europeans misguided. To date, the forecast Davis made half a decade ago that China was on “*The Empires’ Edge [by] Militarization, Resistance, and Transcending Hegemony in the Pacific*” (Davis, 2015) has come true. Then what to do? Does the United States, does the West, face a *Return to Winter* meaning a Chinese-Russian axis leading to a new cold war, as suggested by Schoen and Kaylan (2015)?

Very clearly, the American FOIP strategy reveals an “accurate diagnosis,” the problem being that Western Alliance leaders seem to ignore the symptomatology of this epidemic or the need for any treatment plan, “imperfect prescription” or otherwise. From 2013 through 2016, China constructed some 3,200 acres of land involving seven islands on the South China Sea (CSIS, 2016), fortifying them (Axe, 2019a, 2019b), then conducting oil and gas exploration surveys within the territorial waters of ASEAN nations, proving that “megaphone diplomacy” has been all talk, little concrete action without the direct intervention of the United States (Gomez, 2018, 2019; Thu, 2019). Evidently, the United States and its Western Allies pursued an “imperfect prescription” in that China has continued to violate international laws, particularly on the high seas (Packham, 2019; Palit & Sano, 2018; Perwita & Tertia, 2019; Pickrell, 2019), as China has continued to conduct missile drills off the coasts of its neighbouring countries (Shepherd & Blanchard, 2018). On 28 September 2019, Vietnam’s foreign minister warned the U.N. General Assembly of escalating dangers in the region (Boudreau & Wainer, 2019).

American action is not “security-centric” enough, it must become focused much more on global and regional security to reduce risks that are

abundant in Asia: each of the six security risks enumerated above, together with the derivative implications of each, including loss of sovereignty by ASEAN nations with coastlines along the East and South China Seas, diversion of trade away from traditional East-West partners, damage to Western agricultural harvests, and to the health of Chinese consumers compelled to eat reserve pork and other frozen meat reserves instead of fresh food, imposition of negative instead of positive regulations by the West in Asia, continuous loss of Western, particularly of American, technology to Chinese thefts (Iaones, 2019), as well as the eavesdropping of American corporations to obtain business strategy secrets (Robertson & Riley, 2018), an unfair trade practice of gargantuan proportion. Together with technology thefts lies the possibility that imports of agricultural products from the United States into ASEAN bloc countries are being thwarted by sabotage in 2019. An epidemic of swine flu is emerging in more than 50 countries, those hardest hit being in Southeast Asia according to the World Organisation for Animal Health (Thukral & Maguire, 2019). In the West, suspicion focuses on China aiming to reduce demand by Asia for American animal feed.

In China, forced to rely upon frozen pigs to meet the popular demand for pork, suspicion focuses on the United States maneuvering to compel the purchase of American hogs as a means of offsetting dwindling hog sales to China occasioned by trade war tariffs. Hong Kong headquartered WH Foods is the largest pig producer and pork processor in the world, with operational headquarters in Mainland China's Henan Province (Plantz, 2016). It owns Smithfield Foods, the world's third largest pig producer and America's largest. At the end of 2019, China and Southeast Asia relied on importing pork products from the United States to support their staple diet, frustrated by tariffs cross-imposed by the United States and China itself. Amidst this scenario, American firms are withdrawing from China, heading elsewhere or returning home (Ruwitch, 2019). Unwittingly, China appears to be helping to "Make America Great Again," President Trump's 2016 campaign slogan. Whilst America slept, China may have endeavoured to take its place as a global leader by "stealth," as one observer argued (Spaulding, 2019), but "enhanced engagement" articulated in the early months of the Trump Administration (Storey & Cook, 2017) has made Chinese stealth backfire. That outcome has been enhanced by Chinese action or inaction as the case may be: "landscape" and "political infrastructure" have stalled China's BRI in its tracks across Eurasia, much as forecast by Sternberg, Ahearn and McConnell (2017). If ever there was a "grand design" by China as suggest-

ed by Vien (2015), it has witnessed erosion if not entire collapse. In effect, China itself has stalled in its own investing in BRI: The Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is recalcitrant, providing less than USD 2 Billion in funding between 2016 and 2017:

The bank’s president, Jin Liqin, told the World Economic Forum summit in China last year: “We will support the One Belt, One Road project. But before we spend shareholders’ money, which is really the taxpayers’ money, we have three requirements.” “...The new trade route would have to promote growth, be socially acceptable and abide by environmental laws” (Bruce-Lockhart, 2017).

3. Balancing, or Tipping of the Balance?

Maritime Security across East, South, and Southeast Asia is becoming imbalanced in favour of an increasingly-belligerent China that seems to be flexing the muscles it wishes it possessed. The trouble is, China’s self-assessment of its military and naval strength relative to that of the Western Alliance is inaccurate. An objective *Chingbirok* by Chinese leaders would lead to an immediate “correction” of Chinese global strategy: return to the “24-Character Strategy” advanced by Deng Xiaoping, China’s paramount leader from 1978 to 1992, “*Tāo guāng yáng huì*” [“duck your head”] principle¹ especially, such that proactively China will become less aggressive, precluding the need for the United States, together with its Asian allies, to tip the balance with economic or military force or both. If Deng’s projection remains accurate, then China must prove wrong Gertz’s declaration that it is *Deceiving the Skies* (2019) by plotting global supremacy. Already, following a European example (European Commission, 2017), the Trump Administration has whispered that it may seek to delist Chinese companies from being traded publicly on American stock exchanges, causing shares of China’s JD.com, Alibaba, Baidu, and China Large-cap to fall by 5.95%, 5.15%, 3.67%, and 1.15% respectively late in September 2019 just days before the 70th anniversary of the PRC’s founding, but also exerting a corresponding, albeit less serious, fall of Intercontinental Exchange (New York Stock Exchange owner) and Nasdaq shares by 1.88% and 1.70% respectively (Alper & Lawder, 2019).

1 “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.” See: GlobalSecurity.org. N.d.

4. Conclusion

Managing Asia is managing China, indisputably, be it in maritime confrontation, East-West trade, economic growth, transportation by air, sea, or land, China is involved. At times, this has been positive (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015; Morrison, 2019; Yao, 2019), at other times wishfully positive (Yao, 2019; L. Zeng, 2016; J. Zeng, 2019), yet at other times, increasingly more recently, negative (Shapiro, 2017; Gertz, 2019). Paradigms have not changed: Peace through Strength has been and will remain the watchword. No Chinese-Russian axis exists yet, America is being tested. However, Asia requires effective management. An Anglo-American plan for securing the maritime corridor from Japan to the Suez Canal is required. America's primary responsibility should be on protecting Taiwan plus all Asian countries, with Britain's to be on safeguarding human rights and welfare of its Hong Kong subjects plus the welfare of the Indian subcontinent, and Malaysia as its former colonies, plus the Suez Canal region. Both the United Kingdom and the United States should cooperate extensively to safeguard the Indian Ocean and the "Near Seas" as well as East-West trading routes further North: maritime across the Arctic Ocean, overland across the Russian Federation, to promote viable competition by reducing monopolisation of the "New Silk Road" or "Belt and Road Initiative" promoted aggressively by China across Eurasia. In this effort Japan and the Republic of Korea should be encouraged to join.

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