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Contested Asia's New Geopolitics

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The dynamic economic growth of the world's most populous continent gave rise to the anticipation that the 21st Century would be an Asian one in the manner in which the 20th had been American.¹ As wealth and power returned from the North Atlantic to the region where, viewed from the *long duree*, it had been located for most of the past few millennia, many anticipated an economic boom as the region's burgeoning middle class drove consumption-led growth as well as an extend period of peace and stability.² After all Asian prosperity had been made possible by the geopolitical accord created by the rapprochement reached by China and the US in the 1970s. And as those two countries came to trade more with one another, the golden strait-jacket of shared economic interests led many to think that the combustibility of the first few decades of the Cold War had been banished forever from the region's international relations.

The turbulence of the past few years has cast doubt on that conventional wisdom. North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the territorial disputes in the East and South China Sea, and high altitude stand-offs between India and China are just some of the most visible forms of an increasingly contested Asia. Where in the past, the US and China sought to carefully manage their relationship, now mistrust and ill-will dominates thinking on both sides. Doubts over American power and purpose have been growing for some years and they have been accelerated by Donald Trump's first two years in office.

Defence expenditure is rising as Asian states funnel their new found wealth into managing a growing sense of insecurity.³ And nationalism has returned as a potent political force in both Asia's authoritarian polities and its democracies. As a consequence of all this, Asia's regional security environment is more unsettled than at any time since the end of the Indochina wars. The optimism of the early part of the 21st century, when many thought that US-China relations were firmly fixed on a positive track and that democracy was on the

¹ Kishore Mahbubani, "The New Asian Hemisphere. The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East", New York: *Public Affairs*, 2008.

² See for example: Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* Canberra, October 2012, <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/173301279?q&versionId=188894954>>.

³ See: IISS, *The Military Balance. 2018*, London: Routledge for IISS, 2018.

march, is gone. While the region retains much of its economic lustre, its geopolitics have become extraordinarily fraught.

In this paper, I will examine the emergence of Asia's dangerous new geopolitical setting. I will identify the key forces at play in the region and how the overlay of a decaying order with several competing new security orders is adding further complication to Asia's international affairs. The paper will conclude by considering a number of paths down which the region's security order may travel based on the trends identified here.

Asia has entered a new geopolitical phase of the post 1945 era. During the first phase, from 1949 to 1979, conflict was the dominant geopolitical theme. The high intensity conflicts in Korea and Indochina, with millions of soldiers and civilians killed, made the region the bloodiest part of the world during those decades. The second phase was engineered by a dramatic diplomatic transformation in the mid to late 1970s. From a place where there were more battlefield deaths than anywhere else it shifted to a place of almost utter tranquillity, at least in relative terms.⁴ Low intensity conflicts persisted in Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma and the Philippines. But in comparison to the carnage that had come before, these conflicts were of peripheral concern. In 1979, the Cold War in Asia effectively ended, understood in the sense that the ideological and geostrategic competition ceased to be the key feature of the regional security setting. From 1979 until 2012 consensus prevailed in Asia. Consensus about the dominant role played by the United States, consensus about the form and function of Asia's regional order and virtually all states shared an emphasis on domestic state and nation building over international concerns. This created the geopolitical conditions that allowed the most rapid and widespread economic expansion in human development in history. But that economic growth, and the nature of the regimes in the region, meant that conditions that created that period would not last forever. The third phase, contested Asia, began to take shape in 2012 with the accession of Xi Jinping as China's paramount leader alongside growing doubts about US power and purpose.

At first glance, Asia's geopolitics look to have much of the same contour lines as have been in place for decades. US military power predominates. In conventional terms it retains maritime and air superiority and managed this through a series of bilateral alliances and quasi-alliance arrangements. As a non-resident power the US depends on arrangements with key regional countries to ensure it can project force effectively and efficiently. The key security fault-lines also remain much as they have been for decades. The two Cold War hangovers — the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan — remain significant points of tension while the old maritime disputes of the East and South China Sea are also potential triggers.

So at what might be described as the structural level of the region's geopolitics — the distribution of power and the key fault-lines — there is a reasonable degree of continuity. And yet the sense of uncertainty and insecurity in the region is at its highest level since the mid-1970s if not earlier. This is being driven by changes in key features of the geopolitical landscape.

⁴ Timo Kivomaki, *The Long East Asian Peace*, London: Routledge, 2014.

China Contests the Status Quo

The most significant of these changes has been the adoption of a more muscular and assertive approach by China toward its regional security interests. This has several dimensions. First, China is seeking to significantly enhance its war fighting capability and to increase the reach of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Where in the past China's military has been focused on internal security and defence of the PRC's territorial sovereignty, the country is now looking to significantly strengthen its capacity to advance its interest at some distance from Chinese territory. This includes the development of aircraft carriers, submarines and fifth generation fighter jets. It also includes developing the capacity to significantly increase the cost of conventional conflict with the US. Even under the most optimistic scenario China is unlikely to become a genuine peer competitor with the US in conventional military terms over the next 20 years, but it is seeking to develop capacity to use its geographic advantage as a resident power in Asia to make the cost of fighting for the US unbearably high.

Second, China is expanding the conception of its core interests and is acting more assertively to advance and defend those interests. The most obvious form this has taken has been in relation to its interests in its maritime approaches and the increasingly confident and destabilising steps it has taken in this domain. This began in 2009 with the lodging of the '9 Dashed Line' map with the UN in relation to continental shelf claims made by the Philippines and Vietnam. More recently, this has entailed building substantial artificial islands and installations in the contested features of the South China Sea. While it has received less attention than the South China Sea, the PRC has also been very active in advancing its claims in the East China Sea. The PRC has long held interests in these areas but until recently it lacked either the capacity or the political will to make good on its claims. Limited capacity and a conscious choice to pursue a low-risk approach has been replaced by increased military wherewithal and the preparedness to take increased risks.

Third, in grand strategic terms China has indicated that it is no longer content with the terms of the deal struck between Mao and Nixon in the 1970s. Its dissatisfaction with what it perceives to be price-taker position in the regional order is clear. But it is much less obvious just what kind of region it would prefer or what steps it is prepared to take to achieve that goal. Indeed, long term strategic ends are not yet settled amongst elites of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with different perspectives evident within the various branches of the party state. But just because there is no settled grand plan, Beijing remains dissatisfied with the status quo. These three changes, within material capacity, the conception of its interests and confidence and its longer term strategy represent a significant set of changes to how the region's most important resident power approaches Asia's geopolitical landscape.

Doubts about US Power and Purpose

The second important change to the region relates to the region's other key geostrategic power, the United States. For decades, the US has been the most important player in the region. Its unparalleled conventional and nuclear capacity kept regional security dilemmas in check, allowed the region's countries to devote more resources to domestic development and ensured that vital arteries of the global economy were kept free from predation. All this was predicated on both the empirical fact of US military power and a clear and long term commitment to an overarching regional strategy. Over the past decade or so

the region has begun to experience doubt about US power and its overarching purpose. American relative economic decline is real and will continue over the coming years. Yet it is a mistake to assume that as its relative share of the global economic pie shrinks its military advantage will inevitably decline. The share of GDP that the US devotes to defence is entirely affordable (it has averaged between 3.5-4% of GDP over the past decade or so) and the longer run trajectory of US force development does not appear to entail significant retrenchment. Indeed the current administration has outlined plans to ramp up spending and to develop a bigger strategic footprint than the recent past.⁵ The change is less about capacity and more about intent and planning. Where in the past the US had a clear and consistent plan — to ensure there was no peer challenger to its military power in the region — which had long term bipartisan support and an extensive and carefully managed network of regional relationships, there is now uncertainty around the purpose of US power. This uncertainty relates both to the credibility of the US security guarantee and to the long term commitment and intent for its regional presence. To be clear these are doubts that are held in the region and not a fundamental lack of confidence in US strategic will and purpose, but even this relatively subtle shift about whether the US would use force and just what its long run ambition is constitute a meaningful change from the long term geopolitical pattern in East Asia.

While the trajectory of Chinese and US policy, as well as their bilateral security relations, reflect long term trends; Trump did not emerge from thin air and upend a stable and well managed state of strategic affairs. Doubts about the country's long term commitment and credibility have been around for six to eight years. But on one issue above all else he has made a significant difference. In his near two years in office, Trump has finally made good on his campaign rhetoric of trade war with China. The escalation of the trade conflict, and the support that Trump has within the country and amongst business elites, means that he is unlikely to back down. The PRC, at present, equally looks unwilling to make the kinds of concessions Trump wants. Assuming that a tariff war remains in place over the longer run there is a risk that trade conflict could lead to a decoupling of economic interests of the two most important economies in the world. In the past, their economic interdependence acted as an important break on mutual acrimony and was thought by many to be a bulwark against the rivalry of recent years escalating into fully blown geopolitical contest. There is a strong chance that those economic guardrails may cease to exist and that economic competition will add further momentum to an increasingly rancorous relationship. From Beijing's point of view, Trump's economic policy appears to confirm the long held belief that the US is seeking to prevent the PRC from achieving its economic potential. More broadly, Trump evidently wants to rip up global supply chains and return to a more nationalist approach to economic development. Consequently, the PRC is likely to push for greater self-reliance, chiding itself for becoming too dependent on foreigners. A decoupling of this kind will encourage political and strategic logic to prevail over more economically rational considerations. The Trump trade war may make the long feared Cold War Redux an actual possibility.⁶

⁵ David S. Cloud, "Trump proposes huge increase in military spending", *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 2018, <<http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-trump-defense-20180212-story.html>>.

⁶ Nick Bisley, "The risks of a new Cold War between the US and China are real. Here's why", in: *The Conversation*, 26.10.2018, <<https://theconversation.com/the-risks-of-a-new-cold-war-between-the-us-and-china-are-real-heres-why-103772>>.

Escalating Risk in Asia's Flashpoints

The division of the Korean Peninsula has been a flashpoint ever since the armistice of the 1950s. Fear that war could break out ensured that the US maintained a presence in ROK for decades and the border between North and South remains one of the most militarised places on the planet. But added to this long running source of tension has been the recent acceleration of missile and nuclear testing that appears to have realised the DPRK's long term ambition to become a nuclear weapon state.⁷ If this is correct, and while analysts are reasonably confident that North Korea is likely to have nuclear weapons, it is not yet absolutely certain that the proven explosive capacity can be married to be workable delivery system, then Asia will be home to four nuclear weapon states.

As the North has undertaken a sprint to the finish line from 2016 through to early 2018 it has badly unsettled Northeast Asia. Trump's bombastic rhetoric also dialled up the pressure. Since the Singapore Summit of June 2018 tensions have eased but this appears likely to be an interim phase as the North is unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons and this will prompt a reignition of Trump's bellicosity. The spectre of a nuclear North Korea is now real. In the short run this will drive heightened tensions as regional powers determine how to position themselves in relation to this development. This may prompt a nuclear breakout as the combination declining confidence in US credibility and North Korea's capacities lead countries like South Korea and Japan to acquire nuclear weapons. But over the longer term it might prompt a greater level of stability as the region settles back into a deterrence-based pattern of strategic relations.

But escalating tensions are not the sole preserve of the Korean Peninsula. The region's three others have also experience heightened pressure in recent years. Taiwan, the South China Sea and the East China Sea have long been places where clashes of interests among the major powers could prompt conflict. Over the past decade each of these has ratcheted up its risk profile considerably. As Brendan Taylor has detailed, the circumstances of these flash points has pushed the region into a 'crisis slide' in which the prospects of a war breaking out due to the increased tension and risks of miscalculation are higher than they have been for decades.⁸ A key reason for the uptick in tension is the growing power and political salience of nationalism across the region. From the victimised nationalism that has been at the heart of the CCP's legitimisation strategy to the wounded nationalism that Trump harnessed so surprisingly in 2016, the political phenomenon that was such a damaging part of the 20th century's international affairs is a potent force in contemporary Asia. Nationalism is a particularly worrying because it heightens risk by narrowing the room for political and diplomatic manoeuvre and it also distorts the costs and benefits of strategic choices. By driving decision-making away from more rational considerations and into the realm of honour and prestige and also tying the hands of decision-makers nationalism is a crucial new risk factor in the region.

Forms of Security Cooperation

But it is important to emphasise that when surveying Asia's geopolitical landscape the news is not all negative. As the region has become more uncertain, Asian states have also

⁷ Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "North Korean nuclear capabilities", 2018, in: *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 74.1 (2018), 2018, pp. 41-51.

⁸ Brendan Taylor, *The Four Flashpoints. How Asia Goes to War*, Melbourne: La Trobe University Press, 2018.

begun to experiment with new forms of security cooperation.⁹ There are a number of trends here. First, there are a range of multilateral mechanisms that are led by or have ASEAN at their centre. The most significant of these are the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting 'Plus' (ADMM+) process and the East Asia Summit (EAS), but also include the ASEAN Regional Forum and a number of ASEAN 'plus ones'. The EAS has a policy remit that spans the policy spectrum and has been styled as the peak body to lead strategic co-operation in Asia; the ADMM+ is more narrowly conceived bringing together the member's defence ministers to work on concrete areas of security cooperation. So far, it has largely focused on noncontroversial areas such as humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HADR). Crucially, both EAS and ADMM+ have the same membership bringing together the ASEAN ten along with India, China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, the US, NZ and Australia.

Second, there are a range of groupings, sometimes described as minilateral or plurilateral, that bring together small numbers of states to share information, coordinate policy and advance common security interests. These include things like the Quadrilateral Security Initiative (India, Australia, Japan and the US), trilateral groupings such as Australia, Japan and the US ministerial summit as well as functional cooperative measures like the Proliferation Security Initiative and the now stalled Six Party Talks. The third group are China-led multilateral initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Here Beijing is experimenting with institutional leadership in ways that better reflect its interests but which do not overtly compete with existing entities or have provocative short term consequences.

The growth of new mechanisms is an important part of the emerging regional order. Asia has moved from being a place where, until the mid-1990s, there was virtually no security collaboration beyond various bilateral military alliances and partnerships, to a situation in which there are almost too many acronyms to keep up with. This has occurred for two main reasons. The first relates to managing the security consequences of globalisation. As Asian states have become more economically integrated they have also opened themselves up to new security challenges and have also become more sensitive to these vulnerabilities. From terrorism to infectious diseases, the positive economic sides of economic interdependence have brought new threats to states and societies in the region. The growth of multilateral initiatives reflects an attempt to manage these new threats and vulnerabilities. The other factor has been the sense of change in the regional security order. States in the region have sought to try to manage this uncertainty through institution building. Whether in efforts to try to shape the great powers' interests or simply getting states together to build trust and better communicate, the development of new initiatives is an effort to manage the shifting geopolitical landscape. While there has been a significant expansion of regional security multilateralism, the ability of these mechanisms to shape either individual state security policy choices or the broader security order has been relatively limited. Nonetheless it is an important new aspect in Asia. Indeed at times Asia's multilateral institutions have, rather than ameliorate competition as liberal theory might have us expect, they have contributed to and exacerbated regional competition.

⁹ Nick Bisley, *Building Asia's Security*, London: Routledge for IISS, 2009 (Adelphi No. 207).

New Strategic Concepts

The final facet of the regional security setting relates to several new ideas and initiatives that reflect the changing circumstances while also seeking to shape those changes. The idea of the Indo-Pacific has been around for some time. Scholars and analysts in Australia, India and Japan have argued that the growing connectivity — both to with trade and investment as well as security and strategic concerns — between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean region require governments and thinkers to recast their strategic geography.¹⁰ Instead of seeing those two regions as separate and discrete theatres of operation and spheres of interest, the forces that bind them and the growing lines of cooperation and competition that these will create require us to conceive not of an Asia-Pacific, and an Indian Ocean region but an 'Indo-Pacific'. Discussion of these ideas in think tanks and universities has been going on for at least a decade. But over the past two years the idea has moved from the seminar room and into the declaratory policy of key regional powers. Australia has put the idea at the centre of its 2016 Defence White Paper and 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper.¹¹ Japan has similarly embraced it as a key policy organizational concept,¹² while Narendra Modi has also embraced the term in major policy speeches.¹³ Most importantly, under Donald Trump the Indo-Pacific has become its prime regional geopolitical descriptor. Trump outlined what remains the only major strategic statement of US policy in Asia at the 2017 APEC meeting in Hanoi, describing the protection of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' as Washington's main ambition.¹⁴ Indeed the US has gone so far as to rename its Pacific Command as Indo-Pacific Command. As yet the Indo-Pacific has not moved beyond declaratory policy for most states. Australia probably cannot afford a substantive Indo-Pacific policy while Pacific Command had a formal theatre of operation that spanned from the Hawaiian Islands across to Pakistan, so the label change has been little more than that, for the moment.

Yet while policies still do not reflect this larger and more integrated regional concept its emergence and broad ranging embrace is notable for several reasons. The concept reflects a concerted effort not just to grapple with increasing regional integration and to try to provide some policy direction but an attempt to give some conceptual shape to the region's shifting geostrategic setting. Perhaps the most important aspects of this is the way in which it makes India a more important player. The Asia-Pacific, the primary descriptor for most countries hitherto, kept India at arm's length. Here, India is a crucial part of and indeed potentially among the leading powers in the region, on a par with and sitting at the same table as the major East Asian countries. But where India and the US, for example, see it as an open and inclusive regional construct, Beijing sees in it an overt effort to contain

¹⁰ E.g. Rory Medcalf, *Pivoting the Map. Australia's Indo-Pacific System*, (ANU Centre of Gravity Series, No. 1, 2012), <http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2015-12/COG1_Medcalf_Indo-Pacific_4.pdf>.

¹¹ Department of Defence (Ed.), *2016 Defence White Paper*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/2016-defence-white-paper.pdf>>; DFAT, *2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016, <<https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/>>.

¹² MOFA (Ed.), *Policy Priority for Development Cooperation*, Tokyo 2017, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>>.

¹³ Narendra Modi, *Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue*, Singapore 01.10.2018, <<https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>>.

¹⁴ Donald J. Trump, *Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit*, Da Nang (Vietnam), 10.11.2017, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summitda-nang-vietnam/>>.

the PRC. From its perspective the Indo-Pacific is the rhetorical clothing put on a concerted effort by the US, its allies and friends to constrain the PRC's growth and influence. By linking the Indian Ocean region and the Western Pacific the US is seeking to enhance its already considerable maritime strength to thwart China's efforts to protect its interests and improve its standing. So even at the conceptual level and at what is little more than the very first phase of the concept being used to organise strategic policy it is in turn reflecting and reinforcing the region's contested dynamics.

China also has a macro idea driving many elements of its international policy. The Belt and Road Initiative was launched in 2013 and since then has evolved to become not just an expansive effort to drive infrastructure investment in the region to improve physical connectivity to China from points West and South it has become part of the CCP constitution and without doubt the biggest facet of the country's international outlook. As with Indo-Pacific it is in its early phases and its actual trajectory is difficult to discern given the scale of the ambition, its geographic remit and nebulous qualities. But as with Indo-Pacific where China sees a program in which it can improve economic development in its periphery and thus improve its regional standing while advancing shared strategic ambitions, the US and its allies see duplicitous motives. BRI has been described as a neo-colonial endeavour that could lock developing economies in debt traps that will lead to Beijing acquiring strategic assets across the Eurasian continent and more broadly as an explicit effort to yoke the economic interests of regional countries indefinitely to China's thus restructuring the political economy of Asia's international order.

However viewed, in the Indo-Pacific and the BRI the region has two macro concepts competing to shape the shifting strategic setting. Proponents on either side view the other with suspicion even while they insist on the benign and inclusive qualities of their own concept. The contested quality of Asia's new geopolitics now has both material and ideological dimensions.

Geopolitical Change in Asia: Likely Paths

There are two crucial questions that these developments pose: 1) how durable are these changes, that is are they developments of short or long term consequence; and 2) are these changes cumulatively likely to change the structure of Asia's geopolitics? Given that we are living through change and it is impossible to gain the necessary sense of historical perspective to answer those questions with any degree of confidence. That said it is clear that Asia has entered a period in which contestation is likely to be the dominant geopolitical dynamic. Yet there are many different forms contestation can take and consequently a wide array of paths Asia's security order might take. In this final section of the paper, I will briefly explore four of the main ways contested Asia's geopolitics might evolve.

Much of course depends on the choices states make in response to one another's actions and in the past two years we have learned, often painfully, the ability of history to surprise. However, at this point a number of major decisions appear to be relatively fixed. The PRC wants to be the region's dominant power over the next generation but as yet it is unclear precisely what it envisages dominance entailing in programmatic terms. For its part Washington is unlikely to change its broader strategy for Asia and will not accept a lesser position in the region, either in stature or status. That said the nativism that brought Trump to the White House reminds us that there is likely to be some doubt about America's long term willingness to underwrite the region or to bear the costs of maintain-

ing the status quo. But this is not yet fundamentally testing American regional resolve. Finally, the lesser powers who have alliance or quasi-alliance relationships will remain dependent, geopolitically speaking, on Washington over the medium term. This is principally because of the extent to which they have come to depend on the US means that even if they wanted to diversify their strategic policy from their current settings they will not be able to do so. The only uncertainty relates to India and the long term role it will play. It will become a more important player but just how important is very hard to discern. But one thing is clear is that while India is a democracy and has a clear interest in a rule-based international order this does not mean it will automatically be a supporter of US policy and Washington's vision of the strategic status quo. It has diverging long term interests and hopes for a more multipolar regional order than that which the US and its allies seek. With these assumptions in mind, what are the four possible geopolitical futures?

The first version is an integrated but contested order.¹⁵ Here economic integration fanned by globalization, great power competition and a growing institutional architecture will create a more integrated regional security order. This China centred but not Sino-centric system will entail a reduced role for the US but one in which even with its centrality, the PRC will not be able to replicate the primacy that the US enjoyed. Contestation among the major powers will be driven both by competition for interests as well as about the larger shape of the region. Nationalism will also foster competition and rivalry and make reaching a stable and settled geopolitical order extremely difficult.

A second possible version is a future of duelling conceptions of regional security orders. Here the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' competes increasingly openly with a Chinese conception of regional order. In essence this is a contest between the status quo of a US-centred regional order and a new dispensation in which China styles itself as the centrepiece and principal order builder and rule maker. Under this scenario, the relatively low level frictions in the flash points of the South China Sea and East China Sea are ratcheted up and framed more explicitly as contests about the form and function of Asia's geopolitics. There will also be increasingly open competition between the advocates for each order for states and institutions to take sides and support alternative conceptions. Each side will portray their vision for the geopolitical setting as inclusive and open but they will not be able to make the necessary concessions to realize these rhetorical ambitions. Under a duelling orders pathway competition is full spectrum but not intensely militarized in the short to medium term.

If the trade wars remain in place and the economic integration that has bound the states across the Pacific unravels then the region is likely to enter a much more openly militarized dynamic, akin to a Cold War 2.0. If the two largest economies in the world decouple then the vital stabilizing force of their shared economic interests will be removed and this will give the contestation in the region a much more geostrategic and ideological dynamic. This third scenario sees the US and China inhabiting increasingly separate economic spheres and increasingly competitive geopolitical spaces. As in the Cold War the dynamic of geopolitical competition would not be tempered by shared economic interests or economic elites seeking to moderate foreign policy behaviour.

¹⁵ I have discussed this in more detail in: Nick Bisley, *Integrated Asia: Australia's Dangerous New Strategic Geography* ANU, Centre of Gravity Series (May 2017), <http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2017-05/cog_integrated_asia-may_2017_0.pdf>.

The final pathway is a 21st century 'grand bargain'. Here the US and China devise a rapprochement akin to the deal struck by Nixon and Mao in the 1970s. This would require each side to make concessions to achieve a shared view about the form and function of the regional security order. While there are a number of different modes this might take from the highly formalized vision of a Concert of Asia to more ad hoc 'spheres of influence' management, key of a grand bargain would need each side to make concessions to accommodate the other's interests so as to find a mutually acceptable model for the region's geopolitics. Given that the US is not a resident power and that it extends significant security guarantees across the region it is likely to have to cede more ground than China. In one of the more controversial examples of this vision, Charles Glaser argued that the US should give up Taiwan as the concession to forge a more durable regional security order in the twenty first century.¹⁶

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Asia's geopolitics have entered into more contested and consequently dangerous territory than they have inhabited since the end of the Indochina wars in the 1970s. Of the four stylized futures, from a grand bargain to a Cold War redux, the region is currently in the early phases of the second pathway but could easily move into a more dangerous phase. The combination of nationalism and the inability to see the geopolitics from the competitor's point of view make the drift into more heated competition more likely than not. Unless or until the major powers can accept that each will have to give ground, and the lesser powers can also work to help the major powers take these steps, the only question is just how bad things will get.

¹⁶ Charles S. Glaser, "A US-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice Between Military Competition and Accommodation" in *International Security* 39.4, 2015, pp. 49-90.