

East Asia's Enduring Rivalries: Ripe for Abatement?

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Abstract

Despite earlier premonitions that East Asia might be 'ripe for rivalry', interstate relations in this region have generally become less tense in recent years. Naturally, this observation does not deny the existence of ongoing tension, such as pertaining to maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas. However, compared to those bygone years when East Asian states were fighting major wars and lined up in opposing camps, today's regional interactions are much calmer and multifaceted. This essay assesses these changing relations in the context of the literature on enduring rivalries and evolving Sino-American relations. It argues East Asian enduring rivalries, whether sustained, escalated or terminated, are nested in a larger contest for influence involving major powers. Washington's involvement plays a pivotal role affecting the trajectory and prospects for enduring rivalries in East Asia.

Keywords

Enduring rivalries, empirical puzzles, US pivotal role, rivalry persistence and termination

Introduction

In an influential article written almost 20 years ago but continues to be cited, Aaron Friedberg (1993/1994) expressed his premonitions that East Asia might be 'ripe for rivalry'. He compared East Asia's prospects for peace and cooperation

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with Western Europe. These prospects appeared to be distinctly more favourable for the latter region where liberal democracies, market integration, dense institutional networks and affluence and cosmopolitanism worked to restrain a return to its acrimonious past. By contrast, these conditions were less pervasive or shallower in East Asia where nationalism, authoritarianism, historical animosities and divergent cultural traditions appeared to presage a continuation and even intensification of interstate rivalries.

There have, of course, been important changes since Friedberg wrote his article. Surely, intra-Asian trade, including commerce between supposed rivals like China and Taiwan, has expanded enormously. China has become the leading trade partner not only for Taiwan but for South Korea and Japan as well. The number of intergovernmental institutions and the extent of people-to-people exchanges have also taken off by leaps and bounds (for instance, nearly one million Taiwanese and half a million South Koreans now reside in China). Compared to the 1950s, 1960s and even 1970s, contentious relations have generally abated. Despite recent maritime tensions in the South and East China Sea, China, for example, has settled many of its border disputes and its diplomatic ties with its former adversaries (e.g., Russia, India and Vietnam) and its relations with neighbours are arguably more cordial now than at least some more tense periods previously. This does not mean that old rivalries have been buried but it does beg the question of what constitutes an enduring rivalry in East Asia. Among other questions, how many militarized disputes are required in order for a dyad to be considered an enduring rivalry and how long does a peaceful interval have to be maintained in order to consider an enduring rivalry to have ended (e.g., Bennett, 1997; Colaresi, Rasler & Thompson, 2007; Diehl & Goertz, 2000; Goertz & Diehl, 1993; Thompson, 1995; Stinnett & Diehl, 2001).

This article critiques Friedberg's thesis against a growing literature on enduring rivalry. There is a rather substantial quantitative literature on interstate rivalry, which commonly refers to chronically contentious dyads as enduring rivals. These relations have attracted scholarly attention because, while they constitute a small minority of all interstate relations, they have been responsible for a disproportionately large number of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) and wars (Bennett & Nordstrom, 2000). Enduring rivals are states that experience recurrent militarized disputes, and these disputes have often developed into full-scale wars. Conflict recidivism and the danger of escalation are the underlying policy and theoretical reasons that motivate a concern for enduring rivalries.

One approach to operationalize the concept of enduring rivalry has been to define it in terms of the frequency of MIDs involving a particular dyad. It has sought to identify such contentious relations on the basis of whether a dyad has experienced at least six militarized disputes during a 20-year period (Hensel, Goertz & Diehl, 2000; Diehl & Gertz, 2000). Although this number (six) does not have any inherent theoretical rationale, it points to a chronically high level of tension as the defining characteristic of a rivalry. While recognizing this feature, another approach to rivalry identification has given more attention to mutual perceptions of threat (e.g., Colaresi et al., 2007; Thompson, 1995). This reciprocal

sense of danger distinguishes rivalries from other antagonistic relations whereby, say, Grenada, Panama and even Iraq and North Korea may be said to have felt an existential threat from the US but not the reverse. Presumably, rivalries entail two-sided rather than one-sided threat perception (Hewitt & Wilkenfeld, 1999; Thompson, 1995, 2001). As just implied, the leaders of those states involved in a rivalry must also see themselves engaging in a competitive contest. And as implied by the idea of competition, the contesting states should be at least roughly matched in their national capabilities. Even though the US and Cuba, and Russia and Georgia (or Ukraine), may have antagonistic relations, one would normally not use rivalry to describe their relations. Should relations across the Taiwan Strait be described as such? Furthermore, although rivalries are necessarily about contestation over something, such as, interstate influence, regime legitimacy, disputed territories and even national or ethnic identities, not all such disputations would be considered rivalries. Most people would not consider the so-called Cod War between England and Iceland a rivalry. In short, rivalry as a concept engages several aspects that *jointly* define it. It involves two approximately equally matched contestants seemingly locked in a relationship of perpetual tension that presents recurrent threats to break out in war.

In calling attention to some East Asian relations that might have been 'ripe for rivalry', Friedberg appeared to suggest that these relations were likely to experience elevated tension and might even be poised to enter a period of protracted and intensified contest. Some of these relations, such as those across the Taiwan Strait and the 38th parallel on the Korean peninsula, had already gone through multiple militarized disputes before Friedberg's article. According to at least this latter consideration if not other criteria, their extant relations were already rivalries—and not just 'ripe for rivalry'. Depending on the particular aspect(s) emphasized, one might argue that Sino-Japanese, Sino-Indian, Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Russian relations had also already become rivalries at one time or another before the early 1990s.

How have these dyads' relations evolved since Friedberg's article? There are at least four possibilities. (1) Have these relations continued the state of affairs prevalent in the early 1990s? (2) Have they entered a process of *détente* and conflict abatement? (3) Have they reached a new level intensified contestation? (4) Or have the former contestants managed to settle their conflict? Individual pairs of relations can take one of these paths and depending on the direction of their evolution, East Asian regional politics in general may be said to have become more or less contentious—there appear to be more cases falling into the second and fourth categories than the first and third categories.

One may reasonably argue that China's relations with some of its neighbours (Russia, India, South Korea and Taiwan) are substantially more cordial now compared to, say, the years before the 1990s (that is, taking the end of the Cold War in 1989 as a watershed event) and certainly in contrast to their relations in the 1960s. One may even argue that Beijing and Moscow have managed to settle their rivalry by concluding their border disputes peacefully. While occasional tension still remains, relations across the Taiwan Strait have clearly undergone

a process of détente and conflict abatement, a process that has advanced even further between Beijing and Seoul. Although relations across the 38th parallel on the Korean peninsula have suffered a setback compared to the state of affairs during the presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, they are best described as a continuation of chronic tension rather than an escalation of this tension to a new higher level. Sino-Japanese relations have of course deteriorated recently as a consequence of their dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. However, it is not clear that they stand now at a nadir compared to any other time after 1945. Do quantitative data on MIDs support these impressions that interstate relations in East Asia have *generally* become less tense and or at least not more so?

This article presents this evidence and seeks to explain variations in dyadic tension. It introduces several pertinent conclusions from quantitative research on enduring rivalries, highlighting especially the influence of major third parties in rivalry maintenance and termination. This influence is suggested by contrasting US policies towards Western Europe and East Asia after 1945, and by contrasting the contemporary situations across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean peninsula. The article's main argument contends that while they may be facilitative and even necessary conditions, endogenous factors such as those mentioned by Friedberg are not sufficient to explain the perpetuation or termination of rivalries. *Highly asymmetric rivalries are sustained and even occasionally escalate to war because of the important role played by major powers as patrons or mediators in these contests.* In other words, supposed rivalries between minor and even secondary states are often nested in larger contests for influence involving the major powers. What the latter decide to do, or not to do, affect the prospects for these local conflicts to be settled, dragged out or even escalate to war (Chan, 2013).

Dyadic MIDs Involving East Asia

Systematically collected data on MIDs have now become the standard of quantitative research on international conflict. The most recently updated data provide coverage up to the year 2001, and Zeev Maoz (2005) has developed a dyadic version identifying the disputants ((DYDMID2.0). For the years 1946–2001, it reported 412 separate episodes of MIDs among the East Asian countries, and between them and several countries outside this region (mainly the US, Russia, India, Australia and New Zealand). These episodes vary in intensity and duration, such that some of them involved multiparty wars fought over many years and resulting in many casualties (e.g., the Korea and Vietnam Wars) whereas others were brief and minor encounters that did not cause battle fatalities.

Focusing for the moment on just the incidence of MIDs, how many of the dyads would qualify for the conventional, though arbitrary, definition of an enduring rivalry, which calls for at least six MIDs during a 20-year period? During 1982–2001, there were seven such pairs (again ignoring for the moment other

considerations for accepting a contentious dyad as a rivalry): Myanmar–Thailand (13 MIDs), China–Vietnam (11), People’s Republic of Korea–Republic of Korea (PRK–ROK) (North Korea–South Korea, 11), China–Taiwan (9), USA–PRK (8), Russia–Japan (7) and USA–China (6). China was a party to three of these pairs, and the US was a party in two of them. Conspicuously absent from this list are three pairs of ostensible rivalry that matches China with India (just one MID), Russia (3) and Japan (3). The last figure of course overlooks some tense confrontations in recent years that have engaged China and Japan over their competing sovereignty claims in the East China Sea. Still, if one adheres to the standard definition of an enduring rivalry based on the incidence of MIDs, it appears that interstate relations have generally improved over time. Compared to the previous 20-year period (1962–1981), the incidence of MIDs had fallen sharply for the China–India (from 11 to 1) and Russia–China (from 16 to 3) dyads.

Comparing the incidence of MIDs between the two 20-year periods (1962–1981 and 1982–2001), there was also a decline in the number of these episodes for USA–China (from 9 to 6), Russia–Japan (from 10 to 7), Thailand–Cambodia (from 9 to 2) and Cambodia–Vietnam (from 6 to 0). Other pairs, however, saw stability or even an increase in the frequency of these episodes: PRK–ROK (from 10 to 11), China–Taiwan (from 4 to 9) and China–Vietnam (from 8 to 11). Cases such as these indicate areas of continuing tension, presenting important exceptions to the general regional trend of conflict abatement. Naturally, if one examines shorter periods of recent history, one gains a different perspective such that, for example, relations across the Taiwan Strait have become more stable and even amicable since the election of Ma Ying-jeou.

The incidence of MIDs between China and Vietnam reflected mainly their border conflicts in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Between 1990 and 2001, this number fell to just three, even though there were more recent acrimonies involving these two countries over their territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The number of MIDs for China–Taiwan during 1982–2001 reflected an increase from 1962 to 1981, especially during a brief period in the early and mid 1990s when China was trying to block Lee Teng-hui’s pro-independence agenda. Since then, this number has fallen sharply. Thus, two of the seven possible enduring rivalries identified earlier—namely, the China–Vietnam and China–Taiwan dyads—appear to be poised to become less troublesome at least compared to the heightened tension that has characterized their relations in some recent years. Another contentious pair that had fought before, specifically China and South Korea, has ‘normalized’ to a point that it has become quite difficult to imagine a return to its previous level of hostility.

Simply counting the incidence of MIDs can of course be misleading. This procedure does not take into account the intensity or duration of a military confrontation, and treats every such episode as equivalent. Thus, for example, the Vietnam War was coded as one single episode for the USA–Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) (North Vietnam) dyad lasting from 1964 to 1973. When one considers that some MIDs during the 1950s, 1960s and even 1970s involved heavy and protracted fighting, in contrast to the relatively minor clashes and military displays during the 1990s (such as, the Chinese missile tests in the vicinity of

Taiwan during 1995–1996), East Asia's general trend has pointed to conflict abatement and the relaxation, even termination, of some old contestations. There are important exceptions to this main trend, such as on the Korean peninsula and in the East China Sea, but they remain as departures from the norm.

A clue to the dynamics behind this general abatement of tension lies in the role of the US and the USSR/Russia. Significantly, on almost two-thirds of those occasions when the US was a party to an MID in East Asia, this involvement was tied to a conflict between two East Asian countries. Put differently, there was a 63.2 per cent chance (during 1946–2001) that when the US became involved in an MID with an East Asian adversary, it was supporting another East Asian country confronting this same adversary. The comparable figure for the USSR/Russia was 19 per cent, lower but still substantial. All such involvement by Moscow in support of an ally occurred before 1989, the year marking the Cold War's end. There was not any similar involvement by Moscow since then. By contrast, there was an upswing in such involvement by Washington. Specifically, in 47.4 per cent of the East Asian MIDs involving the US during 1946–1989, a pair of East Asian countries was also involved. This figure rose to 81.8 per cent during 1990–2001. In other words, when an MID engages two East Asian countries, the odds that the US will also participate in this dispute have gone up to about four in five after the Cold War, whereas Russian participation in such situations has all but ceased. The evidence pointing to US co-involvement in a large number of East Asian MIDs offers an important clue about why some rivalries endure whereas others terminate. Significantly, however, despite Washington's recent declared intention to 'pivot' to Asia, US involvement in East Asia's *military* confrontations have diminished in recent years and despite considerable policy differences, Sino-American relations have stabilized at a less acrimonious level than during the 1950s and 1960s (Shambaugh, 2013).

Endogenous and Exogenous Conditions on Rivalry

It seems intuitively obvious that compared to Europe—or rather Western Europe—East Asia presents a less promising setting for stable and cooperative interstate relations. However, when one extends one's analytic horizon beyond Western Europe and East Asia, the putative influence of regime characteristics, economic development, cultural homogeneity and regional organizations in contributing to interstate stability and cooperation becomes more questionable. One encounters the challenges of *irrelevance* or *idiosyncrasy*, which caution against accepting causal attributions when the same alleged cause has been associated with different outcomes, or when the same outcome has materialized in both the presence and absence of the alleged cause. Thus, for example, authoritarian and communist regimes in Latin America and Eastern Europe had managed respectively to maintain general regional stability and in the latter case, had also dampened traditional national and ethnic animosities. Conversely, market and political liberalization had been accompanied by a revival of such animosities in the Balkans. As for cultural homogeneity, it did not in itself produce greater stability or cooperation in

pre-1945 Europe or contemporary Middle East. Nor did economic development and interlocking commercial interests prevent European countries from going to war in 1914 and 1939. If Western Europe had, comparatively speaking, always been characterized by greater cultural homogeneity, economic development and cross-national linkages, these variables in themselves cannot explain *both* its relative war proneness before 1945 and its peacefulness since then. Moreover, in statistical jargon, this phenomenon is *over-determined*—the number of ostensible explanatory variables exceeds the number of cases whose variations (whether between two different times for the same region or between two different regions at the same time) are the object of explanation.

There is additionally the problem of *endogeneity*. Attention to interstate rivalries, such as their persistence and even possible intensification in East Asia, naturally addresses a concern for the risk of war or at least conflict escalation. Rivalries can of course increase such danger (Colaresi & Thompson, 2002). It is, however, also pertinent to remember that wars can terminate rivalries. After all, the defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945 was responsible for ending their rivalries with the US. Although it did not take a hot war, the USSR's weakness and eventual disintegration has also had something to do with abating its rivalry with the US, commonly described as the Cold War. These remarks raise an important point: how does the settlement, or continuation, of some rivalries affect others? Would the military defeat and physical occupation of Germany after World War II have had something to do with the termination of this country's rivalry with its European neighbours, and would the intensification and perpetuation of the Cold War also have had a further effect in converting East and West Germany into allies of their respective historical adversaries (the USSR and Poland for the former, and the US, France and Britain for the latter)? Moreover, some of the supposed conditions for rivalry abatement or revival—such as, regime compatibility, ideological similarity, liberal democracy, alliance membership and economic openness—tend to reflect the nature of war settlement, foreign imposition and contestation by the patrons of local rivals. In other words, they tend to be the *results* of previous rounds of conflict. *Regional rivalries are therefore to some extent derivative of these other occurrences and indicative of the hierarchical nature of interstate relations* (Lake, 2009). This observation in turn begs the question whether premonitions about East Asia's 'ripeness for rivalry' might not be related to and even rooted in concerns based on 'China's rise' and the consequent power shifts between it and the US. Indeed, did not some better-known rivalries of a previous era—such as, Anglo-German, Anglo-American, Franco-German and Russo-German competition—emerge from the dynamics of power transition?

Significantly and in contrast to those contentious dyads just mentioned, many of the post-1945 recurrent conflicts, such as, those between Syria and Israel, Somalia and Ethiopia, Greece and Turkey, Iraq and Iran, Pakistan and India and North and South Korea, have involved rather lopsided contestants. That is, in military and economic capabilities, and also demographic heft, these are highly asymmetric matches. When measured according to the Composite Index of National Capabilities, a standard measure developed by the Correlates of War Project (Singer, 1987; Singer et al., 1968), about four-fifths of these rivalries were

characterized by a significant power disparity of at least a three-to-one ratio between the two contestants (Klein, Goertz & Diehl, 2006, p. 341). One would naturally be inclined to ask why would the weaker side persist to contest rather than to yield to the stronger side's demands, and why has not the stronger side succeeded in crushing the weaker side, thereby bringing an end to their rivalry. Put slightly differently, why has the weaker side resisted a settlement and has often instigated repeated confrontations even after having suffered defeat or setback in previous rounds (e.g., Taiwan, North Korea, Pakistan, Syria, Somalia, Greece and East Germany during the height of the Cold War)? And what has prevented their respective stronger opponent from defeating them decisively on the battlefield and forcing a 'victor's peace' on them?

One has to consider third parties' intervention in prolonging these rivalries. The differences in, say, Western Europe and East Asia's 'ripeness for rivalry' has to be explained by more than their endogenous conditions. Analysts of interstate rivalries have often overlooked the importance of third parties by treating these contentious relations as basically bilateral matters. This *omitted variable* of third parties' role can better explain the differences for enduring rivalries to start and persist (or to be put to rest) in various regional settings than regime characteristics, economic development, commercial linkages or cultural homogeneity.

The US has played a pivotal role in shaping the settlement or perpetuation of rivalries. In Western Europe, Washington has worked to embed Germany in a series of multilateral institutions, especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in order to dampen concerns on the part of that country's neighbours about its rearmament and reunification by integrating its armed forces with those of its neighbours' and under US command (e.g., Hemmer & Katzenstein, 2002; Ikenberry, 2001). In contrast to this multilateral approach, Washington has stressed bilateralism in its post-1945 diplomacy in East Asia, often described as a hub-and-spokes approach, with a distinct emphasis on the US–Japan security treaty. Takashi Inogouchi (2007) has similarly stressed the paramount importance of the US–Japan alliance from Tokyo's perspective, describing it as bilateralism *über alles*. As a consequence of this more exclusive relationship, Japan has yet to fully come to terms with its Asian neighbours as Germany had done in its post-war reconciliation and integration. Another legacy of Washington's policies was of course that by intervening in the Chinese and Korean civil wars, the US had perpetuated the divisions across the Taiwan Strait and the 38th parallel. Had it not been for the US intervention, these rivalries would not have existed—simply because one side would have eliminated the other. Thus, local rivalries are often a legacy of great powers' past policies. Parenthetically and in contrast, Britain decided against intervening on behalf of the Confederacy in the US civil war (Little, 2007; Thompson, 2007), thus accounting in part for the absence of a North–South split and rivalry that would have ensued in the wake of a deadlock.

Third-party support plays an important role in perpetuating or terminating rivalries (Chan, 2010; Leng, 2000). Were it not for continued Chinese support, North Korea's regime would have likely collapsed. Similarly, had Islamabad not expected Washington and Beijing to come to its aid, it would not have instigated repeated confrontations with India that would have ended in it being defeated

decisively on the battlefield. Similarly, had Pol Pot's Cambodia not expected Chinese support, it would not have challenged a much stronger Vietnam—nor would Hanoi have invaded Cambodia in full knowledge of this action's repercussions in Beijing had it not expected Moscow's support. These last two examples also remind us that when a foreign patron withdraws its backing, asymmetric rivalries such as those between Cambodia and Vietnam and between Vietnam and China tend to end or at least go into remission. The end of Soviet support for East Germany had an even more dramatic effect, causing that communist regime to collapse and to be reunited with West Germany.

This discussion suggests that regional rivalries are related to and even derivative of competition between the great powers. The seemingly intractable conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbours, Iran and Iraq and Pakistan and India have been at least in part fuelled by Washington and Moscow's backing of rival clients during the Cold War. Significantly, when such competitive motivation is absent—such as, when the US exercised exclusive influence over both rivals (e.g., Greece and Turkey, Ecuador and Peru)—the danger of conflict escalation is lowered dramatically (Crawford, 2003). The incentives of major powers therefore matter as they can contribute to settling or at least dampening traditional rivalries as well as exacerbating or perpetuating them.

There is a substantial body of empirical evidence suggesting that when powerful third parties intervene to broker and enforce peace settlements, they can effectively bring an end to interstate and civil wars (Fortner, 2004; Walter, 2002; Werner & Yuen, 2005). Such intervention can help to settle internecine conflicts because whereas the direct disputants have difficulty making a credible commitment to each other against violating an agreement (thus their distrust of each other hampers a settlement from being reached in the first place), a powerful outsider can help them to overcome this problem by offering to act as an effective arbitrator and by even making side payments for them to reach an agreement. Third parties can have this positive effect on settling conflicts even though they can also perpetuate conflicts. The Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel, brought about by intense US mediation and commitment to both sides, illustrates the importance of third-party intervention in terminating a long-standing rivalry (Stein, 1999).

This last remark in turn begs the question whether the US, China, Russia and Japan have more to gain by resolving permanently the two flashpoints in East Asia—across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean peninsula—or whether it would be more advantageous to one or the other of them to let the current situation simmer but not boil over. This is, of course, another way of asking how Chinese reunification or Korean reunification would affect the influence and interests of significant others. Would a reunified China contribute to or detract from US, Japanese and Russian security? Similarly, what are the implications of a reunified Korea for these countries as well as China? Similarly, how would the US and China react to internal weakness and regime collapse in Pakistan, thereby bringing about a *de facto* end to that country's rivalry with India and a further increase in New Delhi's dominance in South Asia?

Naturally, as just hinted, the perpetuation of these enduring rivalries and their possible settlement are not separate matters. They are interrelated. They affect the

overall future distribution of power in East Asia and South Asia, and the role of and rationale for US military presence in these regions. Moreover, whether Beijing acts towards Pyongyang as Washington wishes is not entirely unrelated to whether Washington acts towards Taipei as Beijing wishes. Continued contest in one case provides bargaining leverage for one of them in negotiating over the other case. This observation in turn implies that it is more likely for these so-called rivalries to be settled concurrently as parts of a 'grand bargain' than as separate deals.

Washington and Beijing are of course not always or necessarily in a competitive relationship. They sometimes have shared or overlapping interests such as when they pursue parallel, if not necessarily coordinated, policies that have the intent and effect of propping up the Pakistani government. Such joint effort was on display when East Pakistan—today's Bangladesh—sought secession from West Pakistan with Indian support. In the ensuing Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, both Washington and Beijing 'tilted' in favour of Islamabad in order to check New Delhi's influence. Their policies did not prevent Bangladesh's independence or Pakistan's military defeat but demonstrated again the role of third parties in shaping supposed bilateral rivalries. Sometimes what a country does not do can be as pertinent as what it does do in affecting enduring rivalries. For examples, Margaret Thatcher and Francois Mitterand accepted Germany's reunification despite this development's obvious consequences for Europe's balance of power. Even more remarkably, Mikhail Gorbachev conceded to a reunified Germany that would continue as a NATO member. Moreover, his failure to support allied communist regimes in Eastern Europe and to acquiesce to events that ultimately led to the USSR's breakup went against the very tenet of realism (Lebow, 1994). One may also recall that the US withdrew from the Vietnam War and in so doing, put an effective end to the rivalry between North and South Vietnam.

Enduring Rivalries and Power Shifts

Implicitly or explicitly, premonitions that East Asia is 'ripe for rivalry' are often premised on this region's historical conditions and cultural legacies. Yet because these conditions and legacies should be relatively *constant*, they cannot in and of themselves explain *variations* in rivalry formation, persistence and termination. 'Ripeness for rivalry' should presumably stem from changes rather than constants, especially power shifts emphasizing China's relative gains. Although this latter emphasis on change as opposed to stasis addresses one analytic problem, a concern with power shifts engenders another problem. Why should power shifts affect the probability of rivalry revival or intensification? Logically, shouldn't relative gain by one side mean relative loss for its counterpart so that the former can raise its demands in negotiating a settlement and the latter must accept more concessions to settle this rivalry? That is to say, *power shifts should only affect the terms of a settlement—but not this settlement's probability* (Bennett, 1998). Moreover, a concern for power balance begs the question why asymmetric rivalries would exist at all; why has the weaker side held out against making those

concessions that would have been required by its severe capability disadvantages, and why has the stronger side not been able to simply impose these concessions on the weaker side by military means? Indeed, if the power gap between two rivals should widen, would not one expect the stronger side to be in an even more advantageous position to force a settlement on the weaker side? Such an asymmetric rivalry would continue and even intensify, one would surmise, only if a third party intervenes to perpetuate the stalemate.

These questions in turn warn about the danger of *selecting on the dependent variable*; that is, addressing *only* those occasions when war or conflict escalation ensued in the wake of power shifts. Proponents of the power transition theory (Organski & Kugler, 1980), for example, often direct attention to Germany's overtaking of Britain as a leading cause of World War I. They overlook, however, the fact that the US, France and Russia had also competed with Britain and that the US had overtaken Britain even before Germany did. By the logic of the power transition theory, because Germany had already overtaken Britain, it should have won both world wars. It did not because an even more powerful third power, the US, had intervened on Britain's side (Chan, 2008). More recently, China's economy has surpassed Japan's just as the latter had surpassed Germany's at an earlier time without war breaking out. The world has seen many such occasions of power transition, most of which have turned out to be peaceful. Washington's power gains relative to Britain (written persuasively by, among others, Friedberg himself, 1988) enabled the US to eventually gain regional hegemony in the Western Hemisphere—effectively terminating its rivalries (if rivalry is at all the appropriate word) with its two neighbours, Canada and Mexico.

By selecting on the dependent variable—that is, by focusing on only those situations where rivalry intensification occurred—analysts run the risk of ignoring those 'dogs that did not bark'—that is, when rivalries did not intensify even though some or most of the putative causes for their perpetuation or intensification had existed. Moreover, they overlook the strong probability that local rivalries are *nested* in larger, or more global, contests for power such as Anglo-American competition in the Western Hemisphere being just part of Britain's confrontation of simultaneous challenges from several latecomers (Russia, Germany, Japan and of course, the US). Similarly, the abatement and eventual disappearance of the Anglo-American rivalry (especially after London had settled the Venezuelan border dispute on basically Washington's terms) had surely had some effect on the cessation of the US–Canadian and US–Mexican rivalries. This remark in turn returns us to the proposition that absent support from an outside patron, the weaker side of a contentious relationship is likely to concede and settle rather than carry on its dispute with a much stronger opponent.

As several scholars have remarked (e.g., Thompson, 1995; Vasquez, 1996), not all rivalries are alike. The competition between the US and the USSR during the Cold War, between Spain and France during the 1700s, and between the US and China today may be described as 'positional rivalries' motivated primarily by reasons of global or regional influence. Conversely, territorial control, identity politics, ethno-religious tension and even competing regime legitimization are more pertinent factors in contests between Israel and Syria, Iraq and Iran, Pakistan

and India, Peru and Ecuador, Greece and Turkey, North and South Korea and across the Taiwan Strait. These dyads' contentions may be more accurately described as 'spatial rivalries' whose basic causes, such as identity politics, border disputes and even regime legitimization, are largely absent in those 'positional rivalries' driven by a motivation for strategic influence. There are distinctions even among spatial rivalries so that, for example, while religious and identity differences loom large in the contests over the Kashmir and across the Taiwan Strait, people on both sides of the 38th parallel in Korea (Ganguly & Thompson, 2011) and previously, between the two parts of a divided Germany agree that they belong to the same nation.

Positional rivals' agendas can perpetuate spatial rivals' disputes and also contain these disputes from 'getting out of hand', but one often confuses rather than clarifies matters when one lumps different sorts of contestations under the generic label of 'rivalry'. Michael Colaresi (2001) showed that rivalries are more likely to end during periods of systemic change, especially when the interstate system is undergoing a process of power de-concentration. If power is becoming less concentrated in the hands of a dominant hegemon, the relative decline of the leading country coincides with the relative power gains by other countries moving up in the ranks of great powers. A hegemon's relative decline presents a possible occasion for it to retrench its overseas commitments whereas during its period of ascent, it can be assumed to take on more such commitments by intervening in others' disputes. Colaresi's research supported Bennett's (1998, 1997, 1996) conclusion that the bilateral balance of power between two spatial contestants does *not* in itself affect the probability of rivalry termination. Others such as Goertz et al. (2005) and Grieco (2001) have also concluded that a stronger country's power preponderance and even its military victory do not necessarily end a rivalry. Third-party intervention in such lopsided contests prevents the stronger side from defeating the weaker side decisively on the battlefield and from imposing a victor's settlement on the vanquished. By ensuring that the weaker side will not have to suffer the worst outcome—such as, foreign conquest and regime demise—the prospect of third-party intervention encourages it to hold out and even to escalate a conflict in the hope that outside assistance can help it to reverse its disadvantage (Luttwak, 1999).

Three aspects of the above discussion should be highlighted. First, if misunderstanding or miscalculation should be a leading factor in causing leaders to blunder into war, then enduring rivals—those that have been involved in repeated conflicts over a long period of time—should be most familiar with each other's capabilities and motivations. That is, they should be most knowledgeable about each other and should thus be most qualified to avoid misunderstanding or miscalculation as a cause for war. Yet, as already noted, these countries have a tendency to get into repeated bouts of conflict and confrontation, suggesting that something else is the likely reason for this phenomenon. If anything, empirical evidence suggests that the risk of conflict recurrence rises with each additional past dispute (Colaresi & Thompson, 2002).

Second, whether they are of the positional or spatial type, the *serial* nature of these conflicts is after all what distinguishes rivalries from dyads that only

encounter occasional conflict. There is a tendency in the quantitative literature on enduring rivalries to use the history of these conflicts—such as the issues being contested and the frequency of prior militarized disputes—as an explanation for the persistence of these contentious relations. Logically, however, this history cannot explain the first time the contestants had a militarized dispute (because they did not yet have a history of conflicts then). This first militarized dispute must be explained by something exogenous to the history of their subsequent disputes (Gartzke & Simon, 1999). The history of these disputes also cannot explain the termination of rivalries, which again has to be explained by factors exogenous to this history. That is, *conflict history—such as ideas suggesting path dependency, institutional inertia and entrenched enmity—cannot in itself explain why enduring rivalries have started in the first place and why some have ended*. As a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for asymmetric rivalries to start, persist and end, third-party intervention offers a more promising candidate for such explanation.

Third, the costs of war deter its occurrence. The more costly a conflict is expected, the more reluctant would the disputants be in choosing war. This is after all the reason why the awesome destructive power of nuclear weapons is supposed to provide a stable strategic deterrence when both sides have an assured ability to destroy the other. By ensuring that a conflict, even a war, will not ‘get out of hand’, foreign interveners reduce the cost of war—and the risk that the weaker side in a rivalry will suffer a devastating, even an irreparable and irreversible, setback in a clash of arms. In so doing, this prospect increases its incentives to prolong and even escalate a rivalry. Foreign backing thus tends to have this effect, whether intended or unintended, on rivalry perpetuation. This remark obviously suggests the question whether Washington’s commitment to defend its formal or informal allies in East Asia (e.g., Taiwan, the Philippines and Japan) has strengthened or weakened in recent years?

Two strong empirical patterns have emerged from quantitative research on rivalry. First, contested territories tend to be the most salient issue that sustains rivalries (e.g., Bennett, 1997, 1998). Second, rivalries are characterized by a steady, or persistent, level of mutual hostility and recurrent confrontations. These points pertain directly to China, which is obviously a pivotal party to many supposed rivalries in East Asia. Beijing has settled most of its territorial disputes and usually on terms more favourable to its neighbours (Fravel, 2008), and both the frequency and intensity of militarized disputes involving it and others (such as, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, India and Russia) have decreased in recent years. In view of this evidence, why should one expect historical rivalries to revive and even intensify in East Asia? Indeed, if China is becoming stronger, it should perceive less threat from its neighbours (after all, as suggested already, rivalries imply *mutual* threat perception and some rough *parity* between the contesting parties’ capabilities). One possibility derives from the distinction between positional and spatial rivalries, and the tendency for the former competition to intersect with and even abet the latter conflicts. *The larger context and dynamics of Sino-American contention and power transition hold the key to whether the region is ‘ripe for rivalry’*.

Systemic Shocks and the US Role

The abatement and termination of enduring rivalries tend to be associated with major and often sudden changes in interstate relations, sometimes described as 'systemic shocks' (Colaresi, 2001). According to Goertz and Diehl (1995), 87 per cent of these contentious relations start with political shocks and 90 per cent end with them. Regime change or collapse presents an obvious example even though this occurrence might have been caused by military invasion or conquest (such as, in the case of South Vietnam, Pol Pot's Cambodia and Germany and Japan's defeat in 1945). However, major policy or political transformation in a foreign patron can also have this effect such as when domestic changes in the US and the USSR ended their respective support for clients in Saigon and Berlin, thus terminating rivalries involving the latter.

When a contentious relationship has somehow become habituated or even entrenched, it often takes some exogenous event to shock it out of this equilibrium (Goertz & Regan, 1997; Hensel, 1999). This exogenous event can be an abrupt and unexpected development in a third party, often related to the latter's leadership succession. This connection is understandable because new leaders are less committed to old policies whether due to their personal involvement or political stake. These new leaders are more likely to embrace 'new thinking' as in the case of Mikhail Gorbachev and his advisors. Leadership succession involving Deng Xiaoping was similarly the proximate cause for China's reform policies starting in the later 1970s. Thus, new leaders and new ideas were crucial in influencing these countries' external relations. Such changes occurring inside major powers, as well as Richard Nixon's decision to visit Beijing in 1972, exemplify systemic shocks that affect the persistence or termination of rivalries, and not just among these major powers alone because these events also influence relations among the minor or secondary powers such as when conflicts between Thailand and Vietnam and between Cambodia and Vietnam abated after the Vietnam War.

Being the most important third party to bilateral contentions in East Asia, the United States has played and will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping regional rivalries. Washington's role, however, will itself be shaped by changing circumstances in East Asia and elsewhere. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the US deliberately pursued a hub-and-spokes approach in arranging separate bilateral deals with its allies. In contrast to Western Europe where US allies were stronger, Washington engaged in bilateralism rather multilateralism in East Asia in order to gain greater control and influence over its respective junior partners. This bilateralism suggested that except for symbolic reasons, Washington did not expect—and indeed, did not want—its junior partners to become militarily involved in each other's conflicts. This preference was clearly communicated in a decision to decline Kuomintang's offer to send troops to fight in Korea and Vietnam. As well, that to this day South Korea and Japan, the two most important US allies in East Asia, do not have a security treaty between them is in part indicative of this US inclination for bilateralism (Cha, 1999). Significantly, Washington's bilateral alliances in East Asia have enabled it to *both* sustain its allies in confronting their communist neighbours *and* to restrain them from getting into unwanted wars with

the latter. With respect to the latter objective, these alliances serve the purpose of ‘tethering’, ‘leashing’ and subordinating Taiwan, South Korea and even Japan to US military leadership. These alliances thus have the characteristics of *pactum de contrahendo* or pact of restraint (Schroeder, 1976).

American bilateralism reflected a grand design after World War II (Ikenberry, 2001; Mastanduno, 2009). This grand design was built on an implicit agreement that these allies would defer politically to the US and subordinate themselves militarily in return for its security protection. Concomitantly, these countries would gain access to the US market and the US dollar that were initially so critical for their economic recovery and later, for their industrial development. In exchange, they would recycle their trade surpluses and revalue their currencies in order to help Washington address its chronic fiscal imbalance, which developed subsequently in part due to its large military presence and extensive commitments abroad.

Why is this historical bargain relevant to this discussion? There are two competing reasons for this concern. On the one hand, we see the forces created by this grand bargain continue to entrench enduring rivalries in East Asia. On the other hand, we see this grand arrangement having come under increasing strain in recent years. Ongoing trends suggest that the hub-and-spokes structure is being increasingly eclipsed by emerging Asian regionalism. Material conditions auguring its obsolescence are inducing new thinking about more effective ways to enhance national security and elite legitimacy. New ideas can in turn contribute to rivalry abatement and even termination in East Asia (Legro, 2005). The Cold War’s end has reduced the need for US military protection. South Korea and Japan are economically and militarily much stronger today than they were in the 1950s or 1960s. They (as well as China’s other neighbours, including Russia, India, Vietnam and Taiwan) are also on much better terms with China now. Similarly, concerns on the part of Southeast Asian countries for their security, whether due to internal insurrection or foreign invasion, have greatly subsided. As a result, these countries’ demand for US military protection has declined.

Their need for access to the US market and the US dollar has also diminished now that China has replaced the US as the primary export and investment destination for many East Asian countries. Concomitantly, the US dollar has lost much of its luster and has in fact suffered serious depreciation (at least relative to alternative assets such as gold and notwithstanding its occasional attraction as a safe haven such as during the recent Euro crisis). The US status has changed from the world’s largest creditor in the years immediately after World War II to being its largest debtor currently. Moreover, whereas West Europe used to hold most US-dollar assets, today China, Japan, Taiwan and the Arab oil exporters have become the largest owners of American debt. In short, the bargain struck after World War II—based on political allegiance and military subordination to Washington in exchange for its economic subsidies and security protection—is being unsettled by recent developments. These developments include the severe fiscal deficit, chronically high unemployment and large debt burden confronting the US, difficulties that were exacerbated by the sharp recession in 2008–2009 and protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The 2008–2009 global recession,

brought on by the subprime crisis in the US, has also raised widespread scepticism about the so-called Washington consensus (on economic development and financial management) and conversely, elevated Beijing's economic credibility in the eyes of its neighbours (Kirshner, 2014). In East Asia, the opportunity costs that political tension and military confrontation can undermine financial confidence and economic performance have concomitantly increased greatly. These costs have increased because East Asian regimes have increasingly pivoted their political legitimacy and longevity on their ability to manage and grow their economy (Solingen, 2007). This performance legitimacy requires continued economic openness, stable external relations, and keeping the competitive dynamic of armament and alliance at bay. East Asia's (security) demand for US military support has declined; so has the US (economic) ability to supply this support.

However, changes in national policy objectives, regional economic dynamics and shifting power realities in East Asia have not yet fundamentally altered Washington's strategic relations with the region. Whereas US-sanctioned regional economic order is increasingly challenged by rising Chinese economic power, the American realist grand design vested in the hub-and-spokes system has proved to be resilient. The political logic of the system is 'vertical control over horizontal connections'. All major decisions in East Asia must go through Washington, not regional capitals. This centre-radiation pattern of decision-making has historically eliminated the need for horizontal policy coordination among East Asian states.

In East Asia, Washington has used Japan as its core local agent to support its power and purposes. The US–Japan security alliance has not only satisfied Tokyo's security needs but also made Japan less threatening to its Asian neighbours. It has helped to dampen the security dilemmas that would have otherwise emerged in the region if Japan were to remilitarize. Although the Cold War's end has reduced the demand for US military support, Washington can continue to use nuclear proliferation, anti-terrorism and regional rivalries to justify and even further consolidate its forward military deployment and bilateral security arrangements. The rise of Chinese power challenges American leadership in East Asia. At the same time, it also enhances the appeal of continuing with the US-led security arrangements for those Chinese neighbours seeking to hedge against future Chinese dominance (Nathan & Scobell, 2012). In this respect, US forward deployment and defence guarantees have strengthened Washington's grip on regional security affairs, and have helped to suppress US allies' centrifugal tendency and intra-regional security cooperation.

Washington's role in the region influences East Asia's historical conflicts, whether those dominated by spatial contests or others that also feature positional competition. As shown by a series of recent conflicts, including the sinking of *Cheonan* and Pyongyang's nuclear programme, contested sovereignty over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the United States is still in the pivotal position for managing, mediating and mitigating regional tension. In many of these instances, however, the US has been not just a solution but also a problem. For example, Washington's rhetoric that appeared to be aiming at a hard regime landing in Pyongyang and its invasion of Iraq has increased North

Korea's insecurity and bellicosity. They have contributed to tension on the Korean peninsula. In other cases, US policies of strategic ambiguity or deliberately holding back have not necessarily exacerbated tension but have also not helped to resolve long-standing disputes. When Beijing and Tokyo clashed after a Chinese fishing trawler collided with Japanese Coast Guard near the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Washington did not take sides in the sovereignty dispute but reiterated that the US–Japan security pact is applicable in a Sino-Japanese clash. Washington, by its domestic law (the Taiwan Relations Act), took a similar stand on relations across the Taiwan Strait, professing an interest in the peaceful resolution of this dispute. Its continued arms sales to Taiwan, however, have had the objective effect of enabling it to hold out against Chinese demands for reunification. Through its hub-and-spokes arrangements, Washington has inserted itself in a perpetual role in East Asia's major conflicts. If these conflicts are not resolved, Washington has always an 'intervening leg' in East Asian affairs. In designing the post-1945 order, it has ensured that it would be able to penetrate and control this region's core relations and institutional forums—something that it would have vigorously opposed in the name of the Monroe Doctrine if another power had sought to undertake similar policies in the Western Hemisphere.

The current situation is that Washington cannot quite 'exit' from East Asia's rivalries but it also cannot continue business as usual given the strains created by emerging regional dynamics on its historical grand bargain. These dynamics have lessened American influence. Regional institution-building projects have proliferated in East Asia in recent decades. Yet emerging regional institutions, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and South Korea), still cannot effectively compete in their importance with US-led security structures. The Obama Administration has begun to pay more attention to building regional architecture as part of its strategy of 'return to Asia'. East Asian regionalism, however, has evolved at a fast pace and has developed a more complex agenda recently. Washington is finding itself under increasing pressure to adapt to new East Asian realities and to take part in reconfiguring regional architecture.

There are some signs that the US is adopting a more variegated approach, consisting of a continuation of its traditional bilateralisms (with the US–Japan security treaty continuing to represent the pillar of Washington's East Asian diplomacy), various mini-lateral forums and arrangements (e.g., the Six-Party Talks in Beijing) and even ad hoc initiatives to address specific issues. However, it seems very unlikely that the US would let its hub-and-spokes structure to be bargained away. This structure is an important strategic asset for the US presence in East Asia. It was the product of deliberate and long-standing US policies. This structure has had an indirect effect in perpetuating regional rivalries or maintaining the status quo, even though it has also provided institutionalized venues for bilateral dialogues and engagement with Washington's formal and informal allies. Whether Washington's recent pursuit of a more 'mixed' approach augurs a fundamental break from its historical approach of hub-and-spokes diplomacy or signifies just a stalling effort is yet to be decided. However, it is clear that the US will continue to hold a pivotal role in shaping the future evolution of East Asian rivalries, and

these rivalries have been generally heading in the direction of abatement rather than intensification.

Conclusion

After the Cold War, East Asian politics has entered into a new era whereby relations are more fluid and varied, moving increasingly in the direction of complex interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1977). With the collapse of bipolarity, East Asian states seek greater autonomy, freedom of action and exploratory ways to hedge against future uncertainties in the security environment. Although more uncertain, this security environment is not necessarily more threatening to cause them to align closely with one major power against another. While most of East Asian states choose to develop closer ties with China for economic benefits, they also play the hedge game against possible Chinese dominance in the future (Tan, 2012). This hedging tendency has provided a prominent role for the US as a security guarantor and power balancer of choice in intra-Asia politics.

Notwithstanding this hedging, many contentious relations have become less acrimonious and more stable as documented earlier in this article. For example, relations across the Taiwan Strait were able to withstand the challenge of Chen Shi-bian's pro-independence agenda, and have continued to become more stable. By contrast, relations on the Korean peninsula have suffered a setback after a period of 'sunshine' politics. That these rivalries have followed different paths suggests the interactions of domestic political incentives and, again, the pivotal role played by Washington. Whereas the domestic distribution of economic interests and political power in Taiwan has redirected its Mainland policy towards a more practical direction of 'economics first', the regime in Pyongyang did not allow economic incentives to translate into a political rapprochement with the South, and its rigidity and bellicosity have caused a reversal in inter-Korean relations.

In contrasting these two cases, we also can see the effects that Washington's different policies have had in restraining the pro-independence forces in Taipei while fostering the hardliners in Seoul in order to denuclearize North Korea and to precipitate regime change in Pyongyang. Thus, third-party influence can play an important role in abating, terminating or perpetuating rivalries. US policies fundamentally affect whether the status quo is maintained, contentious relations abate or intensify and even a resolution of a long-standing dispute is reached (such as the Camp David Accord and Germany's reunification). They can make a huge difference in shaping the pertinent rivals' incentives. Individual rivalries can evolve in different ways: status quo, abatement, intensification or termination. Which trajectory it takes is determined by a combination of endogenous and exogenous forces.

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