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A Grand Strategy to Avoid the Sino-American War

By NABESHIMA Keizo

The most critical challenge to global security is how to manage “Xi’s China” in Asia and “Putin’s Russia” in Europe. Both China and Russia adhere to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, and their behaviour is completely at odds with the liberal world order based on freedom, democracy and the rule of law, which has brought more tensions to the world. This trend is accelerated by the declining America’s power, and unless the Trump administration makes America resurge with new strategies, the world will fall into further chaos. The Xi administration advocates the resurgence of the Chinese civilization, and they are advancing Chinese influence from the Asia Pacific to the Eurasian continent with their economic leverage “Belt and Road” tactics. As a result, our security concerns are growing day by day. That is typically seen in their unilateral aggressiveness over territorial disputes in the East China and the South China seas.

Rivalry over the hegemony between China a rising power and America the established world leader is so intense as to be called Thucydides's trap, illustrating a great transformation of international affairs that is just as mentioned above. When Professor Graham Allison of Harvard University published “Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’ Trap?” in 2017 to foresee the U.S.-Chinese relationship, he told that the war between the two nations was unlikely. However it was extremely difficult for the two to coexist in a cooperative manner because there was a huge gap in their strategic visions. According to the authoritative 2015 RAND study “The U.S.-China Military Scorecard,” over the next five to fifteen years, “Asia will witness a progressively receding frontier of U.S. dominance.” Some economic forecast even predicts that the size of the Chinese economy will grow three times as large as the American one by 2040. Late President Richard Nixon confided his former speech writer William Safire, “We may have created a Frankenstein” when he talked about his visit in 1972 to China to normalize bilateral diplomatic relations. He could never imagine that the Chinese monster would grow so tremendously.

Regarding China’s view about the United States, Professor Allison argues, “From China’s perspective, the U.S. position in the western Pacific is waning. Chinese actions in the region have endeavored to hasten the U.S.’ retreat, most visibly in the South China Sea.” Furthermore, Allison

told that, American pundits who had talked with Chinese leaders including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had unanimously pointed out that the Chinese side believed American strategy was based on containment. Just as mutual deterrence of MAD or Mutually Assured Destruction prevented a nuclear war during the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, nuclear war is unlikely to happen also between the United States and China. However, since growing economic interdependence has made America and China inseparable Siamese twins, we can only conclude that both sides have to make a compromise. Richard Haas, President of the Council on Foreign Relations which publishes renowned journal "Foreign Affairs," also argues, "Today's foreign policy must begin with a concerted effort to discourage major-power rivalry, competition, and above all conflict from becoming the dominant feature of the international system again" in his book "A World in Disarray" published in 2017.

For the Communist regime, a more aggressive foreign policy could create a new source of political legitimacy, but only by placing trade and investment opportunities at risk. Haas mentioned, "How China's leaders will manage this dilemma will be truly consequential for China and the world." China needs to behave as a responsible great power. They must abide by international law, and domestically they must respect human rights and establish the rule of law that meets the international standard. Also, America has so many things to do. It is an urgent matter to rebuild its system of the armed forces of which vitality and morale have been inflicted by defence spending cut. This may have led to recent collision accidents of two Aegis destroyers of the 7th Fleet in a row. The Trump administration must do something to stop social divides which have started growing since their inauguration, and resolve the gloomy political dysfunction that comes from disputes with congressional leaders, in particular those of his fellow Republicans. Most importantly, they have to make coherent strategies as the superpower. However, since the Trump administration upholds "America First," it is unlikely that they launch a grand strategy for "The World First" to which embraces global responsibility.

(This is the English translation of an article written by NABESHIMA Keizo, Critic, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Hyakka-Seiho (Hundred Flowers in Full Bloom)" of JFIR on August 28, 2017.)