

US' Strategic Reorientation and Chinese Counter-Narrative: The Economic Reality of Asia-Pacific

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Abstract

The Concept of Asia-Pacific empowers the US to involve in all matters broadly related to Asia-Pacific. In a simple form, the Asia-Pacific region is encompassing West Coast of North America, Australia and major parts of Asia, having the potential to come up as a geopolitical driving force. Asia-Pacific, comprising 22 percent of world land, is one of the most significant regions that possess three well-known Economic Powers, i.e. the US, Japan, and China. Similarly, the region is to be found strategically at an intersection of Middle East, North America, East Asia, and Europe with world's six largest ports and five highly important Sea Lanes of Communication for international trading. Having so much importance, Goldman Sachs confirms that hub of the global economic activities will be transferred to Asia-Pacific decisively by 2050. The study will analyze the very importance of Asia-Pacific, the US's strategic reorientation and the Chinese counter-narrative for the region.

Key Words: Asia-Pacific, Pakistan, US, India, CPEC, Southeast Asia

JEL Classification: Q27,FO2.

Introduction

The world has already passed over the vestibule of globalization that consequents to disburse the European's venture and marketing acquaintances corresponding to the plentiful resources of Asia-Pacific. This region constitutes thirty-six states, acquiring huge inhabitants of approximately four billion which is 65 percent of the world. (Bana, 2016, pp. 8-12). In addition, 1/3rd of the world's population is located exclusively in the East and Southeast Asia who are producing over 1/4th of the world's exports. Moreover, Asia-Pacific is one of the well-articulated and significant regions covering twenty-two percent of the globe's land where three major economies of the globe i.e. the US, Japan, and China reside. Asia-Pacific is ineluctably situated at an intersection of North America, Middle East, Europe, and East Asia. (Moon, 2012, p. 35)

The region is encompassing six largest ports of the world and five crucial SLOCs naming them as the South China Sea, Malacca, Makassar, Ombai-Wetar, and Lombok. The most crucial is "the Strait of Malacca" which is largely an ocean-going chokepoint in the itinerary through which approximately 600 oil tankers are plying daily. (UNDP, 2010, p. 34) The momentous raison d'être of the states and miraculous assembling of demography,

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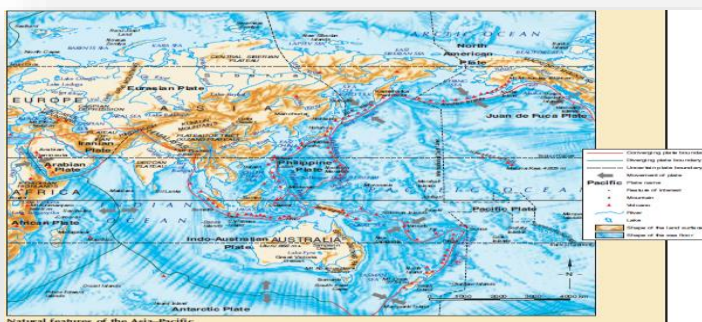
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economic development are enthralling in a leading role in the region. (Delaney, 2018, p. 10-13) The states' institutions of the region have enjoyed approximately US \$6 trillion of foreign exchange. The same is accredited to be 2/3rd of the possessions of the whole world, therefore, making the region most favorable to “free trade agreements” due to which the hub of trading activities will be comprehensively shifted to Asia-Pacific region by 2050. (Sachs, 2017, p. 13).

The Geostrategic Significance of Asia-Pacific

Asia-Pacific is a colossal region assessed as approximately 2.8 billion hectares of land that stretches over twenty-two percent of the world's land. The region is of massive enormity, ranging from the West to Pakistan, to the East to the States of Oceania Iceland, to the North to Mongolia and to the South to New Zealand. (Tsamenyi, 2010, p. 67) It envelops the diversification of assorted surroundings as it is variegated with towering mountains and plateaus and steamy infertile and semi-fertile deserts. The vassalages surrounded by various states are the residuum of political, cultural, religious, physical, or economic determinants of their amalgamation. (Sutter, 2009, p. 76). This region is exceptionally diverse in provision of physical and human characteristics to contain diverse ecological commodities that array from steamy forest to deserts and plains to jungles. It is confirmed, “The ecosystems are balanced by multiformity of human populations exhibiting a variety of belief systems, customs, values, languages, and traditions.” (Cheong & Tongzon, 2013, 144-170).

Regional States are heavily dependent on existing waterways known as Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) of the region for the conduct of trading activities. People from the military explain, “SLOC is an instrument of power and the surrounding geography becomes the pivot where forces should be deployed.” A representative of the people analyses, “SLOC signifies the state of relations with other countries located along the sea route being traversed, and statistician prioritizes, SLOC is just the short and most economically traveling distance between two destinations.” In that order, the security of SLOC for multiparty system tells us to expect incursions in any area which may violate the sovereign status of any state. Therefore, wide-ranging policy parameters on sea lanes of communication should be framed which should reflect the national goals for security on the subject associated with relevant countries. (Lohman, 2007, pp. 1-9)



Map of Area of Asia-Pacific (Natural Features)

Source: www.fao.org/docrep/w4388e/w4388e03.htm

The Asia-Pacific’s presumption as geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic space can be articulated as; first, all regional states engage extraordinarily in seaborne activities and adopt deep-sea associated strategies, hence adequately prove that seas are their lifelines for the affluence of the safekeeping of economies, commerce, and landmasses. Second, the strategic and economic significance of the region is progressing well because of the rise of China, etc. Unquestionably, for strategic links and power dynamics, capital flows grew with erstwhile trading activities as evidenced in the Asia-Pacific region (Fullilove, 2018, p. 13). Finally, due to the territorial disputes with neighboring countries, China has provoked other powers and created an environment of insecurity thereby inviting outside power to interfere in the regional issues.

The Social and Economic Development of the Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia-Pacific region has been characterized by a divergent heterogeneous culture. This is due to its openness to the outside world for its economic and societal development. However, its aboriginal ethnic culture has been preserved in most various parts of the region. To supplement this particular area, Chinese civilization steadily subverted Japanese civilization that has been integrated in Japan all the way through the Korean peninsula. The new features of civilization have been integrated into all its forms of daily life and allied institutions of Japan; however, the Japanese have not discarded their original customs, traditions, and daily life. Rather, they have adopted the new culture but also maintained their native culture. It is always easy to unearth the sort of past schedules besides the other conformities in other areas of the region (He, 2008, pp. 489-518).

The joint population of China and India is roughly 2.4 billion which is a major proportion of the population of Asia-Pacific. Along with, there are other countries that have a large population of consumers and investors; therefore, they are heavily accounted for in the prospects of trading. Approximately 1071.1 million people including 261.1 million of Indonesia, 210 million of Pakistan, 100 million of Vietnam and 500 million people of ASEAN states are living in the sub-region. A lot of weight is given to population in the numbers game regarding economic and friendly relations etc (Green & Goodman, 2015, pp. 19-34). In addition, with regard to the manageability and sustainability of people, the largest cities of the world can be found in Asia-Pacific. In this regard, “out of the twenty largest metropolitan cities of the world, nine are found in Asia-Pacific.” (He & Yang, 2015, pp 416–424).

Table 2. GDP of Asian States

	Actual Data and Latest Projections				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Asia	5.6	5.9	5.6	5.6	5.5
Emerging Asia ¹	6.8	7.1	6.8	6.6	6.4
Austraka	3.6	2.1	2.7	2.8	3.2
Japan	1.8	1.6	-0.1	1.0	1.2
New Zealand	2.4	2.2	32	2.9	2.7
East Asia	6.8	6.9	6.7	6.3	5.9
China	7.8	7.8	7.4	6.8	6.3
Hong Kong SAR	1.7	2.9	2.3	2.8	3.1
Korea	2.3	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.5

Taiwan Province of China	2.1	2.2	3.7	3.8	4.1
South Asia	5.2	6.8	7.1	7.3	7.4
Bangladesh	6.3	6.1	6.3	6.8	-0.1
India	5.1	6.9	7.2	7.5	7.5
Sri Lanka	6.3	7.3	7.4	6.5	6.5
Nepal	4.8	3.9	5.5	5.0	5.0
ASEAN	5.9	5.2	4.6	5.1	5.3
Brunei Darussalam	0.9	-1.8	-0.7	-0.5	2.8
Cambodia	7.3	7.4	7.0	7.2	7.2
Indonesia	6.0	5.6	5.0	5.2	5.5
Lao People's Democratic Republic	7.9	8.0	7.4	7.3	7.8
Malaysia	5.6	4.7	6.0	4.8	4.9
Myanmar	7.3	8.3	7.7	8.3	8.5
Philippines	6.8	7.2	6.1	6.7	6.3
Singapore	3.4	4.4	2.9	3.0	3.0
Thailand	6.5	2.9	0.7	3.7	4.0
Vietnam	5.2	5.4	6.0	6.0	5.8

Source: IMF Website, www.imf.org.com

While surpassing the growth of other regions, this region has been continuing its high economic development over the last three decades. The region is well-known for the high growth rate; therefore, it is famous as a “growth center of the global economy and this growth rate is predicted to be maintained” (Hirsch, 2016, pp. 63-74). Socio-economic environment, high growth rate, huge population, a harmonized heterogeneity of natural and plentiful resources including abundance in mining and maritime resources have pronounced this region more than the other regions. At present, in totting up the whole region, the leading features are the increase of intra-regional trade, economic progression and the enlargement of intra-regional interdependence. (Kim, 2016, pp. 19-37)

Adding together, it is estimated that Asia-Pacific's economy would equalize the economies of North and South America and exceed the economy of Western Europe by 2025 (Palma, 2011, pp. 87-153). The growth rate of the region had already attained 5.5 percent in the year 2018 and is estimated to maintain the same in 2019. The trade and industrial guiding principles based on obliging the domestic burdens will overshadow the unbendable economic state of affairs. Despite the market's congestion in resource flows, the Asian Markets have been malleable.. The World Bank has confirmed that Asia-Pacific is contributing thirty percent of GDP to international growth (Llorito, 2018, p. 1-2).

The regional countries have implemented the policies of accessibility to markets for integration and liberalization of the economies. Consequently, these policies have boosted up the trading activities for raw materials and finished goods. On the other hand, there are deficiencies in executing those policies for speeding up the trading activities in the communication network. To match up the response strategy in possessing sufficiency in a communication network, regional countries have already enlarged their market-based strategies to sea. The states are also working for the safe passages of supply to enhance their competence in handling the relevant problems and make trouble-free right of entry for their commodities and raw materials to international markets (EAPE Update, 2017, p. 15).

Incremental Economic Integration of ASEAN

The results of the Economic Ministers Meeting were approved in the 2013 ASEAN Summit and then instantly heralded to include the reports signifying region-wide conformity for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to progress a little to seventy-seven percent (Albert, 2017, pp. 4-9). They showed satisfaction over a substantial growth in harmonizing air and financial services in the future, however, ASEAN leaders showed concerns over the insufficiency of the remaining period in fulfilling the remaining twenty-three percent. The aims of AEC are to build a production base and sole market for ASEAN; synchronize services tourism, healthcare, internet connectivity, and air transport; manage capital flows; assist the movement of trained labor; generate a common investment code, and decrease the gap between poorer members and wealthier of ASEAN. (Bagchi, 2017, p. 12)

In 1997, the economic community plan was launched to complete its target in 2020. Nevertheless, in 2007, the ASEAN leaders extended the time limit up to 2015, understanding that ASEAN would be much behind in the economic integration drive compared with other regions. However, there was harmony in understanding that ASEAN would not precisely press back the completion date because that can slip by a year or more. (Arezki & Blanchard, 2017, pp. 13-25) Before they can synchronize the less-developed Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar with more wealthy ASEAN members under AEC, they will have to establish new economic structures and regulations. The AEC incremental progress will confirm benefits along the way. However, ASEAN will have to face the challenge to get internal economic integration before broader regional trade regimes like TPP and RCEP turn out to be effective. (Llorito, 2018, p. 1-2)

Trade and Investment in Asia-Pacific

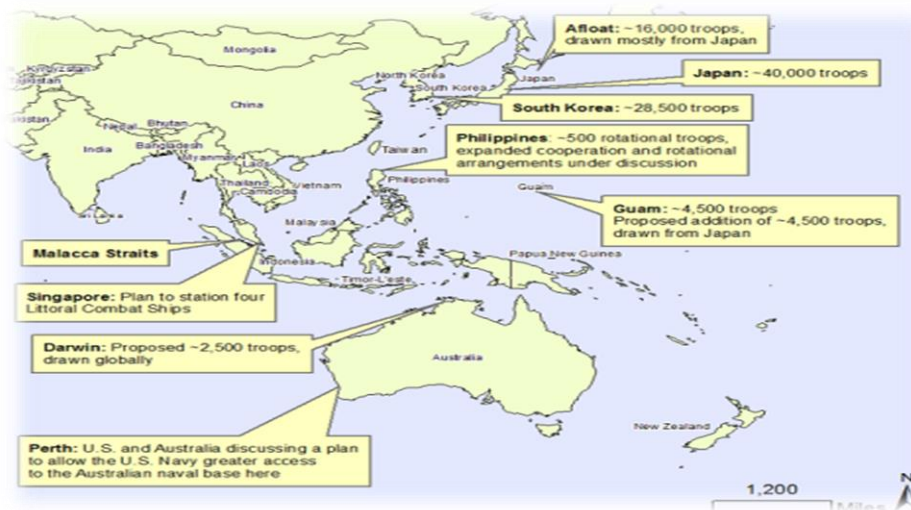
The rapidness of economic amalgamation has gone faster whereas a few of the new frameworks have attained their finishing points. The TPP stretched exponentially with the new entry of Mexico, Canada, and Japan into the negotiations in the year 2012 and 2013. A few years back, Washington advised other US allies in Asia; Philippines, Thailand and South Korea to confirm their entry too. Since US-South Korea has already been through a Free Trade Agreement, Seoul could join TPP any time. However, Bangkok and Manila are not within the probable contestants. The Philippines will have to bring constitutional changes in the law for foreign ownership, and there is little indication that President Rodrigo Duterte is keen to initiate an internal discourse to this effect. (Kaplan, 2019, p. 4)

Thailand was battered by an unproductive endeavor to discuss a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with the the US in the 2000s. During Mr. Barrack Obama's visit to Bangkok, the Thai Minister of Commerce specified that Thailand would give its due consideration for joining TPP in November 2012. It is not clear whether TPP will achieve its present cut-off dates with the available assemblage of delegates. South Korea, Japan and China have decided in principle to initiate negotiations on a trilateral free trade agreement, but so far they have not reached on some fruitful conclusion. For the time being, due to territorial disputes among these states, they may not reach on some workable plan on the economic front. The withdrawal of the US and the nonexistence of China in TPP, and the reflection to opposing the RCEP, encourage the discernments about the Sino-US contention in the economic arena of the region (Alwafi, 2017, pp. 4-9).

At the moment a promising framework of RCEP of 45 percent of the world's population, was initiated in 2013 in Phnom Penh. The RCEP has 10 ASEAN member states, and those in the free trade agreements members to include New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, India, China, and Australia. (Yhome, 2017, p. 68) With US \$ 21.3 trillion joint GDPs, RCEP presents the largest economic agreement in the world. Having conclusive and apparent paybacks to members in this economic giant, RCEP is wide-ranging and pleads to regional poorer and the smaller economies. The joint GDPs of potential members of RCEP has already outshined the joint GDPs of TPP members during the year 2007. It is assessed, "Continued growth, particularly in China, India, and Indonesia could see a GDP in RCEP to grow to over US \$100 trillion by 2050, roughly double the project size of TPP economies" (Wang, 2018, pp. 41-53). The future of RCEP is brighter because, in January 2017, the US has withdrawn from the membership of TPP.

The US's Power in Asia-Pacific

The US considers the viability of Asia-Pacific as the hinge for projecting its hard power. The foremost object of the US's presence in Asia-Pacific is to retain the regional balance of power in the course to act as a balancer. To this effect, forward deployment of forces was maintained aiming to show up its power in the area. To reinforce this strategy, despite having other contingents, deployment of 1, 00,000 military men in South Korea and Japan together, is a clear demonstration of the US to project military power in the region (Boden, Andres, & Marland, 2015, pp. 45-67). Furthermore, the availability of forces principally means to shoulder the security responsibilities in East Asia, Asia-Pacific, and the Persian Gulf. Besides other important facets of the policy, the US will attempt to seize all opportunities in the region (Ryan, 2016, p. 2).



Map of US Military Deployment in Asia-Pacific

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion>

Moreover, the US aspires to achieve two main objectives through the availability of the US forces in the region; to make sure the availability of forces at the time of application and to keep a watch over the military build-up of China. With the exclusion of having sovereign rights over Guam, the US does not enjoy any monarchical privileges in the Western region of the Pacific Ocean. The US will have to uphold excellent friendly relations with its strategic partners and accomplices for the resilience of their “defense partnerships”. In the category, Japan, South Korea, and Australia are enjoying the status of strategic partners of the US in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition to troop deployment in Asia-Pacific, the US also perpetuates different levels of cooperation with the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore through various defense packages (Poling & Sayers, 2019, pp. 23-35).

The Prospects of China in Asia-Pacific:

China is promoting its policy to establish cordial relations with all states of the world especially the regional states to align them to its strategy largely based on cooperation and friendship. China is enjoying a better status after progressing its economy well and getting into international markets and other natural resources worldwide hence, the might of China is endorsed in its growing economy and progressive development. Adding together, China has in its credit holding huge foreign exchange reserves. With growing days and other economic-based motives, China has been transforming into a major trader and beneficiary of FDI. Unless to modernize its military, no country can ever claim to have a status to dictate its options for resolving or helping any issue, hence the option of advancement in the prospects of employing hard power has its own value and dictation in international politics. (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 71)

At the moment, with all parallels in the Chinese favor, it is not easy for China to move on balancing against the US and its allies, largely due to its persuasive policies on Security (Higgott, 2004, pp. 160-164). Stephen S. Roach (2016), explains, “China has been maintaining the policy to be stronger first because major powers would be then more accommodative towards China.” Nevertheless, confronting the US has never been on the cards of China during its “unipolar moment” of unrivaled power exemption because there was no other way out for adoption. From Chinese international politics, it implies clear that China has been unremittingly playing its role for a peaceful, stable and prosperous world. To conserve its energies, the Chinese military think tanks and strategists have been warning its leadership repeatedly not to indulge with the US in over-ambitious arms race because it will spoil its policies on the mechanics of modernizing and economic development (Hong, 2016, p. 35).

The Strategies of New Bamboo Curtains and a String of Pearls

During the Erstwhile Cold War, a strategy of the Bamboo Curtain was promoted, “The Cold War political demarcation was done between the Communist States of East Asia, particularly China and the capitalists and non-Communist states of the region, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, India, Japan, and Indonesia, etc” (Du, 2015, pp. 429-430). Under a strange phenomenon of the term *Bamboo Curtain*, the Military Disbanded Zone of Korea bowed to be a sign of division in the Korean Peninsula. The vibrant term “*Bamboo Curtain*” derived from the term, “Iron Curtain”, in the 20th century being used chiefly in Europe to specify the boundaries of Communists. The terminology was used for China,

“During Cultural Revolution, China had been placed, sections of the *curtain* under a lock-down, thereby to block any entry or exit from the boundaries of the country without proper permits” (Ludden, 2013, 3-6). However, exemptions were given to those who were going as refugees to Hong Kong, the colony of British.

In contrast, “String of Pearls, the Chinese strategy”, was basically related to the Chinese re-emergence as a rising power, whose hard power will be from one end of Asia-Pacific to its other end. This approach confronted the US pre-eminence to command the “major Sea Lanes of Communication in the region.” The US started pursuing its containment strategy of China through a new approach, “New Bamboo Curtain Strategy” which extends to the rest of the world including Asia-Pacific. Under this strategy, the US, when needed, can disrupt any kind of supplies of oil in the process of transportation especially all the way through Strait of Malacca. “To counter the US strategy, China has been positioning itself in a series of ports starting from the Persian Gulf till the South China Sea including the construction of China-Myanmar pipeline, ports of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan” (Kanwal, 2018, pp. 3-9).

The Sub-regions of Asia-Pacific and Regional Cooperation

Asia-Pacific region is subdivided into four regions; Oceania, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and North-East Asia. Mostly, all sub-regions are peaceful but the probability of conflict is resilient. Wars and skirmishes among various states are not having much of the probability however, these may happen due to miscalculations or accidents. To improve bilateral relations among the regional states bilateral negotiations have been conducted especially between the US and regional states through regional organizations of Asia-Pacific. The southeast Asian States consisting Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, have attracted the American foreign policymakers, as they made their forceful but timely entry in ASEAN, and other regional economic organizations (Albert, 2017, pp. 4-9).

Due to the US's national interests, it has affianced in the region through various bilateral defense agreements with Thailand and the Philippines. Maintainability of regional peace and stability is more important for the US when it is either affianced through defense agreements or physical presence. Notwithstanding, the Southeast Asia region is known for in-house disturbances and insurgencies like situations prevailing in different states like Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, and Myanmar. Though mostly, all influential major powers are involved in the region incidents having linkages with ethnic or religious outlining are taking place. This speaks loud and clears off the poor smudges in the feeble security situation being confronted in the shape of multinational threats. It is mind-boggling that the region has high-ceiling of natural resources but its poor security situation consequent to any productive trading activities. (Legro, 2007, pp. 525-526)

Central Pacific which is generally known as Northeast Asia incorporates huge and emerging economies like China, the Republic of Korea and Japan and Russia, Taiwan, Mongolia, and North Korea. The region is important not owing to have three of the world's four largest economies rather the regional powers are constantly involved in the conflict zones. (Buttonwood, 2017, pp. 24-28) In this connection, North Korea being dissatisfied state had been considered to be the major source of precariousness. Side by side there is other disagreements and disputes in the region due to which disputants can initiate hostilities imminently. Ironically, this region is devoid of any dispute management body

so that disagreements, etc can be timely managed. The cautious approach in the application of national power's elements will be ultimately required in those areas where the security situation is not good.

One of the sub-regions is South Asia that holds 3.5 percent of land and lodges twenty-four percent of the population making 1.75 billion people, in which the Muslim population is predominant. The countries in the region are; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In spite of having much of the populations and rising economies, South Asia is still facing severe security-related issues within the region. Bilateral relations and cooperation related initiatives have diluted the settlement of the dispute especially Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Politically, there is a little anticipation to think the early solution of the Kashmir and much of other border disputes between India and Pakistan. The freedom fighters attacks on Indian Post at Pathankot and ICRC convoy at Pulwama have reversed the situation resulted in severe air shootings at each other and the situation could have led to nuclear war. The new hopes for initiation of bilateral trade are zero hence South Asia will remain the least integrated region.

At the moment, two important events have affected the available security engagements; Mr. Trump's forsaking of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and commencement of Mr. Xi Jinping's One Belt and One Road (OBOR). Predictably, the regional states reshaped their policy orientations towards these major powers. While the traditional allies are facing the US's vague commitments but the Chinese proposal of billions for convalescing of road and rail network to them in an effort to undo the Asian order. "Trump's America First Policy and Xi's Policy of deep pockets for China's neighbors have already made several US loyalists to recalibrate their alliances." (Khasru, 2017, pp. 3-7) The looming over the difficulty is, "Will economic gains create sticky-enough glue to hold countries in the bloc together as they march uncharted territories, and respond to a surging China and a warning and unsure the US?" (Friedberg, 2011, p. 182)

Conclusion

During the course of the study, a number of diversified issues were studied having macro-level geographical contiguity with the region like resource availability, climatic change and enduring globalization interconnectivity with the world economy. Regrettably, there are signs that things are quickly recurring to 'Business as Usual.' Instead to spend more on universal issues related to food shortages, energy supplies, and population pressure world is spending much on the military while posing to be insecure. This strategy will be counterproductive if dramatic situations of the effects of climate change twirl out to be accurate. When the mounting numbers of refugees are on move, then all will have to set head bowed to think a region because a better solution will be needed on a regional basis if not on a global level. Similarly, the study evaluated the US's and Chinese engagements through three significant contingents in the global enfold. First, the feeling about the engagement between the US and China in armed battle; second, the believing about the Chinese and the US interdependence prohibited such an ending on the whole; third, the forecasting of peaceful power transition between the US and China.

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