

## Regional Security Governance in the Sino-U.S. Relations

By Fan Jishe

America Studies, China Academy of Social Sciences

In the past 10 years, China's comprehensive strength has markedly increased, having given China greater capacity to participate in global governance, especially regional security governance. Taking into consideration the future probability of the significantly increasing Sino-U.S. interaction in the field of regional security, this article mainly discusses capability of China's participation in regional security governance and the areas of regional security governance in which China and the United States can jointly participate.

### **I. China's capability in regional security governance**

Firstly, assess the ability of Chinese participation in global governance. To assess how China can participate in the regional security and governance, first of all it requires assessment of the China's ability to participate in global governance. The standards used by famous international political scholar K. J. Holsti to identify the main actors and the secondary actors in the international system structure can also be applied to assessment of China's ability to participate in global governance.

Holsti put forward four questions: One is which country is setting the international agenda. Two is, normally, which countries can decide or seriously affect the bargaining of the relevant regional and global issues. Three is which countries have the capacity to design solutions blueprint to regional and global issues, and in extreme cases to enforce these solutions through the use of force in

places far away from home. Four is which countries' domestic and foreign policies have the greatest impact overseas. The answers to the four questions can roughly determine the structure and gradation of the international system, i.e. which country or countries are the main actors, which countries are the secondary actors. The main actors of the international system can shape the international agenda, determine a solution blueprint of regional and global issues, and to promote the execution of these solutions.

Apply the above four questions to China's case can determine its ability to participate in global governance. With a rising China's impact, compared with the previous days, China has deeply involved and participated in global governance of international affairs: China is able to participate in some of the international agenda setting, especially the international agenda affecting its important interests; China has the ability to influence some regional and global issues in the course of bargaining; have the ability to shape solutions blueprints for some regional and global issues, but China has inadequate political will or ability to enforce the relevant resolutions; in the past China's domestic and foreign policies were not too conspicuous, but in recent years the international community increasingly concerns about the change and adjustment of Chinese domestic and foreign policies. More interesting is that overseas institutions and scholars engaged in policy research have careful reading of the official Chinese policy

in recent years. The media widely reports the introduction of China's domestic policy. Although the "reading comprehension" of foreign research institutions and scholars on China's domestic and foreign documents may not be accurate, at least shows that China's domestic and foreign policies have attracted more attention, which is the outward manifestation of gradually increasing China's influence.

From the historical evolution of interactive relationship between China and the international community, these significant changes can also be observed. Before having regained the lawful seat of the United Nations in October 1971, China was basically an "outsider" of the Western-dominated international system. From regaining lawful seat in the United Nations so far, China has slowly but comprehensively integrated into the existing international system, a synchronous process to China's reform and opening up. In the 1980's and 1990's, whether officially or non-officially, whether in political or in the economic field in China, the phrases used with the highest frequency is "getting compatible with the international standards," "integrating into the international community". China's accession to WTO is a landmark event of Chinese fully integrating into the international community. The rapid growth of China's economy, and the rapid upgrade of China's international influence have appeared in the same period. So far, China has completed the transformation from an "outsider" in the international system to a "player" of the international system, and then to a "major player" in the international system, China's global governance capacity has increased accordingly.

In summary, China's capacity in global governance has increased significantly, and it has greater influence and stronger ability in some areas or global issues of governance but in other regions or global issues of governance, its influence and ability are relatively weaker. This phenomenon of China is equivalent to an athlete having several single champion titles, but is still not an all-around

champion. This also determines the Chinese participation in global security governance will be selective, and regional security governance will be the area, in which China has a stronger ability to engage.

## **II. Regional Security Governance: Necessity for Sino-U.S. Cooperation**

Whether China can effectively and actively participate in regional security governance depends on how the United States in its foreign policy positions China and looks at its enhanced security governance capability. In the discussions on Sino-U.S. relations of the past 10 years or so, American officials and scholars have differently positioned China. During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush defined China as a "strategic competitor"; President Obama in his re-election campaign once defined China as a "potential partner", with the premise condition that China should abide by international rules. In the United States, American scholars have positioned China more complicatedly, some believe that China is an "adversary "; some think that China is a "Frenemy", both a friend and enemy; still others argue that China is a "Frival", both a friend and rival. If the United States defines China as a "partner", China and the United States will have continuously expanding space on the regional security cooperation related to common interests; even if the United States defines China as a "strategic competitor", China and the United States still have enough driving power for regional security cooperation. Then, the increasingly strengthened comprehensive strength of China is considered to contribute to providing public products, rather than a preparation for the future Sino-U.S. contest. Therefore, the United States will also be more willing to have constructive cooperation with current China rather than hoping to look forward to cooperate with the future China.

In fact, China and the United States have the foundation for the establishment of relations of strategic stability, and cooperation is conducive to

promoting common interests of the two countries. China and the United States have a lot of cooperation on regional issues but there also exist many differences on issues such as the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, territorial disputes between China and its neighboring countries and the role of the United States, and differences on security issues in the Middle East as well. These issues are important for the two countries, China and the United States have common but not overlapping interests on these issues. The regional issues are areas where China and the United States can expand cooperation, but which can also see increasingly fierce competition in the future. Even if interests on regional security issues between China and the United States do not overlap, there is still a great necessity to expand the regional security governance cooperation.

China's global influence and ability are on the rise, but are still relatively limited. Therefore, China can only participate in the global governance of regional and global security issues closely related to its interests and China has some of leading ability, and this governance should be the common governance of cooperation between China and the United States. In terms of agenda, China has already involved in global governance of many regional and global issues, such as the issues of non-proliferation, anti-terrorism, climate change and other issues. In terms of regions, the regions where China has interests, influence and ability to participate in the global security governance are located approximately in Asia: Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, which are also closely related to the Sino-U.S. common interests. Therefore, the global governance on which China and the United States can cooperate is actually a Pan-Asian regional security governance.

### **III. China & the United States and Pan-Asian Regional Security Governance**

*First, the Northeast Asian region, especially the Korean Peninsula.* Security issues in Northeast

Asia determines whether peace and stability can be maintained and denuclearization be realized on the Korean Peninsula. From the history and reality of the Korean Peninsula, the orientation in which the Korean Peninsula situation develops is closely related to the Chinese and American interests. In 1950, the Korean War broke out, China and the United States met on the battleground in the Korean War. In early period after the founding of new China and under full construction, China was forced into the Korean War, the U. S. seventh fleet stationed in the Taiwan Strait, so China's reconstruction and the great cause of national reunification after WWII were forced to delay. At present, the cold war globally has been brought to an end for more than twenty years, but the Korean Peninsula is still is the shadow of the cold war. North Korea's program of nuclear weapons provides an excuse for consolidating the cold war architecture in Northeast Asia, and military deployment and military cooperation of the United States and Japan and South Korea are not reduced. Relevant countries have undertaken governance on the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula for more than ten years, so far ineffective, one of the main reasons is that relevant key actors are lack of consensus for the future of the Korean Peninsula. The Korean Peninsula is currently stable, but this stability has latent crisis. Whether the future of the Korean Peninsula can materialize denuclearization, maintain peace and stability, and even bring to an end the cold war structure of the Korean Peninsula presents a major challenge to all the countries of Northeast Asia, and both China and the United States are key countries for the future direction of the Korean Peninsula.

Both China and the United States are important actors in the security governance of Northeast Asia. After the outbreak of this round of North Korean nuclear crisis, China, first of all coordinated the Three-party Talks, and then, hosted the Six-party Talks in order to solve the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, China has played a very important role in "promoting peaceful

reconciliation", and "facilitating talks". Not only that, after the North Korea launched the satellite and had a nuclear test, China played a very important role in the framework of the United Nations to respond to the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. The United States is an important "stakeholder" on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. The reason why the negotiated solution of the North Korean nuclear issue failed and the nuclear standoff with North Korea continues to this day lie in different policy goals between China and the United States on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. China pays more attention to maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula while the United States hopes through a variety of means to achieve the denuclearization, although these means refer to either taking the initiative to promote a collapse of North Korea or passively waiting for the chaos to occur here. If China and the United States can reach a basic consensus on the future of the Korean Peninsula, the two countries can jointly co-govern challenges to nuclear proliferation and challenges to stability on the Korean Peninsula. In this process, China and the United States can jointly build the future prospects for development of the Korean Peninsula, and can also gear run in crisis control cooperation, lay the foundation for establishment of the new type of relations between major countries with "pragmatic cooperation" and "constructive control of differences" as the basic principle.

*Second, the Southeast Asian region, especially the South China Sea matters.* China's rapid rise has inevitably made neighboring countries, especially Southeast Asian countries feel discomfort. So it is natural for these Southeast Asian countries to feel the pressure, but these countries convert the pressure felt from the maritime territorial disputes with China into worries and even anxiety of the growing China's strength. It is this situation that allows the United States to receive varying degrees of commending and support of the Southeast Asian countries for its return to Asia, and the South China Sea matters have become the convenient excuse for

the United States to coordinate the Southeast Asian countries to put pressure on China. Whether China and the United States can constructively participate in security governance of the South China Sea will not only affect the future Sino-U.S. relations, but can also the deep-seated influence in Southeast Asia security situation and security pattern.

The maritime disputes between China and its neighboring countries have been there for a long time, involving the issue of sovereignty, and the self-claimed interests of these countries also overlap. Therefore, the South China Sea disputes can hardly be properly resolved in a short term through negotiations or peaceful means. Similarly, if the current situation remains, China is unable to lead or shape the governance process of the South China Sea disputes, the South China Sea matters will become obstacles to China's future development. Therefore, China must take a more active and leading role in the South China Sea security governance. China has proposed a number of concepts related to the South China Sea. Macroscopically, the report of the 18th CPC National Congress stresses promoting awareness of the community of the human destiny, taking into account the legitimate concerns of other countries in pursuit of national interests, and advancing common development of all countries in the pursuit of national development. In principle, China in 2013 held peripheral diplomacy conference, at which President Xi proposed a concept of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness". Not only that, China has also presented an initiative of the Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road. A community of destiny, amity-sincerity-mutual benefits-inclusiveness, maritime Silk Road, ideas and suggestions can be used to solve the South China Sea disputes, provide a new framework and ideas for the security governance of the South China Sea. Only China takes the initiative to stabilize the South China Sea situation, is it possible to have enough time and space to iron out a solution gradually in the interests of all parties concerned.

The United States is an important factor in the settlement of the South China Sea matters, but in the final analysis, it is the "extraterritorial" country of the South China Sea disputes, an ultimate solution of the South China Sea disputes will be jointly worked out by China and its neighboring countries. If China and the United States come to confrontation and competition because of the South China Sea matters, which will seriously damage the fragile Sino-U.S. relationship of mutual trust, and will present a dilemma to the Southeast Asian countries, i.e. choosing a side between China and the United States. Because of complexity of the South China Sea matters and the limited ways in solving them, currently, both China and the United States should make concerted efforts to stabilize the situation in the South China Sea, which is necessary, feasible, and also in the interests of China and the United States as well as the common interests of the disputes-related countries. If through the joint efforts of both China and the United States, the stable situation in the South China Sea can be maintained, and in the course of exploring a diplomatic solution of disputes in the South China Sea by many countries, the free navigation at the sea concerned by the United States can also be guaranteed, controversy over close reconnaissance between China and the United States can be expected to solve, China and the United States can have enough driving-power to control the produced frictions or even crisis.

*Third, the Central Asian region, especially the stability of Afghanistan.* Afghanistan is always a country for the game-play by major powers. The former Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan, then bogged down in the quagmire there; the United States has in Afghanistan carried out a 10-year war on terror, but hardly victorious. At present, the United States has troops stationed in Afghanistan withdrawn gradually, leaving only 9800 to participate in the security and stability of Afghanistan, to provide help and assistance for the Afghan Government military forces, and serve as a consultant. These people will completely withdraw

from Afghanistan in 2016. What effect will the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops have on Afghanistan? Does the Afghan Government has the necessary ability to maintain security and stability in the country? Can the Afghan government and the Taliban achieve political reconciliation? What is the future direction of Al Qaeda? These questions need to be answered

In Central Asia, especially stability of Afghanistan is related to China's peripheral security environment, also affects the future U.S. efforts combating terrorism, and to maintain the Central Asia regional stability conforms to the common interests of China and the United States. For China, whether Central Asia can maintain stability will impact on the stability of its Western region. If Afghanistan is unable to maintain security and stability, Taliban and Al Qaeda may get active again, terrorism could spill over and directly influence Xinjiang region bordered with Afghanistan. In this context, China has put forward the strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt aiming at creating opportunities for Eurasian economic integration. Central Asia is clearly the key region of the Silk Road Economic Belt. The Chinese active participation in security governance for Central Asia, including Afghanistan is not only necessary, but also feasible.

For the United States, it has experienced a decade-long war on terrorism, and will naturally hate to see Afghanistan terrorism resurgence after the complete withdrawal of its troops, falling short of success for lack of the final counterterrorism efforts. The maintenance of security and stability in Central Asia, especially in Afghanistan can expand the Sino-U.S. in-depth cooperation in the fight against terrorism, and the United States also expects China to participate in the security governance of Central Asia.

The Sino-U.S. joint participation in security governance of Central Asia can be achieved through a variety of ways. The United States can alone or coordinate other countries and international organizations to provide development assistance for



the development of Central Asia. China has in the past thirty years successfully realized economic development but has not sacrificed the domestic stability, whose experience can serve as reference and help for the Central Asian countries, especially Afghanistan. Both China and the United States can, under the framework of the United Nations, make contributions to the stability and development of Afghanistan. China and the United States can also coordinate other European countries to contribute to stability and prosperity for Central Asia especially for Afghanistan in multilateral ways.

*Fourth, the Middle East.* Instability in the Middle East has been there for a long time. Before the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, the relationship between China and the Middle East countries was mainly political, and economic relations was not prominent. With the rapid grow of China's economy, especially in the past 10 years, the economic relationship between China and the Middle East countries increased significantly, in which China increasingly depends on the Middle East energy. Meanwhile, the U.S. dependence on the Middle East energy has decreased, because, on the one hand, it over the years has tried to realize the diversification of energy sources, on the other hand, developed American shale gas and shale oil. The changing Sino-U.S. dependence on the Middle East energy has an impact on the Middle East security governance. After troops withdrawal from Iraq, the United States now has kicked off diplomatic reconciliation process with Iran. The U.S. future policy flexibility on the Middle East is gradually

expanding, the importance of the Middle East to China is likely to slowly surpass the importance to the United States. Therefore, it is inevitable for China to participate in the Middle East security governance.

Although the United States presents a weakening dependence trend on the Middle East energy, in the foreseeable future, it will not completely disregard it. The Middle East stability, especially promotion of its peace process, its stable energy supply and energy channel security, combating extremist forces in the Middle East, and guarding against the Middle East proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are still the U.S. important security interests. China and the United States have common interests in these areas, and huge space in cooperation. If the two countries can jointly participate in the Middle East regional security governance, it is not only beneficial to the countries of the Middle East, and even more conducive to a variety of interests of China and the United States in the Middle East.

In summary, these four Asian regions are the regions where China can play an important role, but also the regions for the Sino-U.S. cooperation. With the changing strength of China and the United States, the United States alone is unable to affect the trend of the regional security issues; China's security governance capability is growing, but still alone is unable to respond to the situations of these regions, therefore, the coordination and cooperation between China and the United States is not only necessary, but also possible.