



US-China: Joined At The Hip



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by Peter Hayes

June 27, 2013

I. Introduction

Peter Hayes writes "The tug of war over Taiwan and the contest between the US and Chinese military to deny access to the other in China's coastal zone and the western Pacific States is.....simply the most dangerous possible conflict in the region....Yet even here, we find that China and the United States are joined at the hip in the most horrible way imaginable."

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II. POLICY FORUM BY PETER HAYES

US-China: Joined At The Hip

The US Department of Defense's Early Bird (these days, you can read [recent editions](#) on line) provides a bird's eye view of the world from press clippings selected by the US military for the US military. If you want to know what's important to the US military on a given day, read Early Bird.

On August 25, 2012, I opened Early Bird to find in the Asia Pacific Section:

29. [China Is Said To Be Bolstering Missile Capabilities](#)

(*New York Times*)...Keith Bradsher

China is moving ahead with the development of a new and more capable generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched missiles, increasing its existing ability to deliver nuclear warheads to the United States and to overwhelm missile defense systems, military analysts said this week.

30. [U.S. Missile Shield Plan Seen Stoking China Fears](#)

(*Wall Street Journal*)...Brian Spegele, James Hookway and Yuka Hayashi

The U.S. decision to expand its missile-defense shield in the Asia-Pacific region, ostensibly to defend against North Korea, could feed Chinese fears about containment by the U.S. and encourage Beijing to accelerate its own missile program, analysts say.

31. [Patrol Vessel Heads To Hawaii For Joint Exercises](#)

(*China Daily*)...Shi Yingying and Zhao Shengnan

The Haixun 31 maritime patrol vessel, one of China's biggest maritime patrol ships, will set out for its first visit to the United States on Saturday. Scheduled to depart from Shanghai at 10:30 am, Haixun 31 is expected to arrive in Hawaii on Sept 4.

32. [China Eagerly Buying Up U.S. Assets](#)

(*Los Angeles Times*)...David Pierson and Don Lee

...The increase in investment, already at least \$8 billion this year, comes despite lingering American anxieties about potential breaches of national security and loss of technology to the powerful Asian competitor.

It's hard to imagine a better snapshot of the contradictory nature of inter-locking US economic and military relationships with China.

But on September 12, 2012, it was trumped on by this gem:

29. [China's U.S. Debt Holdings Aren't Threat, Pentagon Says](#)

(Bloomberg.com)...Tony Capaccio and Daniel Kruger, Bloomberg News

China's holdings of more than \$1 trillion in U.S. debt and the prospect that it might "suddenly and significantly" withdraw funds don't pose a national security threat, according to a first-ever Pentagon assessment.

Wrote Bloomberg: "Attempting to use U.S. Treasury securities as a coercive tool would have limited effect and likely would do more harm to China than to the United States," according to the report, which was sent to congressional committees by Defense Secretary [Leon Panetta](#). "As the threat is not credible and the effect would be limited even if carried out, it does not offer China deterrence options" in a diplomatic, economic or military situation, the Pentagon found."

Now that's a relief!

Nonetheless, the increasing interweaving of the US military with China's economy reaches into the military itself, and not just via procurement of components or supplies of rare earth minerals on which high technology alloys are based. Thus, it was no surprise to see in Early Bird on May 16:

22. [Pentagon Continues Use Of China Satellite In New Lease](#)

(Bloomberg.com)...Tony Capaccio, Bloomberg News

The Pentagon will continue for another year the lease of a Chinese commercial satellite to provide communications for its Africa Command.

23. [U.S. Sees China Launch As Test Of Anti-Satellite Muscle: Source](#)

(Reuters.com)...Andrea Shalal-Esa, Reuters

The U.S. government believes a Chinese missile launch this week was the first test of a new interceptor that could be used to destroy a satellite in orbit, one U.S. defense official told Reuters on Wednesday.

China's relatively open economy and absolute economic weight in the world is a gravitational force field that neither the United States nor its allies can ignore. This factor already constrains Japan's ability to grow due to what Tatsujiro Tsuzuki and colleagues call its "[mutually assured dependence](#)" on China's economy—whatever happens in the political stratosphere. China relies on Japan as a key source of technology, trade, and investment. Neither can prosper without the other, harsh rhetoric over small islands, comfort women, and textbooks, notwithstanding.

The tug of war over Taiwan and the contest between the US and Chinese military to deny access to the other in China's coastal zone and the western Pacific States is where US and Chinese forces could come head-head, immediately. It's also where China might feel most obliged to escalate to nuclear weapons to stop US conventional forces from intervening effectively, and the US might feel

obliged to attack first to disable Chinese mainland forces attacking Taiwan or US naval forces in the Taiwan Straits or East.

It's simply the most dangerous possible conflict in the region, and far surpasses the threat posed by the DPRK in terms of potential to bring US and China into direct conflict.

Yet even here, we find that China and the United States are joined at the hip in the most horrible way imaginable. As the Natural Resources Defense Council [show](#), in spite of the vast gulf of technology, numbers, and conceptual underpinnings between US and Chinese nuclear arsenals, each can wreak vast destruction on the other with nuclear weapons fired with long-range missiles. Such is the destructive power of nuclear weapons.

Whatever the local balance of forces, at the end of the day, neither the United States nor China can afford a general or even a local war which runs the risk of mutual nuclear annihilation, let alone a conflict that would lead to economic and social dislocation from reversing mutual assured economic dependence.

III. NAUTILUS INVITES YOUR RESPONSES

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