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## Hegemony Games: USA vs. PRC

### *The Wheels of Change*

by JACK A. SMITH

6/1/2015

**he·gem·o·ny** (*həˈjemənē, ˈhejə,mōnē*): leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others.

The most important political relationship in today's world is between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Whichever way the relationship goes will have a major impact on global developments for many decades. Big changes are beginning to take shape. Matters of peace or war are involved.

This relationship between Washington and Beijing has existed somewhat uneasily since the early 1970s after the PRC broke with the Soviet Union mainly over intense ideological differences within the communist movement. In effect the Communist Party of China (CPC) joined with capitalist America in an informal tacit alliance against Russia. This was a geopolitical triumph for the U.S. but not for China. In the last couple of years Beijing and Moscow have developed a

close relationship, largely as a repost to Washington's expressions of hostility toward both countries.

China was considered a revolutionary communist country from the 1949 revolution until the deaths of party leader Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai in 1976. The left wing of the CPC was then crushed, and the leadership in 1977 went to "paramount leader" Deng Xiaoping, a long time revolutionary and high government official in many posts who had earlier been purged twice "for taking the capitalist road."

Deng set about in 1980 to develop a dynamic capitalist economy under the slogan of "using capitalism to build socialism." By 1990, after the U.S. and others imposed sanctions against China for the Tiananmen Square confrontation with students seeking certain democratic changes, Deng issued the following instruction to the CPC: "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership."

The Chinese economy after 35 years is one of the wonders of the capitalist world, particularly since it is still maintained by the CPC, as are all other aspects of Chinese society. The PRC's political system is officially described as being "socialism with Chinese characteristics," though the socialist aspect has been abridged.

For many of these decades the U.S. superpower and global hegemon has gradually sought to position China within America's extensive orbit of states that look to Washington for leadership. Beijing came closer with warmer relations, joining the World Trade Organization, respecting the World Bank and IMF, even sharing war games with the Pentagon — but never so close as to be stifled by Washington's dominant embrace. This didn't inconvenience the U.S. as long as China was mainly involved with internal growth, building huge cities, massive infrastructure projects and becoming the global manufacturing center.

But then two things changed. First, by the time Xi Jinping became general secretary of the CPC and president of China less than three years ago, the PRC was about to surpass the U.S. as the world's economic giant and was universally recognized as a significant major power. It had plenty of cash, ideas, supporters and incentives to contemplate a larger independent role for itself on the international stage. Second, given China's growth, it evidently seemed that strict compliance with Deng Xiaoping's defensive suggestion to hide China's light under a bushel was outdated.

The Obama Administration is not pleased with China's more forward stance. Relations between Washington and Beijing are cooling quickly but both countries have a mutual desire to prevent this situation from getting out of hand. The key difference, and it is of great significance to both parties, is that China opposes hegemony in principle, and the U.S. is determined to remain the global hegemon.

Contradiction is ever present in U.S. foreign/military policy, and things are rarely as they seem to an American people largely uninformed or misinformed about the realities of international affairs. This observation is occasioned by the extremes to which U.S. policy and interference around the world are being taken by the Obama Administration and its Republican congressional alter ego, obstructive on domestic matters but complicit with President Obama's principal international monomania — the retention of Washington's unilateral global hegemony.

The Obama Administration appears to be preoccupied day and night gallivanting throughout the world issuing dictates, administering punishments, rewarding friends, undermining enemies, overthrowing governments, engaging in multiple wars, subverting societies not to its liking, conducting remote control assassinations, listening to every phone call and examining the daily contents of the Internet lest someone get away with something, jailing honest whistleblowers, upgrading its nuclear stockpile and delivery systems, moving troops and fleets here and there, and that's only the half of it.

This is happening for one main reason. The U.S. has arrogated world rule to itself, without authority, competition, or oversight, since the implosion of the Soviet Union nearly 25 years ago. There is nothing more important to America's ruling elite. Every possible danger to Washington's hegemony must be neutralized. And looming in East Asia is the cause of Washington's worst anxieties — China.

In his victory speech after winning the 2008 election, Barack Obama — a humdrum one-term U.S. Senator with no foreign policy experience after serving several years as an obscure Illinois state legislator — announced that with his assumption to the presidency “a new dawn of American leadership is at hand.” He was referring to his own leadership restoring U.S. international domination greater than ever after eight years of blundering President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.

No one seemed to think twice about this. Democrats applauded; Republicans nodded. After all, isn't that what the United States is supposed to do?

Expanding global supremacy is a popular political promise in America. Extreme nationalism often wildly inspires the masses of a powerful country as it blinds them to the equality of nations and humanity, and guides them to another proposed conquest; and the prospect of greater profits through intensified world domination compensates the powerful corporations and families that contributed to Obama so generously in both elections.

The President frequently repeats his jingoist mantra about the necessity of American “leadership,” at times accompanied by pandering clichés such as “I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being.” Speaking at an Air Force Academy graduation in 2012 Obama told the cadets, “never bet against the United States of America... [because] the United States has been, and will always be, the one indispensable nation in world affairs.” Applause, hats in air, now go out and kill.

Since the vast corporate capitalist mass media is entirely in agreement with the sacrosanct principle that only the United States is morally, politically and militarily equipped to rule the world, Obama’s flag-waving imperial intentions are rarely if ever criticized by the press, Democrat or Republican. At least 90% of the American people obtain virtually all their scatterings of information about foreign affairs from a propagandistic ultranationalist media powerhouse controlled by just six billionaire corporations.

Many millions of Americans have opposed Washington’s frequent and usually disastrous imperialist wars. But far fewer challenge the concept of U.S. global “leadership” — the euphemism for ruling the world that allows Washington carte blanche to engage in wars or bullying whenever its perceived interests appear to be challenged. It may seem like a century, considering the carnage, but it is important to remember that Washington only obtained solo world power when the Soviet Union imploded less than a quarter century ago. The next quarter century, as a new world order is beginning to take shape in the very shadow of the old, will be rough indeed as the U.S. government resists inevitable change.

The days of American hegemony over the nations of the world are numbered. This is perhaps the main and certainly the most dangerous contradiction deriving from America’s determination to lead the world as carried forward by President Obama and undoubtedly to be continued by the next and the next administrations. There are many secondary contradictions strewn throughout the world, but almost all are related to first.

The U.S. government is recklessly flailing its arms and interfering in all the global regions to impose its will in order to indefinitely continue enjoying unilateral domination and the sensation

of luxuriating in the extraordinary advantages derived from being the world's top cop, top judge, only jury, mass jailer and executioner extraordinaire. If you doubt it, just look about at the human, structural and environmental anguish created in the last 15 years by the action or inaction of Bush-Obama world leadership. Think about the trillions of U.S. dollars for destruction and death, and the paucity of expenditures for construction and life. A better world can only emerge from a better and more people-friendly political and economic global order.

Obama's policy of enhanced American "leadership" has created havoc these last six years as a result of the collusion between the Democratic White House and the Republican Congress — partners in the projection of American armed power around the world. The main target — despite all the elbowing and ranting about Russia, Putin, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, Yemen, Islamic State, ad infinitum — is and will remain China. The U.S. does not want a war with China, though one is certainly possible in time. It would prefer warm, friendly and mutually beneficial relations, under one condition: The U.S. is boss, and leads, while China — rich and powerful if it wishes — is subordinate, and follows, even in its own natural sphere of influence. Beijing does not seek hegemony, but it will not kowtow to the United States.

In the midst of all this rumbling and grumbling from the White House, it may be interesting to become acquainted with the enormous but modest *main national strategic goal* of the Communist Party of China. It is "to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021; and the building of a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049. It is a Chinese Dream of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." So goes the Chinese "menace."

China is not a newcomer to world politics and economic power, as the U.S. government has at times suggested of one of the world's oldest and most creative civilizations. As James Petras has written: "The study of world power has been blighted by Eurocentric historians who have distorted and ignored the dominant role China played in the world economy between 1100 and 1800."

This period ended because of Western imperialist intervention and plunder, including the Opium War, which brought about the humiliation and decline of Imperial China's final dynasty, which fell in 1911. A form of semi-democracy/semi-feudalism prevailed until the Communist revolution of 1949, when, in the words of Mao Zedong announcing victory, "The Chinese People

have stood up.” In these last 66 years China removed about 700 million citizens from poverty, and has become the world’s manufacturing center and a major economic power.

The Chinese Communist government is calibrating its rise very carefully, intent upon avoiding offense to the crouching, tail twitching American imperial dragon. On May 21, Peoples Daily quoted a recent talk by President Xi Jinping: “China aims to become stronger but not seek hegemony; the strategic choice of cooperation and win-win [for all sides] is the path that China chooses. China has always been a peace-loving nation that cherishes harmonious relations. Its adherence to the five principles of peaceful coexistence and anti-hegemonism has shown China’s determination to stick to peaceful development.”

The five principles have governed New China since the revolution. They are: “Mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence.” There have been a few minor lapses, but these principles have remained stable and effective all these years. China’s concept of harmonious relations is of ancient philosophical extraction. Frankly, in this writer’s view, there are times when China’s criticism of an extremely inhumane aspect of one or another state’s internal affairs would do some good — but non-interference, much less non-aggression, is vastly superior to Washington’s endless interference and aggression.

Xi’s statement is an accurate representation of China’s foreign relations. This is the PRC’s long-term global strategy of development. It needs and wants peace. Washington knows all this, but that’s not the point. Xi declared that Beijing opposed the very concept of global hegemony by any nation, including itself, and, of course, the U.S.. President Obama’s primary foreign policy objective, and assuredly that of succeeding administrations, is the retention of global rule. This contradiction will eventually have to be resolved through negotiation or hostilities.

China will certainly not confront the U.S. on this matter within the foreseeable future. Beijing’s reading of the tea leaves suggests that world trends will encourage the incoming tide of multipolar world order and displace the outgoing tide of unipolar dominion. Such thinking emerges from America’s evident decline, the imminent rise of the developing nations, and the mounting dissatisfaction with the results of Washington’s global rule among countries not dependent upon Fortress Americana.

Writing in *Time* June 1, Ian Bremmer noted: “Emerging countries are not strong enough to overthrow U.S. dominance, but they have more than enough strength and self-confidence to

refuse to follow Washington's lead." This is a recent development that will continue to unfold in the next decade or two.

At this point, equipped with the seven league boots only possessed by a superpower, the U.S. is far ahead of its detractors in the emerging competition to determine whether only one, or many nations in combination, will shape the future. The UN may figure in this, but only after the preponderant influence of the U.S. and certain other countries is reduced and more evenly shared with the rising countries, a number of which surely realize it's time for a change. They wish to avoid a dreadful future of devastating wars, rampant climate change, poverty and scandalous inequality.

The fact remains: Washington is determined to keep the keys to the kingdom, and it is taking measures daily to strengthen its intention to constrain China by depriving it of exercising even the regional power to which it is entitled on the basis of its huge economy, a population of 1.4 billion people, and its peaceful rise and intentions.

President Obama is quite visibly seeking to confront China, politically, militarily, and economically and politically in the Asia/Pacific region. This is what the "pivot" to Asia is about, containing Chinese influence within its own geographical environment.

The U.S. is at least two decades ahead of China in war technology, equipment, nuclear weapons, various missiles, planes, ships — everything. John Reed wrote in DefenseTech a few years ago: "Even China's newest military gear is reminiscent of Western or Soviet technology from about 20 years ago, or more." People's Liberation Army (PLA) leaders certainly want to catch up and are making progress, but they can only approach near proximity if Pentagon scientists decide to sleep for the next two decades. Instead, Washington's immense military, several times that of China, is increasing the gap in real time.

U.S. military spending this year will amount to 4.5% of GNP, and that does not count a number of military expenses concealed in nonmilitary budgets such as the new 20-year multi-billion dollar program to modernize U.S. nuclear weapons and delivery systems (charged to the Department of Energy). China's spending this year, with four times the American population, is 1.5% of GDP.

China's extremely important cyber warfare advances may or may not be equal to those of the U.S., but it is the only area of relative equivalence, and it's causing headaches in the Pentagon.

The U.S. is frantically surrounding China with military weapons, advanced aircraft, naval fleets and a multitude of military bases from Japan, South Korea and the Philippines through several nearby smaller Pacific islands to its new and enlarged base in Australia and, of course, intercontinental ballistic missiles from the United States. The U.S. naval fleet, aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines patrol China's nearby waters. Warplanes, surveillance planes, drones and spying satellites cover the skies, creating a symbolic darkness at noon. By 2017, the Pentagon plans to encircle China with "the most advanced stealth warplanes in the world," according to RT. "The Air Force's F-22s and B-2s, as well as a fleet of the Marine Corps' F-35, will all be deployed. This buildup has been going on for three years and it is hardly ever mentioned in the U.S.

Washington seems to fear China's military defense capability more than its potential offensive abilities, though that remains a serious concern. In the Pentagon's annual report to Congress May 8, all 31,000 words were devoted to "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015," including these:

"China is investing in capabilities designed to defeat adversary power projection and counter third-party — including U.S. — intervention during a crisis or conflict.... The PLA is developing and testing new intermediate- and medium-range conventional ballistic missiles, as well as long- range, land-attack, and anti-ship cruise missiles that extend China's operational reach, attempting to push adversary forces— including the United States — farther from potential regional conflicts. China is also focusing on counter-space, offensive cyber operations, and electronic warfare capabilities meant to deny adversaries the advantages of modern, informationized warfare.... China's military modernization has the potential to reduce core U.S. military technological advantages." Concern was also expressed for "China's development and testing of missile defense."

Much of the Pentagon report is far more objective and informative about China than statements from the White House, Congress and the provocative corporate mass media: First of all it describes China's political goal realistically: "Securing China's status as a great power and, ultimately, reacquiring regional preeminence." Question — Why is the Obama Administration doing everything possible to thwart China's regional preeminence? Answer — Because it is unwilling to share a regional portion of its own world preeminence with any country that will not bend a knee to Washington's supremacy.



The report says accurately: “China continues to regard stable relations with the United States and China’s neighbors as key to its development. China sees the U.S. as the dominant regional and global actor with the greatest potential to both support and, potentially, disrupt China’s rise. Top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping, continued to advocate for a ‘new type of major power relations’ with the United States throughout 2014. China’s ‘new type’ of relations concept urges a cooperative U.S.- China partnership based on equality, mutual respect, and mutual benefit.”

Most interestingly, the Pentagon also recognized that “Chinese leaders see a strong military as critical to prevent other countries from taking steps that would damage China’s interests and to ensure China can defend itself, should deterrence fail. China seeks to ensure basic stability along its periphery and avoid direct confrontation with the United States in order to focus on domestic development and smooth China’s rise. Despite this, Chinese leaders in 2014 demonstrated a willingness to tolerate a higher level of regional tension as China sought to advance its interests, such as in competing territorial claims in the East China Sea and South China Sea.”

The *Wall Street Journal* May 13 defined the South China Sea as “one of the world’s busiest shipping routes and a strategic passage between the rich economies of Northeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. As much as 50% of global oil-tanker shipments pass through its waters.... China often intercepts and protests over U.S. naval ships and aircraft conducting surveillance near its coastline in the South China Sea.... Six governments – China, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and the Philippines — claim the waters, islands, reefs and atolls in whole or in part, making the area a potential flashpoint.” Two countries, Japan and South Korea, have claims in the East China Sea to the northwest, so eight nations are involved. China has long claimed authority over almost all the islands on the basis of evidence the other states consider inadequate.

The Obama Administration is navigating with abandon and roiling the political waters throughout both seas, enthusiastically supporting the claims of all the smaller nations against China’s claims. This is a very important and delicate matter because verified claimants are entitled to exploit energy, mineral and other abundant resources in the proximity as well as to deploy them for military purposes, if large enough, but most are tiny. This is clearly a complex matter that should be resolved over time through peaceful negotiations, and give and take dispute resolution. The continuation of America’s self-appointed role as advocate and protector of the counter-claims of smaller countries against China will only cause more trouble.

The U.S. has absolutely no authority in this matter, and it even refuses to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is equipped to mediate territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Actually, Obama doesn't give a fig about the claims. The only purpose of his intervention against China's claims is to consolidate and expand Washington's large and growing cheaper-by-the dozen gaggle of regional client states — some of which (Japan, S. Korea, the Philippines) have been U.S. protectorates since the end of World War II. All these countries will support America's global political, economic and military intentions in East Asia, including that of confining China's influence within its own borders to the extent possible. If not, they will be escorted to the door.

In this connection the U.S. is also exaggerating the fact that China is involved in land reclamation efforts in five small reefs in the Spratly Islands. It's expanding them by adding sand and making infrastructure additions, including an airfield in one. The White house says up to is about 2,000 acres are at issue. Obama said a month ago that China was "flexing its muscles" to browbeat smaller nations into accepting Beijing's sovereignty over disputed islands, and more recently Washington implied it might send navy ships and aircraft to the islands — but soon backed off because China's actions were entirely legal.

In mid-May, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Daniel Russel told the Washington Post: "Reclamation isn't necessarily a violation of international law, but it's certainly violating the harmony, the *feng shui*, of Southeast Asia, and it's certainly violating China's claim to be a good neighbor and a benign and non-threatening power." At that point, the heavens finally intervened with a lighter moment. Wrote the Wall Street Journal May 21: "Chinese Taoist priest Liang Xinyang is rebutting the U.S. official's understanding of *feng shui*. The term, which translates directly as 'wind water,' refers to the Chinese philosophical system of harmonizing the human being with the surrounding environment. In fact, claims Mr. Liang, China's reclamation efforts are *improving* the region's *feng shui*.... Mr. Liang maintained that *feng shui* 'belongs to the whole world, but the power of interpretation stays with China.'"

Soon after the Pentagon report, China outlined a new military strategy to boost its naval reach May 26. In a policy document issued by the State Council, China vowed to increase its "open seas protection," switching from air defense to both offense and defense, and criticized neighbors who take "provocative actions" on its reefs and islands. A statement in the document declared: "In today's world, the global trends toward multipolarity and economic globalization are

intensifying.... The forces for world peace are on the rise, so are the factors against war.... There are, however, new threats from hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism.” China will speed up the development of a cyber force to tackle “grave security threats” to its cyber infrastructure. Cyberspace is highlighted as one of China’s four “critical security domains”, other than the ocean, outer space and nuclear force.

In addition to military threats, and encouraging allies to assist in containing China, Washington’s “pivot” includes strong intervention intended to increase America’s economic clout in East Asia and reduce Beijing’s. Obama’s chosen vehicle — the Trans Pacific Partnership — so favors corporations at the expense of U.S. jobs, the interests of working people, the environment and national sovereignty that many Democrats in Congress, led by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, are sharply opposed. In the words of Public Citizen:

“The TPP is a massive, controversial ‘free trade’ agreement currently being pushed by big corporations and negotiated behind closed doors by officials from the United States and 11 other countries – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The TPP would expand the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) “trade” pact model that has spurred massive U.S. trade deficits and job loss, downward pressure on wages, unprecedented levels of inequality and new floods of agricultural imports.

“The TPP not only replicates, but expands NAFTA’s special protections for firms that offshore U.S. jobs. And U.S. TPP negotiators literally used the 2011 Korea FTA – under which exports have fallen and trade deficits have surged – as the template for the TPP. In one fell swoop, this secretive deal could: offshore American jobs and increase income inequality, jack up the cost of medicines, sneak in SOPA-like threats to Internet freedom (i.e., Stop Online Piracy Act), and empower corporations to attack our environmental and health safeguards, expose the U.S. to unsafe food and products, roll back Wall Street reforms, and ban Buy American policies needed to create green jobs.

The *Japan Times* sounded like recalcitrant U.S. Democrats when it reported May 15: “One big problem with the TPP talks is the secrecy of the negotiating process. The participants are required not to publicize developments in the talks and draft agreements while they are still being negotiated. The talks are going forward without the Japanese public and lawmakers being given relevant information on what is being discussed or agreed upon. For example, it is impossible to know the details of discussions on regulations the TPP nations can adopt for

environmental protection and food safety. Even when the trade pact takes effect, the participants will be forbidden from disclosing internal documents on the negotiation process for four years.” Japan has not signed the TPP deal yet. It is demanding concessions on automobiles and agricultural products.

The Senate rejected Obama’s demand for a fast track arrangement in mid-May, 52 to 45, but after corporate howls, promises and dollars it was passed days later 62-37. Most Republicans supported the trade plan from the beginning. Winning over his own party has proven so difficult that Obama has introduced the false patriotism of anti-China rhetoric to shame recalcitrant Democrats into changing their views. Speaking in May he said: “If we don’t write the rules for trade around the world, guess what? China will.” Actually, China is far more cooperative with U.S. trade proposals than obstructive. On the TPP Beijing simply understands that it is aimed against China and that it has many shortcomings, as Warren has repeatedly pointed out.

Although China earlier appeared deeply concerned about the TPP, it now seems indifferent. Over the last several months, President Xi has combined a well-financed, spectacular package of trade, banking, and infrastructure projects that are bound to significantly advance China’s power and prestige in Asia, Europe and North Africa as well.

The two most important and far reaching projects are the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the visionary, immensely expensive One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project. The latter initiative is also referred to as the New Silk Road after the 4,000-mile trade route between China and the West that developed from 114 BCE to the 1450s. The accompanying maritime trade lanes were called the Spice Route. OBOR, too, consists of a land and sea route. When New China does things it’s often in a big way, often with a touch of long-past history in mind.

China’s recent creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) — an exceptionally powerful economic initiative destined to benefit all of Asia and the world — was perceived by the White House as a humiliating affront. Washington worked for months to undermine the impending venture, advising allies and underlings far and near to keep out.

Beijing proposed the AIIB in October 2013; a year later, 21 nations, all Asian, gathered in Beijing and signed the memorandum establishing the bank. Six months later, the membership has expanded to 57.

In mid-March, Washington’s closest ally, the United Kingdom, was among the first major western economies to join the bank, prompting an extraordinary outburst by an anonymous high

official of the Obama Administration, who declared for publication: “We are wary about a trend toward constant accommodation of China, which is not the best way to engage a rising power.” President Obama had to give permission for “anonymous” to deliver so petulant and insulting a remark.

Within a couple of weeks all the major world nations had joined except Japan and the U.S. The rest knew a good deal when they saw it in the midst of prolonged economic stagnation, particularly in Europe. Remember Willy Sutton’s answer when asked why he robbed banks? “That’s where the money is.” Their economies will profit.

The international news analyst M.K. Bhadrakumar reported in Asia Times May 26: ” The AIIB Charter is still under discussion. The media report that China is not seeking a veto in the decision-making comes as a pleasant surprise. Equally, China is actively consulting other founding members (UK, Germany, France, Italy, etc.). These would suggest that Beijing has a much bigger game plan of scattering the U.S. containment strategy. Clearly, the Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade deal is already looking more absurd if China were to be kept out of it. The point is, AIIB gives financial underpinning for the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative, which now the European countries and Russia have embraced, as they expect much business spin-off.”

China benefits immensely, in terms of international prestige and politically as well, from the new venture. The AIIB has become a strong rival to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, two powerful U.S.-controlled financial organizations, as well as the regional Asian Development Bank, ruled by Japan and America. China is not interested in debasing these associations but in collegial modernization with Beijing having a voice.

What’s the oddly named named One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project stand for? The “Belt” refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt, largely composed of countries situated on the original Silk Road from China through Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The “Road” refers to the new maritime Silk Road. The initiative calls for the integration of the region into a cohesive economic area through building infrastructure, increasing cultural exchanges and broadening trade. Many of the countries that are part of the “belt” are also signed up with the AIIB. The Maritime Road is aimed at investing and fostering collaboration in Southeast Asia, Oceania, and North Africa through several contiguous bodies of water.

Journalist Binoy Kampmark points out in CounterPunch: “The economic belt, as Xi terms it, features such concrete manifestations as high-speed rail lines [including one between Beijing and Moscow], highways, bridges, and Internet connectivity. These, in turn, will be complemented by

port development that is already seeing a presence in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. Spearheading the drive are China's state-owned enterprises."

Two other countries play important supporting roles in the U.S.-China exchange — Russia and Japan.

President Xi said recently that China is devoted to "promoting a new model of major-country relationship with the U.S., keeping its comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia, [and] strengthening its partnership with the EU." China's partnership with Europe involves trade, investment, environmental issues and the like. With Russia it's broader, specifically: Energy, Business and Trade, High Technology and Industry, Finance, Military and Political/Diplomatic.

China has military and political/diplomatic relations with the U.S. as well, but of a different character. According to Russian Insider: "Military: China and Russia are engaging in military exercises of increasing scale and frequency. Their respective General Staffs closely coordinate with each other. Russia has resumed arms and technology sales to China. Political and Diplomatic: China and Russia are joint founder members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. They actively coordinate their foreign policy positions with each other. They also work closely together and support each other in the UN Security Council."

Moscow's partnership with Beijing has become much stronger in recent years. Russia is a major nuclear power, roughly equivalent to America, with sophisticated military technology and hardware exceeding that of China, to which it is now selling offensive and defensive weaponry after a lapse of decades. The world's two biggest countries (size and population) have long been wary of each other, but a perceived need to strengthen their defenses brings them closer. Whether they will ever form a binding formal alliance is not known, but Russia's power adds to that of China and vice versa. Commenting on the relationship a couple of weeks ago Xi declared: "We are strong if united but weak if isolated."

At the same time the PRC is trying to calm an aroused Washington. Michael Swaine, a China expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington recently told the press: "The Chinese are trying to convey a more moderate and softer message. They are trying to promote the image of a more flexible power." Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang recently declared in a widely publicized speech that that the PRC "does not have any ideas or capabilities" with which to challenge or displace America's global command.

Russia shares with China the threat of U.S. military power on its periphery. Stratfor noted March 30: “From the Baltics to the Black Sea and now the Caspian, the United States is on the search for recruits to encircle Russia. Romania threw its lot in with the United States last year, but this year, Turkey and Turkmenistan are the ones to watch.

“All along Russia’s frontier with Europe, the U.S. military is bustling with activity. Bit by bit, the United States is expanding various military exercises under the banner of Operation Atlantic Resolve. The exercises began in the Baltics and Poland and, as of last week, expanded into Romania with plans to move into Bulgaria. So far, most of these missions are on the smaller side, consisting of only a few hundred troops at any given time, and are meant to test the U.S. ability to rapidly deploy units to countries that can then practice receiving and working with these forces. Additionally, various headquarter units from U.S. Army infantry brigades have been rotating in and assuming control of Operation Atlantic Resolve in order to practice joint command and control.” Several hundred American troops are in Ukraine training Kiev’s military.

It was symbolically significant that that Xi Jinping was seated next to President Putin at the May 9 Victory Day Parade in Moscow and that a Chinese military detachment was part of the event celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the allied victory in Europe. Putin and Russian troops have been invited to participate in China’s celebration of Japan’s defeat in September. The U.S., Britain and France, Russia’s former allies, boycotted the Moscow event.

The new U.S.-Japan expanded military guidelines for “defense cooperation” that was agreed in Washington between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and the Obama Administration April 27 is of major geopolitical significance. Tokyo will now increase its military role in the region and assume a “more robust international posture,” in response to growing Chinese influence. The guidelines allow for global Washington-Tokyo cooperation militarily, ranging from defense against ballistic missiles, cyber and space attacks as well as maritime security.

China has sharply criticized the new guidelines, calling them an attempt to undermine Beijing, as well as the geopolitical architecture of the Asia-Pacific. *Global Times*, which is affiliated with the CPC, declared: “The new guidelines have struck a threatening pose toward China, which is the strongest driver for East Asia’s development. They should know that their aggression has sent a dangerous signal to regional stability.”

Washington also renewed and strengthened America’s “iron-clad” commitment to support Japan and all territories “under Tokyo’s administration.” Japan and China are locked in a sharp



disagreement about their rival claims to tiny East China Sea islets and reefs, some no more than large rocks sticking out of the water. Should the conflict become a serious confrontation the Obama Administration evidently will intervene on behalf of Japan

The daily Indian newspaper *The Hindu* reported May 1: “Officials from the United States have been quoted as saying that the latest guidelines — updated for the first time since 1997 — end the geographic limits on the Japanese military to operate. Following permission from Parliament, Japanese forces can participate in military operations across the globe. ‘The current guidelines are unrestricted with respect to geography,’ U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter has been quoted as saying. ‘That is a very big change — from being locally focused to globally focused,’ he observed. Analysts point out that the changes to the U.S.-Japan pact inject more substance into President Barack Obama’s ‘Pivot to Asia’ doctrine, which the Chinese say lays the military groundwork for containing Beijing’s peaceful rise.”

Heretofore the terms of the “pacifist” constitution imposed on Japan after it was defeated in World War I” confined the Japanese military to fight only in Japan and in self-defense. The right wing Abe government has sought to dispense with this constitution entirely, but a majority of the Japanese people strongly oppose such a step. Abe envisions Japan once again becoming a major military power in Asia. Actually Tokyo already wields the ninth largest military force in the world, replete with high technology weaponry.

China has just made an amazing overture to Japan in an effort to reduce tensions. M.K. Bhadrakumar reported May 27 that China has decided to extend the “hand of friendship to Japan,” describing a precedent-breaking event in Beijing May 23.

“A heavyweight politician from Japan’s ruling party leads a 3,000-member delegation (yes, 3,000) to Beijing; the Chinese hosts spread out a grand dinner for the 3,000 Japanese guests at the Great Hall of People; President Xi Jinping makes an apparently surprise but carefully choreographed appearance at the dinner; Xi makes an extraordinarily warm speech full of conciliatory sentiments belying his fame as an assertive leader, stressing the imperatives of Sino-Japanese friendship not only for the two countries but for the region and the world at large; the heavyweight Japanese politician steps forward in front of his 3,000-strong delegation and hands over to Xi a hand-written letter from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe; Xi reciprocates by conveying his best regards to Abe — a thaw in China-Japan ties seems to be at work.

“Cynics might say Abe has a habit of sending hand-written letters to counterparts in countries with which Japan has strained relations, such as South Korea. But there is something beyond the



calls of public diplomacy here, as is apparent from the contents and tone of the speech Xi made while addressing the goodwill delegation from Japan. A Xinhua commentary noted, ‘The onus is now on the leaders of Japan to reciprocate the friendly tone and take concrete actions to mend frayed ties with China.’ The two neighbors are showing a spirit of pragmatism that was considered unthinkable as recently as last November when on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit Xi and Abe held a frosty meeting.”

The *Financial Times* reported April 30 “Washington is giving up on the idea that a risen China can be co-opted as a stakeholder in the present global order,” implicitly suggesting that Washington is going to adopt a much tougher stance toward China to preserve its geopolitical superiority. The article references a new report on China from the Council on Foreign Relations, the leading establishment voice in foreign affairs. Titled, “Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China,” the newspaper reports it “outlines a plan to draw together all the elements of U.S. power with the goal of maintaining America’s ‘primacy’ in East Asia.... But balancing Beijing’s weight is one thing. Nervous as they are, China’s neighbors have a powerful economic interest in getting on with Beijing. A U.S. that sought permanent preponderance would be inviting a collision. Unstoppable forces and immovable objects come to mind.”

Both China and the United States want to keep their disputes within bounds in the proximate future, if possible. This was demonstrated after weeks of public squabbling May 16 and 17 when Secretary of State John Kerry paid his fifth visit to China. According to a May 26 report in China-U.S. Focus by Zhang Zhixin, chief of American Political Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, this is the meaning:

“As the highest-level American official who visited China this year, with a hot China policy debate going on in the U.S., and the Obama administration strongly criticizing China’s reclamation in South China Sea, [Kerry’s] visit has been regarded as a trip aimed at denouncing Beijing. However, judging from the result, Kerry’s visit is better characterized as a trip of in-depth communication.

“Early this year, American strategic circles started another round of China policy debate. From the so-called ‘cracking up’ of the CPC to the familiar rhetoric of the ‘China threat’ it made some American China watchers believe the consensus underlying the U.S. China policy is collapsing.”

Kerry’s constructive visit

“has been of great importance at this critical moment. First, it shows that both countries would like to manage differences before crises occur.... Chinese leaders tried to reassure the U.S. side they are still committed to building a new major power relationship....

“Second, this visit made timely preparation for the coming bilateral and multilateral events — including President Xi Jinping’s first State visit to the U.S. in September — that could shape the following two year’s Sino-U.S. relations....

“Third, Secretary Kerry’s visit is a success as it deepened the understanding between two countries at this critical time, but it reminds both countries consensus is easy to reach but hard to actualize. The disputes between two countries highlighted the U.S. misinterpretation of China’s plans for future development. The U.S. side should neither overestimate its influence upon China’s future, nor underestimate China’s ability to explore its own way of development with Chinese characteristics.”

Interestingly, a similar situation to the Beijing surprise occurred weeks earlier when Kerry was sent to Moscow for talks with President Putin. Washington’s advance leaks suggested that he would read the riot act to the Russian leader because of the Ukraine situation — but the opposite happened, evidently not least because of U.S. concerns of a developing alliance between Russia and China. Kerry turned on a dime just before both meetings, as though receiving late instructions.

Apparently, the White House concluded its policy of pouting and denouncing China is churlish and demonstrably counterproductive. Even some of Washington’s allies were beginning to look askance at Oval Office shoot-from-the-hip decisions. However, nothing else has changed. The quest to retain global rule is more pronounced than ever and the danger level is getting higher.

Both the U.S. and China are strong and intelligent countries. But as Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

Great changes have already started and the pace will intensify in coming decades — politically, economically, environmentally and in terms of social systems and world order. One needed change is replacing single-country global hegemony with multi-country cooperation for the advancement of humankind. The governments of several rising countries will help bring this about, if possible, but it won’t be easy.

Systemic changes are needed in our societies, as well. We cannot simply paper over the class exploitation, gross inequality, racism, poverty, state violence and the shredding of our ecology — and say that’s “change.” Billions of human beings alive today want a world where wealth is sufficiently shared so everyone has at least enough. That’s no exaggeration. Billions live in poverty. They all want out. Whether in poverty or not, who prefers to live in a world where the richest 1% of the global population own more than the remaining 99%? That’s our world today, and it must change.