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ANALOGIES AND CHINA: U.S. GRAND STRATEGY AND THE  
PIVOT TO ASIA

by

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Lieutenant Colonel Donne H. Kang is a U.S. Air National Guard aviator assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1995 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in 2001 with a Masters in Aerospace Management, and University of Texas San Antonio, in 2012 with a Masters of Business Administration. He earned his pilot wings in 1997 and graduated from the Air Force Weapons School in 2004. He has 3,000 flying hours in the F-16 as an instructor pilot and weapons officer in operational squadrons in the Pacific and Europe. Lieutenant Colonel Kang is a veteran of three combat tours in Southwest Asia and led strike missions into Baghdad during the first nights of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003.



## ABSTRACT

American foreign policy elites are engaged in a national debate to define U.S. grand strategy specific to the Asia-Pacific region. This shift in U.S. focus has been referred to as a pivot or rebalance. The Asia-Pacific region is rife with potential challenges, the greatest of which comes from a rising China. In the nascent phase of strategy-crafting, decisionmakers are cognitively inclined to select analogies to help decipher complex problems. However, overemphasis on a single or incomplete analogy can lead to policy inefficiencies and at times, outright disaster. The use of analogies in foreign policy is irresistible and persistent. This paper analyzes the usefulness of the three prevalent historical analogies pervading thought in policy-making debate about China. These analogies posit China in the frameworks of Cold War containment, pre-WWI Wilhelmine Germany, and pre-WWII Munich. This paper proposes that the implications from each analogy is incomplete in framing the strategic environment and, if adopted by U.S. policy elites, will increase the potential for conflict. The conclusion is that the challenge modern China presents the U.S. is instead *sui generis*, defying previous foreign policy blueprints. Two analogies from China's own history are presented to offer broader frameworks for focusing the U.S. pivot.

## INTRODUCTION

The Obama administration initiated a strategic rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region in January 2010 when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the “United States is back in Asia.”<sup>1</sup> In truth, the United States has never really left Asia. But with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan winding down, decisionmakers now have the intellectual energy to craft a new American grand strategy for a potentially volatile region that includes a rising China and multiple economic and security interests. The different labels for this shift (pivot, rebalance, strategic turn) are reminiscent of the “Kennan Sweepstakes” to label the post-Cold War American grand strategy.<sup>2</sup> Today, as then, decisionmakers are engaged in a national debate to determine U.S. objectives in the region and to harmonize them with ways and means. More often than not, this process for decisionmakers involves the use of historical analogies. Decisionmakers select analogies that organize and frame the strategic challenges in a familiar and more comprehensible manner.

Although historical analogies can be useful in developing frameworks for analysis, they can become detrimental when decisionmakers overly rely on them. Giving too much credence to inappropriate analogies and subsequent worldview in the nascent stages of strategy-crafting creates a snowball effect. Once decisionmakers synthesize an analogy, new and more insidious cognitive biases arise to block information that might counter the flawed premise. Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney refer to this threshold as “crossing the Rubicon.”<sup>3</sup> It refers to a moment in 49 B.C. when Julius Caesar paused before crossing the Rubicon River in northern Italy towards Rome with his legions. By Roman law, no general could cross the Rubicon – doing so would make war inevitable. According to Johnson and Tierney, when decisionmakers

cross a psychological Rubicon, they are actually crossing a “point of no return” in which the time for deliberation is over and reconsideration becomes impossible.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to add to the current debate about what the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific means – specifically, the manner in which American grand strategy should view China. This is not to suggest the shift in U.S. focus is primarily focused on China. However, among the Asia-Pacific’s many challenges for the U.S., China looms largest. Historical analogies have played significant roles in foreign policy discussion in the past. What are the current analogies regarding China and do they offer useful frameworks for analysis? The paper begins with a discussion of analogies from a cognitive perspective and how they have influenced previous U.S. foreign policy. Next, an analysis of three prevalent historical analogies in policy discussion of China is presented. This paper argues that none of the prevalent analogies pertaining to China are particularly useful and that American strategists would benefit from different analogies in order to steer clear of a metaphoric Rubicon. Two analogies derived apart from the Western archetype are offered to better frame the strategic environment for the U.S. pivot.

## **COGNITIVE AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ANALOGIES**

Decisionmakers are inclined to select analogies to help frame complex problems. Various cognitive tendencies such as proximity, emotional ties, and preconceptions determine the proclivity toward selection of analogies. Psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky introduced the ideas of heuristics (cognitive decision making processes) and cognitive biases in 1974.<sup>5</sup> This idea that subconscious motivators can affect rational decision making became foundational to the field of behavioral economics. Foreign policy scholarship borrows many

ideas from the field of economics. The foundations of bargaining theory and the rational actor model in international relations are nearly identical in functionality to market behavior. But the same cognitive pitfalls to investor market optimization also plague decisionmaking in foreign policy. In 1976, Robert Jervis authored the definitive study in psychological factors affecting policymaking, *“Perception and Misperception in International Politics.”* Since then, scholars such as David Lake and Jerel Rosati have continued to incorporate behavioral economics in the rational actor model to paint a decidedly pessimistic picture of the ramifications of misperception in international relations.<sup>6</sup> Kahneman’s conclusion that actors have an inability to sense their cognitive mistakes is the key to understanding the dilemma for foreign policy decisionmakers. Without clean cues that a cognitive error is in play, decisionmakers struggle to optimize their utility, opening the possibility of crossing the Rubicon. Once there, even stronger cognitive pitfalls lead to overconfidence, aggression, and risky planning.<sup>7</sup>

Early in the planning stage, the primary misperception that decisionmakers are susceptible to is the selection of an inappropriate analogy. Cognitive research indicates that when confronted with complex problems, especially of a new nature, people often choose analogies to solve them.<sup>8</sup> Analogies are useful tools for decisionmakers since they identify a past solution for a present problem set.<sup>9</sup> Decisionmakers can use analogies as an analog (this is like that) and an antilog (this is not like that). Creating frameworks in this manner become problematic when analogies cease to inform decisionmaking and instead become the rationale for policy decisions.<sup>10</sup> Myopic overemphasis on analogies affects the resultant perception of information – decisionmakers tend to gather the harmonious and discard the contradictions. According to Jervis, the narrowing conception of continuities and corresponding failure to appreciate discontinuities results in “the tyranny of the past upon the imagination.”<sup>11</sup> The end

result is that the analogy hinders the decisionmaker from framing and reframing the environment as required for new information and changing conditions. A broader array of analogies is beneficial, as well as a mindset capable of analyzing the strategic environment accurately, free of preconceptions derived from inappropriate analogies.

In 1965, policy elites in the Johnson administration were powerfully influenced by analogies.<sup>12</sup> Cold War pressures weighed heavily on the Johnson administration, fueling predispositions to escalate in Vietnam within the larger context of communist expansion of the globe.<sup>13</sup> Curiously, these predispositions contributed to the rejection of French defeat in Vietnam as an analog<sup>14</sup> – even with the obvious parallels. These predispositions also made it difficult for decisionmakers to comprehend the motivation of the adversary in Vietnam and the true nature of the war. A different French defeat in Algeria (1954-1962) could have offered important lessons on the nature of and strategy against a nationalist insurgency, but decisionmakers were hardly inclined to accept an analog from a French failure in north Africa if they were willing to discount French failure in Vietnam. In July of 1965, McGeorge Bundy advised against using the French failure in Vietnam as an analogy. Although the road would be difficult, Bundy believed the U.S. experience in Vietnam would be different since France was not united in purpose for war and was actively undermined at home by the left.<sup>15</sup> Bundy believed that the French experience in Dien Bien Phu was an antilog for the U.S., but history would prove their experiences to be tragically similar.

The Korean War analogy held similar sway amongst administration policy planners. Several advisors in the Johnson administration had either served in the Truman administration and/or vividly recalled the Korean War.<sup>16</sup> Korea was heavily debated as an analog, but Truman's resolute decision to use force was admired greatly and the Johnson administration felt



compelled to do the same.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the Korean War provided decisionmakers patterns and causal links to escalate the U.S. combat role in Vietnam. Unfortunately, the connections were superficial and the framework from the analogy failed to describe the true nature of the challenge presented by the adversary. Instead, Korea helped give the administration the rationale for war, but little insight on the nature of the enemy and how to fight him – and thus failed to inform planners on the costs and difficulty to achieve U.S. aims. Standing at the banks of the Rubicon, Johnson ultimately selected a path toward escalation that would commit the U.S. to a decade of war and 58,000 dead.

When faced with complex challenges, the use of analogies is unavoidable. Khong Yuen Foong, in *Analogies at War*, notes that some analogies become so powerful that “their relevance become matters of dogma that few will see fit to question.”<sup>18</sup> This is an apt description of the road to war for the U.S. in 2003. A decade after crossing the Rubicon, scholars still debate the root causes for the U.S. invasion of Iraq.<sup>19</sup> Some are simply stumped: the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein is difficult to fathom.<sup>20</sup> Regarding Iraq and its ruler Saddam Hussein, one thing is clear: before 9/11, policymakers felt the threat from Iraq could be contained.<sup>21</sup> For Bush administration officials, the 9/11 attacks proved to be a powerful analogy that built a framework for the rationale that high impact, low probability events were no longer tenable. Vice President Cheney defined the new framework: "If there's a 1% chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response. It's not about our analysis ... It's about our response."<sup>22</sup>

The searing experience from 9/11, still fresh in all decisionmakers' minds, demonstrated that if something as inconceivable as the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks could occur, America did not have the luxury of inaction.<sup>23</sup> Once the implication of this analogy became

cemented into decisionmakers' minds, the decision for war in Iraq became much more palpable, even with shaky intelligence for WMD.<sup>24</sup> President Bush in particular was moved by this connection, going so far as to equate Iraq's dictator with al Qaeda: "I can't distinguish between the two, because they're both equally as bad, equally as evil, and equally as destructive."<sup>25</sup> Once committed, the road to war developed a momentum of its own. Disharmonious evidence was marginalized or disregarded outright.<sup>26</sup> The quick victory in Afghanistan suggested similar ease in Iraq, another inappropriate analogy that John Mearsheimer equated to a "mirage."<sup>27</sup> And in case the costs of rebuilding Iraq might deter from the decision for war, analogies were utilized by the Bush administration to diminish the prospects of post-war difficulty, equating Americans in Baghdad with WWII liberation of Paris.<sup>28</sup>

## **EVALUATING CURRENT ANALOGIES FOR CHINA**

Since motivating analogies have proven to be very powerful forces in policymaking circles, one must exercise extreme care in selecting them. Flawed analogies characteristically have superficial connections to the real challenge at hand but are cognitively compelling because of proximity, preconceptions, and emotional connections.<sup>29</sup> Now, while there is still debate, the prevalent analogies for China should be analyzed to merit their worth to U.S. grand strategy. Since the pivot to Asia is still recent, none of these analogies have been wholly translated into policy per se and the U.S. is far from the banks of any Rubicon. This is ideal since each of the analogies, while cognitively compelling, prove problematic as singular frameworks for an American grand strategy for China. The methodology for analysis will begin with the analogy and implied framework(s) for decisionmakers. Then, each analogy will be evaluated for utility based on how well it describes the current system. To paraphrase Clausewitz, the first and foremost strategic question is to establish the nature of the challenge upon which the statesman is

embarking, “neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Containment and the Cold War**

The first prevalent analogy posits China as the Soviet Union and implies Cold War containment as a blueprint for U.S. grand strategy.<sup>31</sup> Parallels between two large, communist states on the Asian landmass are easy to perceive. China is the last great communist power and draws caution from some policymakers who remember an expansionist and adversarial Soviet Union. According to Jervis, minimal evidence is needed before American decisionmakers will see a communist state as an enemy.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, one is not surprised to discover Western psyches primed to categorize communist China as such. Furthermore, the current lexicon is replete with language that if not blatant, frames a hegemonic China and inevitable conflict with the United States.<sup>33</sup>

This analogy is cognitively enticing, especially since containment as a grand strategy proved exceedingly successful. However, of the prevailing analogies, the implications from this Cold War framework are the most problematic. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) abandoned radical Marxism decades ago,<sup>34</sup> eschewing the banner of global expansion for domestic development.<sup>35</sup> In truth, the communist label of China is a red herring and conjures a very inaccurate image of CCP rule in American psyches. Today, China is a socialist market economy state, an authoritarian one to be sure, but hardly ambitious for extra-regional hegemony.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the CCP seems reluctant to lead even a regional hegemon now and is very much aware of its disadvantage in relative power in comparison to the United States. Most importantly, the Soviets collapsed mainly due to a failed economic model and pressure from its

existential adversary, the United States. China, on the other hand, is a growing global economic power due largely American engagement – no other country has done more to enable China’s rise.<sup>37</sup> In fact, both nations’ economic fates are intertwined, making a zero-sum strategic analogy of containment short-sighted. Furthermore, analysts predict that a strategy of blatant containment/balancing will serve only to harden the CCP and precipitate a self-fulfilling influence on a China.<sup>38</sup> Finally, a Cold War lens works both ways - it is worth noting that if the CCP adopted the same analogy, even the most benign U.S. force deployment in the Pacific would be viewed as encirclement.

### **Wilhelmine Germany**

PRC military growth has increased commensurate with its economic growth, especially in the last decade. Wilhelmine Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century provides a cautionary analogy pertaining to China’s growing military power, especially naval power. The alarm among China watchers concerning People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) development of a blue-water naval capability (specifically carrier aviation development) has origins in the Kaiser’s quest for battleships and Germany’s rightful “place in the sun.”<sup>39</sup> Wilhelm’s decision to develop a battleship navy resulted in a naval arms race with England and drew suspicions from all of western Europe, priming the pump for total war. Thucydides wrote that war in ancient Greece was inevitable because of Athen’s rise in power and the fear it caused in Sparta. If Germany’s naval ambitions created fear in Britain that led to WWI, how should U.S. policy elites view China’s launch of its first aircraft carrier and plans to develop more?

For the foreseeable future, the U.S. has no need to fear PLAN growth.<sup>40</sup> According to its own analysts, China’s blue water naval development is in its infancy and the notion that it will be

capable of power projection to the degree of competing with America is inconceivable.<sup>41</sup> The U.S. Navy fleet strength outnumbers the rest of the developed world's navies combined.<sup>42</sup> American naval carrier strike groups, the embodiment of U.S. force projection, deploy in 6-7 ship networked formations with an air wing of 60-70 aircraft. To be sure, the CCP can be accused of giving compelling signals that it seeks a place in the sun, but the PLAN launch of a single refurbished carrier (a Russian derelict at that) cannot be the cause for fear. A grand strategy built upon the same fear that Sparta had of Athens can only be self-fulfilling when it comes to China. Interestingly, the Wilhelmine analogy does offer at least one useful framework in the British naval execution of a distant blockade during WWI. The same framework has been suggested as a low cost, low footprint option for countering China's increasing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities.<sup>43</sup> Although a modern distant blockade has its own challenges, the comparison exemplifies that (framed properly) analogies can be useful aids to problem solving.

### **Munich**

The relationship between two great sovereign states must surely involve mutual conciliation and compromise in order to avoid conflict. The Munich analogy creates a framework in which conciliation is tantamount to appeasement. This analogy is the least prevalent of the three, mainly because it has been well-scrutinized by scholars and found wanting for efficacy in strategic situations where it was utilized.<sup>44</sup> Yet Munich continues to provide an irresistible framework for some policymakers because it captures the intuitive strategic principle that appeasing the enemy will only incentivize him to be more aggressive. According to Jeffrey Record, who wrote an article calling for the oft-misused analogy to be "retired" from national security debate, every President except for Jimmy Carter has invoked it since WWII.<sup>45</sup> Clinton administration officials criticized the Bush administration for appeasing and coddling the CCP in

the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown. Seeking to reverse the perception of being soft, the Clinton administration launched a clumsy effort to tie Most Favored Nation status with human rights reform in China. CCP officials did not yield and the Clinton administration eventually dropped its stance.<sup>46</sup>

The Munich analogy fails to describe China in a meaningful way. Attempting to draw parallels between the CCP and Hitler is a fool's errand.<sup>47</sup> Hitler wanted war as early as 1938 and dreamt of a Third Reich that would span the entire Eurasian landmass.<sup>48</sup> Characterizing CCP ambitions (and rationality) in the same light is problematic.<sup>49</sup> Of course, uncharacteristic blustering by hardliners such as Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's near-verbatim recitation of Athenian rationale for empire from the Melian Dialogue in 2010 gives one pause.<sup>50</sup> The CCP, like any other great power, has demonstrated its willingness to act for its own interests, at times in opposition to U.S. desires. But China has yet to export coercion beyond its periphery. On the whole, PRC leaders are keenly aware of their weakness in relative power vis-à-vis the U.S. and, if anything, have done their utmost to avoid outright conflict, continuing Deng's strategy of quiet growth. The bigger issue is that the Munich analogy frames expansionist ambitions from China's rise as a *fait accompli* and validates a hardline stance. Were the U.S. (or any power) to antagonize China excessively, conflict would be inevitable. The CCP has shown immense resistance to foreign pressure and has shown time and time again that it will not be bullied.<sup>51</sup> Much like the previous analogies, the framework from the Munich analogy would encourage a hardline approach to China and precipitate a self-fulfilling response in the PRC, bringing both nations to the banks of the Rubicon.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: NEW ANALOGIES

Analogies are irresistible because they simplify the complex and make the ambiguous seem understandable. But, as Eliot Cohen notes, “this” is hardly ever like “that” and the urge to make strategy without discerning the true nature of the adversary can and has been catastrophic.<sup>52</sup> The solution is to commit to understanding the true nature of the challenge, to paraphrase Clausewitz, and avoid mistaking it for something it is not. Each of the analogies analyzed thus far provided frameworks that were not useful because they failed to accurately describe the current system. Taken as a whole, these prevalent analogies paint China as an aggressive, expansionist state requiring a hardline U.S. approach. Developing policy along these lines will prove self-fulfilling and may provoke rather than mitigate conflict. If anything, each of the aforementioned frameworks serves as an antilog, or blueprint of what not to do when framing the challenge of China.

The answer to the question, “What does China want?” must be discerned in a different way. For thirty years now, the CCP has consistently practiced in policy its three stated core interests of sovereignty, security, and development.<sup>53</sup> European historical analogies insufficiently capture the paradox of modern China: a nation of 1.3 billion people (1 out of every 5 people on the planet), a socialist market economy state (a curiosity for sure), and a rising power that has forsaken territorial expansion (but has fought wars with America, India and Vietnam). If China is improperly characterized by the current analogies as an aggressive communist state bent on extra-regional hegemony, then how can we more accurately frame its true nature?

Fortunately, China has 2500 years of political history from which to draw upon. A careful study of that history leads to an assessment that Henry Kissinger characterized best: China is a singular nation that defies western archetype.<sup>54</sup> If policymakers yearn for analogies to frame the challenges a rising PRC presents, then it is best to search for them within China. This paper recommends two analogies that better describe the environment than the prevalent western analogies in current policy debate. These two analogies also help explain the rationale and tradition behind the CCP's three core interests.

### **Admiral Zheng He and Splendid Isolation**

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the early Ming dynasty built the most technologically advanced armada in the world. A court official by the name of Zheng He was commissioned to lead a series of naval expeditions over three decades that explored as far as the Arabic Peninsula and East Africa. At the conclusion of these expeditions, no territory was colonized, Zheng He's armada was decommissioned, and the records of his voyages were discarded. Why? For much of history from 221 B.C. until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China's people considered their land the center of the universe. Until the Industrial Revolution in Europe, China was the wealthiest civilization on the planet.<sup>55</sup> Nothing in Zheng He's reports indicated that any other land or people could rival the Middle Kingdom's culture and civilization – so why bother looking outside China's borders? Throughout its history, China has had external security concerns. But its most fearsome invaders ended up adopting Chinese language and culture, essentially being assimilated into Chinese civilization.

Much more than any western analogy, Admiral Zheng's expedition and the Ming's splendid isolation informs a critical aspect of the U.S./China relationship and the most important



consideration for any American grand strategy in the Pacific. For two millennia, the Chinese possessed an advanced civilization built upon proud values, culture, and governance – all devoid of influence from the west. The underlying tension in the bilateral relationship is firmly based in a fundamental clash between Chinese values and western values.<sup>56</sup> Admiral Zheng’s expedition informs the extent to which those values differ. China’s political development has been insular, wholly separate from Westphalian traditions and Western thought. Yet, American policy has been consistently underpinned by a desire to see liberal democratic reform in China. China rejected the outside world in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, eschewed empire and extra-regional hegemony, and turned its focus inward to its cultural heartland. Vestiges of this mindset carry on into modern China – a condition that U.S. policymakers must appreciate. The CCP is determined to develop and govern in a Chinese way, not a western way. Admiral Zheng’s expedition is a reminder that the importance of sovereignty for the Chinese is born of a tradition 2500 years old.<sup>57</sup>

### **Taiping Rebellion Analogy**

In 1841, the Opium Wars broke out in China and signaled the beginning of western foreign intrusion and a century of humiliation. What is curious is that in 1850, when one would expect the Qing dynasty to focus entirely on mitigating French and British barbarians at its gate, the government instead embarked on a 14-year campaign to put down the domestic Taiping insurrection. Why divert precious resources and military power to quell a domestic uprising at such a time? The reasons are enduring and serve to inform U.S. policy elites on the complexities of CCP rule today. First, before the Industrial Revolution altered the balance of power between China and the west, foreign intrusion did not pose existential threats. To be sure, barbarian invasions were violent and costly, but even the usurpers would eventually become assimilated,

bought off, or ultimately defeated. The true threat for China's emperors came from within. Over the two millennia of dynastic rule in China, regime change came always with great upheaval and chaos. Thus, China's leaders have always had a deep aversion to internal instability, a characteristic that is evident in today. According to a senior Australian defense official, the CCP's threat map is devoid of red arrows pointing to foreign powers; instead, the map is overflowing with red dots representing riots, corruption, famine, and ecological disaster.<sup>58</sup> China has a population of 1.3 billion people – there are no small problems. Now, as in Taiping, China's leaders focus within.

Second, the Taiping analogy provides a framework for understanding the significance of the historical relationship between domestic harmony and foreign intrusion in China. The fact that the Taiping insurrection had originated from a bizarre Chinese Christian cult was not lost on Qing officials. The chaos of dynastic upheaval contains a compelling continuity throughout Chinese history: the combination of domestic chaos and foreign intrusion is what destroys empires. During China's dynastic history, domestic insurrection combined with barbarian invasions precipitated the fall of one emperor for another. The emperors had a saying: "When there is turmoil within, the barbarians from without inflict disasters."<sup>59</sup> The Qing dynasty would survive for another 60 years after the Opium Wars, but the Boxer Rebellion and harsh intrusion from foreign powers finally led to its collapse. The Nationalist party would likely be ruling on the mainland if not for having to fight two wars simultaneously: one against Mao's communists and another against Imperial Japan. Understanding this aspect of China's history informs the importance of the CCP's core interests: sovereignty (freedom from foreign intrusion), security (territorial of China proper), and economic development (to preserve domestic harmony).

## Policy Recommendations

The WWI/WWII/Cold War analogies suggest an aggressive China that seeks extra-regional hegemony and requires a hardline approach to contain. Such an approach may increase the potential for conflict as the CCP would view U.S. policy in that light as intrusive and threatening to its own territorial sovereignty and security. The construct also suggests that the CCP cannot be deterred, that engagement is useless, and that conflict is inevitable. This paper argues that this picture of the environment is incomplete at best and misguided at worst. Zhang He's armada and the Taiping Rebellion offer frameworks that capture a more accurate assessment of the challenge China presents the United States in its pivot or rebalance. The efficacy of including these analogies in policy debate is to frame the environment properly and assess the CCP as it is, and not allow the "tyranny of the past" to paint the CCP as something that it is not. China will continue to pursue its own interests and some of those interests contradict U.S. regional goals. Friction between the U.S. and China, therefore, is inevitable. But military conflict need not be so long as the U.S. policymakers view engagement as a necessary task, rather than as appeasement.

The new analogies present policymakers with a clearer view of China, one which captures its development outside of the Western archetype. Equally important, they inform the long standing tradition and genesis of the CCP's three core interests and will help policy elites craft strategy that is not unnecessarily confrontational, but rational, measured, and appropriate. These policy recommendations should not be viewed as an attempt to create apologists for the CCP. American and Chinese interests will continue to clash, but creating a policy that incorporates multilateral engagement and avoids unnecessarily pressuring of China's sensitivities will surely do the U.S. well in avoiding the Rubicon.

## CONCLUSION

Decisionmakers are prone to utilize historical analogies to help frame complex challenges. Analogies are useful when comparing continuities and previous experience, but can become dangerous when they are elevated to become synonymous with the current problem itself. Lessons from the decision for escalation in Vietnam in 1965 and war in Iraq in 2003 demonstrate how powerful and problematic analogies can be. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the analogies prevalent in policy debate about U.S. grand strategy in the Pacific vis-à-vis the challenge of a rising China.

China is a paradox and presents a complex challenge for decisionmakers. Adopting any of the prevalent analogies to European history could prove disastrous. China is not the Soviet Union, has demonstrated no desire for extra-regional hegemony, and has a long tradition of strategic concern about being encircled. Nor can China be compared to Wilhelmine Germany in that its naval development for the foreseeable future can hardly be deemed an extra-regional threat. Finally, the CCP is a poor substitute for the Nazi regime and makes the Munich analogy a straw man – if not for its repeated use by U.S. leaders in modern history against conciliation. Adopting any of these frameworks to define the environment and challenge in Asia will bring the U.S. to the banks of the Rubicon.

Instead, if U.S. policy elites accept Kissinger's assertion that China is a singular nation and that the challenges in its rise are *sui generis*, the opportunity exists to fashion a strategy where a Pacific America and a rising China can coexist. An important part of this process is defining the current state of the environment correctly. Properly assessing the efficacy of western analogies and including lessons from China's two millennia of political history will help.

Within the Middle Kingdom, analogies abound that define and inform China's core interests.

Understanding the true nature of the challenge will do much to ensure U.S. policy elites author a grand strategy that preserves a *modus vivendi* in the near term, and a lasting mutually beneficial relationship in the long term.



- <sup>1</sup> Lawrence Grinter, Air War College Seminar Lecture, November 17, 2012.
- <sup>2</sup> Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between The Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11 The Misunderstood Years Between The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War On Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 132.
- <sup>3</sup> Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney, "The Rubicon Theory of War," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer 2011), 7-9.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>5</sup> Daniel Kahneman, "Dangerous Biases," *Harvard Business Review*, June 2011, 3.
- <sup>6</sup> I found a plethora of scholarship on cognitive bias in decisionmaking to compliment Robert Jervis' foundational work. David A. Lake and Jerel A. Rosati represent a growing body of work that continues, especially in retrospect of American adventures in Iraq.
- <sup>7</sup> Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney, "The Rubicon Theory of War," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer 2011), 7-9.
- <sup>8</sup> Jerel A. Rosati, *The Power of Human Cognition in the Study of World Politics*, (Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, International Studies Association, 2001), 46-47.
- <sup>9</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, "The Historical Mind and Military Strategy," *Orbis*, Vol 49, No. 4, September 2005, 579.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.
- <sup>11</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976), 217.
- <sup>12</sup> Jerel A. Rosati, *The Power of Human Cognition in the Study of World Politics*, (Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, International Studies Association, 2001), 51.
- <sup>13</sup> Robert S. McNamara, "Memorandum for the President from Robert McNamara (June 26, 1965)," Kennedy School of Government Vietnam Documents (compiled by Air University), 33.
- <sup>14</sup> McGeorge Bundy, "Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy: France and the United States... A Useful Analogy (June 30, 1965)," Kennedy School of Government Vietnam Documents (compiled by Air University), 42.
- <sup>15</sup> McGeorge Bundy, "Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy (July 1, 1965)," Kennedy School of Government (compiled by Air University), 51.
- <sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. *Americanizing the Vietnam War*, Kennedy School of Government (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1983), 46-47.
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