

US-China relations: from economic cooperation to strategic competition

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Abstract

Many have considered US-China relations as the most important bilateral relations in terms of its impact on policy of today's and future international system. This estimate is correct, because these relations are strategic interaction between the two superpowers in the international system in the post-Cold War era. On the other hand, there are several convergent and divergent issues in current relations between the two countries, which they can affect potentially major international processes. They can also leave important impacts on position of superior global powers and their freedom, and direct two countries to one global system with nature of single-multipolar system model. Therefore, monitoring of developments in relations between the two leading actors can be useful in understanding trends in international politics. In this regard, the question is if US-China strategic relations are moving to new global system and what will be the form of power structure change in the current international system, and what is the governing pattern and mechanisms regulating these relations. In this regard, the hypothesis of the study is that in the Post-Cold War international system, the hegemony, economic leadership and unilateral policies by United States have come to end, and China, the European Union, Japan, Russia, and India as the world's largest trading blocs beside the United States with have the greatest role in the stability and balancing the system in three areas of economy, politics, and culture. In this regard, the emergence of China in the superpower position will have the main consequences for the semi-surrounding or surrounding areas in world. Accordingly, the present article explores the United States and China relations within the framework of interdependency and with an emphasis on current important issues in the relations of two countries in the form of two forms of cooperation and competition in the Post-Cold War era.

Key words: United States, China, interdependence, competition, cooperation.

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1. Introduction

In this writing we seek to understand and explain the analysis of relationships between the United States and People Republic of China in the post-Cold War periods, because these relations on one hand are strategic interaction between two superpowers in the international system arena in the post-Cold War periods, and on the other hand there are numerous convergent and divergent issues in current relations between two countries, these issues can potentially effect on international macro processes and have an important influence on the position of the global superior powers, the structure of distribution of power in the international system and their freedom of action can leads the two countries towards a new global system with bi- multipolar system model nature. Based on it, this paper seeks to answer this main question and investigates the main subject of this writing and to conclude to its question-based answer requires an answer to the following sub-questions:

Does the US strategic relations with China step toward a new world order? How will be the change of structure of power distribution in today's international system and what is the governing pattern and regulating structures on these relations? The theoretical framework of this paper is that in international system of post-Cold War, the hegemony, economics leadership and unilateral policies by US has finished and China, Europe Union, Japan, Russia and India as the world's largest trading bloc along with U.S. will play the most important role in stabilizing and balancing system in three fields of economic, politics and culture. In this regard, the emergence of China as a superpower will have a major consequences for the semi-peripheral or peripheral regions in the world. In such circumstances, the dominant pattern in US-China relations in form of economic cooperation and strategic competition model in two economic and political-security levels, are together in cooperative and competitive form and interdependence agent also known as regulatory mechanism in bilateral relations of two countries that on the basis of it, impose and force strategy is replaced by link strategy.

2. The theoretical framework: the theory of complex interdependence

Cohen and Nay in the 1970s tried by designing a new attitudes to show that the intellectual form of realism is not the only form that international relations can be explained on the basis of it. They challenged with realism and its fundamental concepts and tried by planning the concept and interdependence theoretical framework proposed different ways to understand international relations.

Nay and Cohen thought that the world was exposed to foundational transformation and during this transformation the rule of conflict and contradiction and confrontation based on antagonism for more power will replaced by interdependence and cooperation. Therefore, states-nations gradually find new competitors and international players on their side and thus both the world players and their behavior's rule are changed. The above mentioned was inserted in book of Power and Interdependence, which was published for the first time in 1977. In a realistic attitude, the nation-state are only the main actors in international relations and force and military power are considered the most important tools used in the world arena and to promote policy and this has created a global hierarchy, meanwhile the military and security issues transformed into the main issues of international relations by it. However, in the world of interdependence the conditions is very

different. In this situations there are other important players other than states- nations. Military power and exertion of force are not the only useful, beneficial and effective tools in international relations arena and its influence and importance is increasingly losing day to day and hierarchical system that realism insists on it will be etiolated. In this situation, the resources available in the global arena is distributed and voluntary cooperation is replaced to conflict and atruggle. (Keohane and Nye, 1977: 5-35)

Interdependence model is a step toward understanding the global phenomenon, it is considered beyond governments' interaction. Some of the features of this model can be summarized as follow:

1. International relations players are not just governments, multinational companies and organizations and international regimes are new players that play role along with governments.
2. The essential problems of the world, are not just military, security and strategic issues, but rather economic, environmental, social and cultural issues have become more important. That is why the use of force and military power are becoming less and economic and social cooperation are becoming more.
3. The rules of behavior in the international arena has shifted from conflict and struggle into transnational cooperation. In interdependence situation, the rule of game is not a zero-sum game, but win and lose can be equally for all parties.
4. Hierarchy of power that was based on military power is replaced by a complex network of cooperation that is no more hierarchical. (Bozorgi, 1996:942)

In the view of Cohen and Nay complex interdependence has three essential features:

1. Multiple channels connect communities together, these channels include: informal relationships among goverment elites and formal arrangements of ministries of foreign affairs, informal relations between the non-governmental elites (face to face relations and telecommunications) and transnational organizations (like banks or multinational companies).
2. The concepts of intergovernmental relations consist of diverse issues that a clear or fixed hierarchy doesn't ruling them, it means that military security is not always on the top of issues.
3. In framework of the region or issues that governed by complex interdependence, governments do not resort to the use of military force against each other but in the relations between these states regarding other issues or in their relations with the governments out of mentioned region, military force may have an important role.

These three main characteristics create distinct political and global processes that convert the sources of power into power as the force of results' control. For example «link strategy », is replaced to impose and force exertion strategies; when the exercise of military power is not the only way to promote and foreign policy goals, creating the economic and social ties between the various players of international relations will become the best way to achieve foreign goals, trans-state and transnational policy-making networks play an essential role in shaping the global behaviors of players and independent role of international organizations in this time is spread unlike the views of realists.

In fact, the key assumptions in theoretical approach of complex interdependence can be identified and summarized in the form of these three main propositions:

The first proposition: If diverse communication channels or multiple ways exist between the states, the rate of violence in relations will be reduced because breaking of relations is considered costly and irrational for all parties and this is a factor for international cooperation among governments at three levels: superpowers, great powers and regional powers.

The second proposition: if there is no clear hierarchy in the topics of the international agenda, the order of issues is determined by domestic and international issues resulted from interdependence (especially in economics domain). Under these circumstances, the government targets become variable it means that the ultimate goals of states are not military security and economics, welfare and environmental goals become more important for governments.

The third proposition: interdependence accelerates a high degree of reciprocity, as a result of the exercise of power or military confrontation in relations between states two levels of the superpowers and great powers are eliminated and political restraint element is replaced to it. Therefore, in these situations the factor of balancing the system is not a military confrontation but is a cooperation and consensus in the form of interdependence. (Rosecrance, 1969: 3)

Therefore in this paper, a complex interdependence factor known as a regulatory mechanism in the post-cold War international system which based on its link strategy is replaced with impose strategy and force exertion and dominant pattern in US-China relations in the form of economic cooperation model and strategic competition is defined and conceptualized.

3. Political and security issues in US-China relations

3.1. China's military modernization

The United States concerned in the past about the main intentions behind military modernization of China. China's military with the name of People's Liberation Army (PLA), based on more than two decades of continuous increasing in military budget, it continues at a rapid rate toward modernization. According to the report of U.S. Department of Defense to Congress in 2012 about military and security developments involving China as well, the China's official reported military budget by taking inflation into account in the period of 2000 to 2011 had been increased annually with an average of 11.8%. In March 2012, China announced that its defense budget for 2012 were 106 billion dollars that had been increased 11.2% compared to 2011 and this budget in 2014 reached to 130 billion dollars.

Pentagon in a report to Congress in 2012 described China's military modernization programs in name of "to improve the capacity of the Chinese People's Liberation Army to manage severe regional military operation including counter-intervention operation, are designed as a defined tasks to prevent foreign military power from intervention in conflicts as well as preventing them from confronting the objects of China's military. According to this report, the other priorities of the Chinese People's Liberation Army are regional claims and development of nonwar operations include anti-piracy and anti-terrorism operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, UN peacekeeping, sea routes protection and capital funding of aerospace. (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2012: 6)

Among the other weapons programs in China which has caused the authorities of White House to be concerned is an efforts to develop anti-ship ballistic missiles with a fatal hit known as DF-21D. The report of Pentagon explains that this missile has been provided with aim to "the ability of the Chinese People's Liberation Army to attack large ships, particularly aircraft carrier in the western Pacific Ocean." China has also tested a new generation of fighter aircraft in name of J-20, China has also bought non-nuclear hunting submarines from Russia and it has produced fourth-generation of indigenous production submarines. (Office of the .Secretary of Defense., 2011: 33)

3.2. Conflicts of exclusive economic zone and Territorial Sea

United States has severe concerned about China's efforts to keep US military aircraft and ships out of waters and airspace of its economic exclusive zone and recently of more expanded claims of China about sovereign territory of eastern and southern China Sea. US military operations in the exclusive economic zone of China is an issue that can shape daily biggest threat about military confrontation between the United States and China; the dispute is that does the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea allows coastal countries to do foreign military operations in their exclusive economic zone? China's view is that according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, foreign military operations in the exclusive economic zone is China's legal right, while US officials believe that international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, does not give right to coastal states. (Dutton, 2010: 16)

In this regard, the United States has operated its warship a long time ago in order to provide its interests in this geographical area which they do observation mission to monitor activities and deployment of Chinese military, mapping the surface of the ocean and carry out military maneuvers with its allies. China has always objected to these activities done by the United States and sometimes practically reacted against it. (Dutton, 2010: 34)

3.3. Cyber spying

Cyber spying issue is considered as a challenging and growing problems in relation between U.S. and China which is seriously followed from two countries. In November 2011, CIA in a report to Congress warned about exploiting foreign spying services of cyberspace and to steal sensitive information from US companies and saying that Chinese and Russian spies have increased their activities in this regard. It has been mentioned in this report that identification of cyber espionage is more difficult than recognition of human spies. Heritage policy institute in an article by Dmitry Tidev write that:"in the third of October, FBI announced a discovery of a spy network in the US military technologies and eleven people in connection with this network were arrested. According to senior officials of intelligence services, China is expanding its spying activities around the world. U.S. and west countries of Europe are placed at top of this list. Spies make good use of computer networks. Despite these conditions, Chinese hackers that are the best hackers in the world, can steal a considerable amount of information in less than a few seconds. This has caused to reduce time and costs of penetration of spices in different parts. (Wortzel, 2010: 22)

4.3. Strategic rebalance of United State in Asia-Pacific region

In the autumn of 2011, the Obama administration announced that by existence of calm and peace after crisis in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States will turn its attention to the Asia Pacific. In fact, formulation of US defense strategy in the Asia-Pacific region (in January 2012) is to strengthen the

US strategic alliances in the region- with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines, and Thailand and expansion of cooperation with emerging partners (including India) in order to assurance of collective capability to provide collective security in direction of national interest. In this regard, Vice President of China, Xi Jinping- the new leader of the Communist Party and new president of the People Republic of China, during his visit to the United States in February 2012 stated that:"«China welcomes to the constructive role of the United States in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-pacific. Yet, we hope that the United States gives respect to interests of China and other countries in the region. (Lampton, 2012: 22)

5.3. U.S.-China military relations

US-China commitments on military and security issues is faced with a challenges in reason of skepticism and reluctance of the authorities of both countries to each other's intentions and objects to make a commitment to build a reliable and continuous relations in army relation domain. In fact, one of the reasons of emphasis of two countries' auturities on focusing on development of mutual trust in military bilateral relations, returns to cold and sometimes tense relations between two countries during the last three years. According to the survey of Pew Research Center, published shortly before the visit of Hu Jintao to the United States, one in five Americans consider China as the biggest threat to the US. The report of this institute ,about the most important threats before the United States during the Post-Cold War, shows that from the 1990s onwards, many more Americans consider China as the most important threat to their country. Based on the data of this report, this number in 2011 reached to 20%. (Swaine, 2011: 55-76)

In any case, US-China military relations in comparison to relations of two countries in other areas such as economic bilateral relations has less been developed. In a joint statement of executive authorities of the United States and China was published in 2011 named "the presidents of two country", both countries pledged to reach to a healthy, stable and reliable military relationship in strengthening bilateral relations and improving the security of world order. In fact, such obligations on one hand increase intellectual security of military authorities of both countries in relation to different topics and on the other hand, it provides mechanisms to prevent crisis in the international system and its management by both countries. (Office of the.Secretary of Defense, 2012: 12)

6.3. The issue of Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program

One of the most important issues of the new millennium has caused a type of process of cooperation and competition between the United States and China is the issue of Iran's nuclear program and the way to react and deal with it. In fact, during recent years US-China relations has simultaneously been involved two competing processes:

- a) Cooperating in some areas including bilateral economic cooperation and in some important international issues related to global security; China as a permanent member of Security Council, committed itself as a superpower to play role to issues related to global security and in this view is forced to have some cooperation with other members of these international institutions.
- b) Competition in some strategic areas in regional and international bilateral relations; since the nuclear issue of Isalamic Republic of Iran was raised in 2003, the great powers such as U.S., China, Europe Union and Russia, have had the greatest role in this issue at the international level. From the negotiations between Iran and the three European countries include Germany, France and England

until the formation of the P5 + 1 in June 2006 and after joining the U.S. to Europe Union on the Iranian nuclear issue, the great powers have played the main role to send Iran's nuclear dossier from council of governors to security council and issuance of three sanction resolutions and a nonsanction resolution and a Security Council statement.

Chinese foreign policy toward Iran's nuclear program has always followed a particular model that John Garver called it "double game". On the one hand, this country has tried in association with the US to pledge Iran to international rules such as Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and put its nuclear activities in a path in accordance with accepted norms. Withdrawal of Beijing from nuclear cooperation with Iran in 1997 under US pressure, the vote of this country to the threat of Iran's nuclear program at the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2006, positive vote to a series of Security Council resolutions against Iran that imposed sanctions on Iran are such of those association with the US on the nuclear case of Iran.

On the other hand, active participation in energy projects in Iran, particularly after the West and Japan withheld from investment in these areas, definition of Iranian nuclear case as an American challenge with Iran and not international community with Iran, and to become the second largest supplier of arms to Iran in the period of 2002-2009 are evidences of pragmatic approach of China and support of Iran in some sections, according to the report of Cyprus Institute. (Sazmand, 2011:266-267)

7.3. North Korea Crisis Management

Given to the function and position of China as the largest supplier of fuel and food materials as well as the most powerful political ally of North Korea, the United States still continues calling on China to more use of its leverage over Pyongyang relation to enforce it with nuclear disarmament and to avoid stimulation of neighbors. In this regard, China has also supported some UN sanctions against North Korea. For example, in April 2012, China supported the statement of president of Security Council- but not as a binding solution – which strongly condemned North Korea. China also supported of resolution 1718 (2006) and 1874 (2009) of the United Nations against the actions of North Korea's nuclear test. (Nikitin, Chanlett-Avery and Manyin, 2010: 45)

Therefore, unlike the crisis of Taiwan which is an area of competition and conflict between the US and China, the crisis of North Korea as a manifestation of cooperation between the two sides is to manage a regional challenge. In addition, North Korea problem beyond the US-China and Korean Peninsula relations for its threatening and security nature in the region, caused Japan and Russia to be involved in it and since the beginning of disarmament negotiations of North Korea, these five countries have always been at the center of world attentions for management of this crisis. (Perlez, 2010: 22)

4. US-China relations: a movement towards a world order with bi- multipolar system model nature

When speaking is about international system it means that developments are seen with a systemic and macro approach. In such a situation the distribution of power between units and players – it means polarization - reveals the form of system and its transformations.

Richard Haass, president of the US Council on Foreign Relations, in an article titled (The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow U.S Dominance) in the magazine of Foreign Affairs in 2008 announced

that: US unipolar time is over; according to this view, the international system in the twenty-first century has been faced with a wide range of developments and changes because power in this century tends more toward distribution rather than focus. He called current international system as a non-polar international system and believes that a non-polar world not only involves numerous actors, but rather involves lacking stable and predictable structure. In such circumstances, the international system will be changing and varying and non-polar international system will work in unipolar, bipolar and multipolar international system or combinational. (Haass, 2008: 44)

Samuel Huntington, a professor of international relations at Harvard University also called the current international system as uni-multipolar which indicate the presence of a superpower, it means United States and several other major powers. In an article titled «The Lonely Superpower» in 1999 He called that we have entered a uni-multipolar systems. Huntington's purpose of uni-multipolar systems is a system with a prominent country that its participation is not sufficient lonely to solve international issues and in order to achieve the objectives requires the participation of other powers. (Husseini, 2005:125)

This approach of Huntington refers to a situation in which some times ago Richard Rosecrance had called it a bi-multipolar international system and in fact it was explanation of desired situation not existing situation. He had explained the situation regarding the characteristics of bipolar and multipolar system that a model of it returned to the Cuban crisis in 1962. In this year two superpowers of United States and the Soviet Union believed that they must limit and control their own behavior and in 1963 the treaty banning nuclear tests was signed. Some researchers call this period bi-polyCenterism or bi-multipolar. But there are differences between these two titles in terms of content as well; unlike traditional multi-polar system in which powers more or less could transform their political orientations by going out from one union and join to the other one, in bi-polyCenterism such condition does not simply occurred. In bi-multipolar system the centers affiliated to the foreign policy, one of the two superpowers remain united, but sometimes within the union they resistance against the domination of others or to compete to protect national interests. (Rosecrance, 1969: 325-327)

Therefore, in such an order there are two superpowers with a numbers of great powers, and system will be stable and rules of the game will be clear. In such a system, due to the lack of chaotic elements in system in past procedure such as, critic ideologies and ambition of leaders and also because of reduction of diversity in relation to global existing resources such as energy and oil the rate of disorders and chaotic elements among states, especially in two superpowers and great powers level has been in minimal amount, and with these conditions, the regulatory mechanism of system -in the form of mutual dependence- have the ability to overcome its impairment, on the basis of it, link strategy and political self-control would replace to imposed strategy and military confrontation. (Sazmand, 2011:267)

In such a system, the orientation of leaders and executive elites on political - security issues and problems does not lead to dissatisfaction of superpowers from international system and insecurity and finally the war between them. In fact, if there is no clear hierarchy on the topics of the international agenda, the order of issues is determined based on domestic and international issues resulted from interdependence, especially in the economic domain. (Brzezinski, 2012: 98)

In the current situation and by forming of new international order, US-China relations has been deepened day to day and despite the challenges, the trend of extension is very serious. Americans criticize of China's human rights violations. Taiwan's challenges and different viewpoints between US-China should also be considered, however; the borders of this crisis is more or less clear for both parties. Another challenge is notifiable attitudes, in Washington some talk about China's danger especially increasing its military capability. In Beijing, a group propose the need to harness US imperialist tendencies, however; beyond these trends, the process of cooperation between the US and China is expanding.

5. Conclusion

US-China strategic relations in the post-cold war period can be a movement toward global order with shape and coordination of 4 + 2 - the United States and China as the two superpowers and Europe Union, Japan, Russia and India as four great powers. In this situation, the strategic and expanding relations of United States and China in form of economic interdependence and bi-multipolar order will have maximum contribution in shaping and balancing this new order. Therefore, with such structure, it can be concluded that:

a) The two superpowers of United States and China with some great powers of Europe Union, Japan, Russia and India form a coalition and the system will be stable and rules of the game will be clear.

b) Since the end of the Cold War until now the relations between two countries has been within a complicated framework of cooperation and strategic competition that it can be theorized and conceptualized in form of economic cooperation and strategic competition model. In the format of this model, two countries cooperate in varieties of areas with a focus on economy, they compete in other important areas such as international security and in the field of energy security supply they follow both cooperation and competitive-based approach. This pattern in the post-Cold War era has been prevailed on the relations between two countries in various areas within the framework of interdependence. (Shariatinia, 2011:10) In this framework, the most important strategic component of the US toward China are as follow:

1. Preventing the expansion of all-round and comprehensive influence of China in the Asia- Pacific: US leaders with an emphasis on engagement with China in the Asia-Pacific region are trying to develop relations with China based on interaction across the Pacific. In this regard, US foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region is based on hard bilateral security ties and soft multilateral economic relations. Whatever is now located in the focus of US attention about the emerging structure of Asia-Pacific geographical area, is China's growing influence, if China comes to dominate regional institutions in East Asia, there is a risk that this country puts them in a way that is not consistent with the interests of the United States. (Chachavalpongpun, 2012: 85)

2. Focusing on creating mutual trust in bilateral relations: in the view of US officials, despite the differences between the two countries in the area of security issues with each other they cooperate to each other in wide areas and this can provide the basis for mutual trust.

3. China's active participation in international common challenges such as: Global economic recession, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and piracy

4. Strengthening cooperation in the field of energy security

5. Managing of macro-financial and economic cycle, human capital development and mutual commercial interests. (Brzezinski, 2012: 98)

China's most important strategic component in the post-Cold War international system include: improving bilateral and multilateral cooperation in regional and global relations in the form of peace and development identity; the performance of Chinese foreign policy system in recent years has been in such a way that a peaceful image of this country has now been formed in the minds of other actors which is different from the past and almost all countries see China as a country with a interaction-based foreign policy and peaceful and ultimately responsible and safe. In current situation, Beijing's foreign policy in addition to preservation of security and maintenance of peaceful relations, defined for itself a new agenda especially from 2001 onwards, and it was transformation of a great number of countries, especially neighbors, to future's partners of China. In fact, the fourth generation of Chinese elite in leadership of Hu Jintao, by giving importance to constructive relations with neighbors, developed its relations with all of them in a good manner. (Zhu, 2010: 217)

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