



(Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Adrian Cadiz, U.S. Air Force)

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter (left) and Philippine Secretary of National Defense Voltaire Gazmin shake hands on a Marine Corps V-22 Osprey as they depart the USS *John C. Stennis* 15 April 2016 after touring the aircraft carrier in the South China Sea. Carter visited the Philippines as part of an effort to solidify the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region.

The Danger of Delusions—and How to Prevent Them from Causing Conflict A Perspective on China

Col. Michael J. Forsyth, U.S. Army

In 2015, I had the opportunity to host a senior Chinese officer during his visit to the United States. During our time together, he continually expressed that the United States should have respect for China, and that it should not pursue a policy of containment. No matter the topic of discussion, the official always circled back to this theme. It seemed to me that this perception of persecution bordered on paranoia.

Assuming the Chinese officer's statements represented the views of his country's leaders, I was reminded of the historical situation with Imperial Germany before World War I. An unreasonable fear of encirclement influenced Germany's political and military class, a mentality that contributed to the start of World War I. I wondered if modern Chinese leaders, like German leaders of the past, were beginning to believe other countries in their region were attempting to encircle them. If so, historical precedent suggests that such paranoia on the part of China could have grave consequences, particularly if China overreacted to perceived threats to its sovereignty.

To avoid such misunderstanding and the consequences that might follow, the United States and its Asia-Pacific partners must work to debunk the notion—where it exists among Chinese leaders—that the United States and its partners are attempting to contain China. The United States can accomplish this with a carefully implemented strategy of balance.

Germany Before 1914

In 1871, a united Germany emerged on the world stage as a great power following the spectacular defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War.¹ Before 1871, the Germanic peoples were divided among dozens of minor kingdoms, duchies, principalities, and free cities, as well as the two major German states, Austria and Prussia—which were in competition for leadership of this widespread hodgepodge of political entities. In this contest, Prussia had steadily risen in power over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gaining great influence among these disparate and mostly poor German states, while Austria's influence had slowly declined. Nonetheless, these powerful German states were competing to unite the weaker ethnic German kingdoms under a single banner of German-speaking leadership.²

The competition came to a head in 1866 when Austria and Prussia fought a short war for

hegemony over the lesser German states. Prussia shocked Austria with a rapid and decisive victory at Königgrätz on 3 July 1866. The Austrian Empire assumed a subordinate position to Prussia thereafter.³ Prussia then established a loose confederation of German states that stopped short of full political unification. However, enough control of foreign policy and military affairs was ceded to Prussia that it could dictate actions to its neighbors.⁴

In 1870, long-running friction between the French and Prussians spilled over into war. Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck conjured up a crisis that would require Prussia to act to save its honor. With commitments of forces from the confederation and its own large army, Prussia fielded a combined army that overwhelmed France. At the conclusion of hostilities in 1871, Bismarck took the opportunity to proclaim a united German Empire under the leadership of the Prussian king, now emperor, Wilhelm I. In an 1871 ceremony at Versailles' Hall of Mirrors in Paris, the new state asserted its dominance. Subsequently, the new balance among the great powers in Europe tilted heavily toward imperial Germany.⁵ In just a few years, a new nation forged from a patchwork of disunited, weak kingdoms and duchies had become the strongest power on the European continent. As such, Germany commanded respect, and fostered fear, among its neighbors.

France, Britain, and Russia, perceiving a mutual threat from the new German Empire, formed what became known as the *Triple Entente* in 1907 to counter Germany's rapid rise. They considered their alliance an insurance policy against future German expansion, through commitments to support one another with military forces in the event of a conflict.

German leaders, on the other hand, naturally viewed this alliance as an attempt to stunt Germany's rise. As a result, German leaders—most notably Kaiser Wilhelm II, who succeeded Wilhelm I in 1888—came to believe their neighbors were attempting to encircle Germany. In Wilhelm's case, some historians believe his mental state bordered on paranoia. In his engagements with other European leaders, Wilhelm and his ministers routinely stated that Germany required "a place in the sun" and adequate living space.⁶ His thought processes are considered a major reason for the outbreak of World War I, in which Germany attacked first to prevent encirclement.

China since World War II

The modern incarnation of China as a nation is in some ways parallel to the rise of Germany. In the late twentieth century, China began to rise from a long period of colonial subjugation. In 1949, the Chinese communists defeated the nationalists after an extended and unforgiving civil war. This was the culmination of the struggle to throw off a colonial yoke placed on the Chinese people, first by several European powers, and later by Japan. Between 1945 and 1949, elements with competing Chinese political ideologies battled each other for hegemony over China. The communists, who emerged victorious, quickly established a harsh system of centrally controlled governance that doomed China to a period of stunted development and political suppression.

However, in the 1970s, a new generation of leaders began to steer China in a different direction following the death of Mao Zedong. The new leaders sought to bring greater prosperity and economic growth to China through state-managed capitalism. Communism was not abandoned, but many of its economic mechanisms were liberalized and modified to enable growth, albeit still centrally overseen by the party. This led to China's rise from stagnation and poverty to an unprecedented level of economic prosperity and enhanced political influence in the world. By the 1990s, yearly double-digit economic growth was pulling China toward a place among the top tier of nations. With its staggering growth came China's demand for greater respect.⁷

Similar to the concerned views of neighboring nations toward Germany in pre-World War I Europe, by the late 1990s China's neighbors began to fear it would encroach on their sovereignty. Chinese actions such as missile tests off the coast of Taiwan in 1996 and claims on the Spratly Islands that originated around the same time have fueled such fears.⁸ Therefore, some states have taken steps to protect their interests. For example, after a decades-long period of cool relations between them, India and the United States are cultivating a strong relationship that includes both economic and security agreements. According to Ted Galen Carpenter, initiatives such as these cause Chinese leaders to believe the United States is leading "a containment strategy directed against China."⁹

In response, China is countering the perceived containment through a rapprochement with Russia. Since

2013, China and Russia have been cooperating for mutual benefit. For example, in 2013, they signed a \$270 billion agreement to double the amount of Russian oil delivered to China. In 2015, Russia and China signed a deal in which Russia would build a pipeline to facilitate the delivery of natural gas from Siberia.¹⁰

China and Russia have a long history of antagonism, as do Russia and the United States. Yet, if China and Russia are now working together, why? For Russia, an economic agreement with China offers a way to stave off the effects of stifling economic sanctions imposed by the West because of Russia's heavy-handed actions in Ukraine. However, in China's case, overlooking the previous adversarial relationship with Russia appears to offer a way to counterbalance the United States, and thus provide protection against containment.¹¹ A historical parallel can be found in Germany's attempting to counter the Triple Entente with the Triple Alliance of Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Germany (as well as with an alliance with the Ottoman Empire).

In fact, the parallels between the nineteenth-century rise of Germany and the modern rise of China are quite intriguing. Much as Germany had emerged as a great power from a sprawling backwater, China rose in the twentieth century. Further, the claims and statements uttered by their leaders are similar. For example, during a 2010 meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, according to Washington Post writer John Pomfret, some attendees claimed to hear the Chinese foreign minister say, "China is a big country and other countries are small."¹² If that statement reflects prevailing attitudes, China's demand for respect combined with claims for regional hegemony—that some have dubbed a Chinese Monroe Doctrine—have the ring of an earlier time.¹³

One consequence of China's power is that nations bordering it, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan, have developed closer ties among themselves. Additionally, Chinese encroachment of international waterways has drawn the United States closer to these countries as well.

Although there are currently no formal alliances or reassurance treaties in effect, the sum of the tighter relations between the United States and China's regional neighbors is leading some Chinese scholars and leaders to believe there is a concerted effort to



(Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)

Concerned that the great powers of Europe were scheming to encircle Germany to limit its power and influence on the continent, Kaiser Wilhelm II, emperor of Germany and king of Prussia, met 8 December 1912 with top German military advisors to discuss courses of action including possibly declaring war. The meeting became known as “the War Council.”

contain China. In fact, as author Biwu Zhang notes, there is even the claim by certain Chinese scholars that the United States is stoking disputes between China and its neighbors as a way to increase China’s difficulties.¹⁴ This again echoes an earlier time, when the imperial German leaders came to believe the Entente was encircling them and that it was necessary to act. Misjudging German perceptions, the Entente’s soldiers, politicians, and diplomats failed to prevent the cataclysm of World War I in the face of a rising Germany. Will leaders act in a different way to avert a clash with a rising China in this century?

A Policy Proposal for Better Relations with China

The patterns of history perhaps can help us devise ways to avoid repeated pitfalls. Chinese leaders fear containment because they do not want China to lose influence, to stagnate, or somehow to become subjugated to the desires and interests of other nations, as before 1949. Such a future is unthinkable and intolerable to the Chinese.¹⁵ Therefore, how can the United States and other nations in the Asia-Pacific region change this perception among Chinese leaders?

Ashley J. Tellis of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has penned an excellent study with solid recommendations that could avoid promoting among Chinese leaders the perception that the United States is attempting to implement a containment policy. His approach advises promoting balance and cooperation versus containment. His main recommendations for U.S. policymakers to achieve such balance are to bolster regional actors, selectively deepen globalization, bolster U.S. military capabilities, and reinvigorate the U.S. economy.¹⁶ Effective implementation of Tellis’s overarching policy of balance and broad growth should be supported by four critical elements: transparency, engagement, inclusion, and agreement.¹⁷

For centuries, a balance of power among the world’s great powers, arrayed in blocs, was facilitated by political leaders for the purpose of maintaining peace. It was only after World War II that the United States implemented a policy of containment to counter the expansion of the Soviet Union.

Containment worked in that case, but it cannot work in reference to China. First, the Chinese and U.S. economies are inextricably interconnected. By contrast, during the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet economies were almost completely separated as trading partners in competing ideological blocs. Second, China’s geopolitical location makes containment extremely problematic because of its centrality in the Pacific Rim. In addition, Soviet expansion ambitions were worldwide, whereas China does not necessarily desire expansion, even on a regional level. In reality, what China most likely wants is regional hegemony and recognition as the first nation in the Pacific. Therefore, containing China would accomplish little since its ambitions are limited to its own region.¹⁸ Thus, balancing makes more sense than

containing, but how could it work?

Balancing is not about building a bloc of nations in Asia to counter China from a military or economic perspective. Rather, as Tellis points out, creating balance in Asia “would focus mainly on restricting Beijing’s capacity to misuse its growing national capabilities in ways that undermine American power.”¹⁹ Instead of forming competing camps, balance would push China toward conforming to international norms.

To implement a balancing strategy, the United States must “buttress its Asian partners, redress the losses ... [the United States has] suffered because of China’s participation in global trade, reinvest in sustaining the military superiority necessary for effective U.S. power projection worldwide, and revitalize its national economy.”²⁰

In sum, balance is about rebuilding American strength while working closely with friends in the region, building them up, and settling the fears they have that could cause unnecessary confrontations. Thus, the United States should be seen as redirecting its energy to solidify its own economy and strengthen friends rather than seeming to seek containment of China.

To make such a strategy of balance work, the United States first must conduct its efforts with 100 percent transparency.²¹ Transparency helps build trust, and building trust is the only way to break down the suspicions held by the Chinese. Therefore, the United States should make a crystal clear statement of its policy of balance, and its support for broad



(Photo by Mass Communications Spc. 1st Class Nardel Gervacio, U.S. Navy)

Senior Capt. Wang Jianxum, deputy chief of staff of East Sea Fleet, People’s Liberation Army (Navy), and commander, Escort Task Group, Chinese Navy Ship *Jinan*, gives a tour of the ship’s bridge to Rear Adm. John Fuller, commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, 13 December 2015 during a routine port visit to Hawaii.

growth for all nations in the Pacific Rim “to realize their strategic potential and increase their mutual cooperation” for the benefit of all.²² The policy should integrate all instruments of national power, with a balance between diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments.

Second, Tellis states, “the United States (and its friends) ought to engage China at multiple levels, both bilaterally and multilaterally,” including industrial, social, military, and educational exchanges.²³ In his analysis of Chinese perceptions, Zhang found a train of thought among some Chinese scholars that could translate to support for the approach put forward by Tellis. This suggests there could be opportunity to conduct meaningful engagement with the Chinese without stoking fears of encirclement.²⁴

However, the United States needs to avoid conducting engagements that add up to inconsistency in overall policy. Inconsistency gives the appearance of weakness and a lack of integrity. Moreover, the military should not appear to be leading the policy

initiatives, while diplomatic, informational, and economic concerns trail at a distance. This can lead to misinterpretation and mistrust, with Chinese leaders railing against efforts intended to build relations and improve cooperation and partnership. Thus, engagement must have a clear message, evenly communicated across all elements of national power, with the military in support.

Third, the United States has to include China in all international decisions and in development of world protocols and policy.²⁵ China cannot be allowed to act as a bystander on the world stage.

At present, China tends to use its policy of nonintervention in other nations' domestic affairs to avoid participating in efforts to maintain global stability. China sometimes stands on the sideline in world crises, criticizing others who attempt to bring order out of chaos. However, China can no longer reserve the right to complain while not putting a shoulder to the wheel if it is to gain the respect it desires. If China wants respect, it should be called out to become more engaged in the world community. It should be encouraged to partner with other nations to prevent or stabilize crises for the betterment of all.²⁶ Tellis points out in his study that the United States must persuade China to accept this.

Finally, in spite of the myriad areas of disagreement, Tellis identifies efforts in which China, its neighbors, and the United States can work together. Among them is cooperation in deepening trade links and combating terrorism.

All nations in the Asia-Pacific region benefit immensely from trade with one another. Expanding trade among nations can bring rewards for all participants.²⁷ Additionally, China, the United States, and their partners collectively remain vulnerable to terror groups. The United States has learned many lessons

over the past decade that could assist China, which has a significant threat from radical Islam in its northwest provinces. The two countries and others in the region could partner to attack this common problem. Such cooperation could help break down barriers, build trust and rapport, and prevent China from misinterpreting the intent of other nations.

Conclusion

History is not a template that can be used to predict specific future events or outcomes. However, a review of the past can reveal patterns from which to consider today's challenges. A cursory review of events demonstrates eerie similarities between imperial Germany of a century ago and China today. A sense of encirclement paranoia influenced the behavior of German leaders, leading to missteps that plunged the world into a devastating war. Based on my personal observation and a survey of published sources, China could be developing a similar delusion that the United States is leading an effort to contain it. The danger is that such a situation could lead to miscalculation and overreaction—unnecessary conflict.

Conflict is preventable if the United States uses all the instruments of national power to achieve a balance of power in which China is not constricted. A policy of balance should build up the U.S. economy as well as its partners, maintain U.S. military power, and take the focus off China. Inherent to the success of such a policy is reducing the sense among Chinese leaders that the United States is trying to contain it. The United States can accomplish this by communicating clearly its desire for mutual benefit.

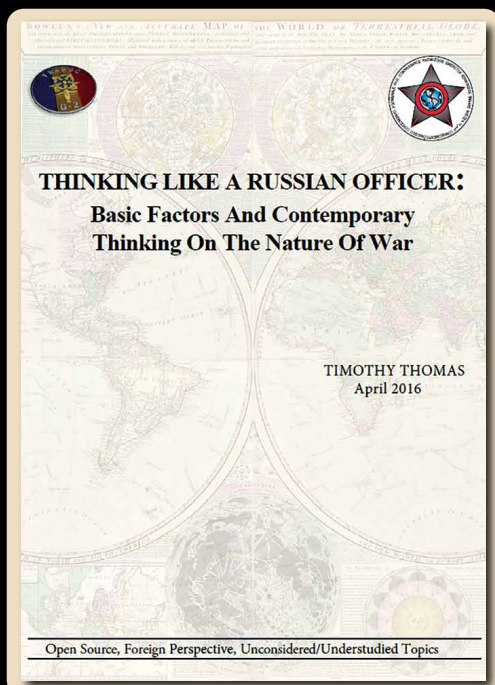
Cultivating a partner in China—in conjunction with friends in the region—rather than an adversary may avert a collision that would prove devastating to all. ■

Biography

Col. Michael J. Forsyth, U.S. Army, is the chief of staff of the Alaskan NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) Region and Alaskan Command at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. He holds an MS in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College and master's degrees from the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies and Louisiana State University. He previously commanded the 196th Infantry Brigade at Fort Shafter, Hawaii. Forsyth served four combat tours, one during Operation Desert Storm and three tours in Afghanistan. He is the author of three books about Civil War campaigns.

Notes

1. Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 510.
2. *Ibid.*, 531–33.
3. *Ibid.*, 542 and 545–46.
4. Michael Sturmer, *The German Empire, 1870-1918* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 15–24.
5. Sturmer, *The German Empire*, 3–5; and Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 33–34.
6. Sturmer, *The German Empire*, xxi, 84–85, and 88–90; and Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 553–55.
7. Ashley J. Tellis, *Balancing Without Containment: An American Strategy for Managing China* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014), 3 and 13.
8. John Thornhill, "China's Neighbors Get Nervous" International Forum online, 2 December 2002, accessed 12 May 2016, <http://www.internationalforum.com/Articles/chinas%20neighbors%20get%20nervous%20by%20Thornhill.htm>.
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11. Peter Harris, "The Geopolitics of Sino-Russian Rapprochement," *The Diplomat* online, 11 July 2014, accessed 12 May 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/the-geopolitics-of-sino-russian-rapprochement/>; and Daniel Wagner, "Why the China/Russia Rapprochement Won't Last," *Huffington Post* website, last modified 10 January 2015, accessed 12 May 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/china-russia-rapprochement_b_6133480.html.
12. John Pomfret, "U.S. Takes a Tougher Tone With China," *Washington Post* website, 30 July 2010, accessed 10 May 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072906416.html>.
13. Tellis, *Balancing Without Containment*, 5. Tellis appears to have introduced the idea that Chinese foreign policy toward its neighbors is a type of Monroe Doctrine.
14. Biwu Zhang, "Chinese Perceptions of US Return to Southeast Asia and the Prospect of China's Peaceful Rise," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24(91) (2015): 185–87 and 189. doi:10.1080/10670564.2014.918419. The author of this study notes that he analyzed eighty-three articles and papers from a variety of scholarly Chinese journals. Of this sample, seventy-five articles took a negative view of U.S. actions involving China. Thirty-five of those took a position that U.S. efforts weakened China's influence in Southeast Asia or worsened its security situation, suggesting a prevailing perception that U.S. policy is aimed at undermining China.
15. *Ibid.*, 188.
16. Tellis, *Balancing Without Containment*, x.
17. *Ibid.*, ix–x, 5–6, 38, 50, and 84.
18. *Ibid.*, 2, 24, 29–30, and 35–36.
19. *Ibid.*, 32.
20. *Ibid.*, 33.
21. *Ibid.*, 84.
22. *Ibid.*, 36.
23. *Ibid.*, 37.
24. Zhang, "Chinese Perceptions of US Return to Southeast Asia," 189–90. Zhang found that twenty-nine of the eighty-three papers examined put forth recommendations for Chinese engagement with the United States. Many of them suggest an approach similar to that of Tellis.
25. Tellis, *Balancing Without Containment*, 87.
26. *Ibid.*, 37–39.
27. *Ibid.*, 38–39 and 42–44.



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The first part of this two-part monograph provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of Russian military thinking with regard to modern warfare, with insight into the decision processes that culminated in annexation of Georgian territory as well as the Crimea from Ukraine. The second part discusses the views of various Russian military authors who have written on various components of the emerging nature of war. This monograph provides a succinct primer for those wishing to catch up on the most current Russian views of military force as they relate to other elements of national power and is especially valuable for understanding the Russian perspective on events as they continue to unfold in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and Syria.

[http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Thinking%20Like%20A%20Russian%20Officer_monograph_Thomas%20\(final\).pdf](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Thinking%20Like%20A%20Russian%20Officer_monograph_Thomas%20(final).pdf)