Introduction
The peaceful rise of China and the US reaction to that rise will be the most important strategic question for the next 50 years.

Discussions must start with preliminary assumptions:
- Must assume that China will continue to grow in the next 30 years as it has over the last 30
- Only way to answer whether China can rise peacefully is with a theory
  - No real facts about the future
  - Can’t know who will be running the governments of China or the US in 2020 or 2030
  - Can’t know if governmental structures will have changed by then as China gets stronger
  - China’s behavior may change as it level of power grows and structures change
    - Now it is a paper tiger but that may be different in 25-30 years
    - Example of such change: students live frugally because they have no money
    - Their lives would change drastically if given $15 million
    - Bottom line: People (and countries) behave differently in different structural environments

Tonight’s talk will cover:
- Mearsheimer’s theory on China’s peaceful rise
- An overview of American foreign policy from 1783 to the present showing that history has been consistent with the proposed theory
- How China will likely behave as it acquires more economic power
  - How the US will respond
  - Preview: China will imitate the US and both will act in accordance with the theory
  - It is possible to guess what the US will do, based not just on theory but also using history as a guide

Theory of Great Power Politics
Must start with five assumptions:
- States are THE principle actors – there really is no governing organization above them (not UN or anything else)
  - Ordering principle is anarchy – does not mean chaos; only the opposite of hierarchy
There is no international 9-1-1 that a country can call and count on for help.

- All states have some military and economic capability but some have more than others and the relative levels are always changing through time.
- One can never really know what a state’s intentions are, i.e. whether another state has benign or hostile intentions.
  - Can’t get into the heads of the leaders
    - Hard to discern about present leaders so even harder for future leaders
  - In the Cold War could measure capabilities relatively easily, but the intentions of Stalin, et al., were endlessly debated.
  - Illustration: Still debating the intentions of Imperial Germany as we near the 100th anniversary of the start of WWI.
  - Bottom line: Won’t know the intentions of future leaders even if we knew who they would be
    - Domestic illustration: People get married believing their partners are wonderful and will be forever, but the truth is the divorce rate is ~50%
    - Historic illustration: Participants at the Versailles Treaty discussions in 1919 couldn’t know what Germany’s intentions would be 20 years later.

- The principal goal of states is to survive.
  - If it doesn’t survive, then it can’t pursue any other goals.
- States are rational actors who perform strategic calculations.
  - States are good at rationalizing their actions.

Blend these five assumptions to come up with three forms of behavior.

- States fear one another.
  - Maybe a good reason if happen to be in a region where the neighbors have both significant offensive capabilities and hostile intent.
  - In Europe would have a good chance to be next to Imperial or Nazi Germany.
- International system is a self-help system – can’t count on allies, and alliances come and go.
  - No higher authority to call for 9-1-1 help since in an anarchic system.
- State survival is only guaranteed by being the biggest, baddest guy on the block.
  - US is not worried about Mexico or Canada.
  - Best to be a hegemon in your own region so don’t have to worry about attacks at home.
    - Provides freedom to roam the planet, build bases, project power, etc.
    - Good to be a global hegemon but the world is too large and the effort too costly.
    - US is in trouble because it has been trying to do this since 1989.
  - Bottom line goals for states:
    #1: Dominate your region.
    #2: Make sure you have no peer competitor.

Peer Competitor Concept.

- US is the regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere.
- US doesn’t want another hegemon to dominate any other region.
- US operates all over the world because it can – but that is not all of the reason.
  - US is also free to roam and project power because it is secure in its own region.
- US doesn’t want a regional hegemon like Imperial or Nazi Germany to feel free to roam in the US backyard because it is secure in its own region – same situation for China in Asia.
- Bottom line: Desirable for Great Powers elsewhere to need to worry about their security in their
own regions
• Illustrative example from the US Civil War
  o Britain thought a lot about coming into support the South in the Civil War
  o Britain wanted two Americas to prevent a single America from becoming a regional hegemon
  o Britain did not intervene because it was pinned down in Europe by worries about France, Russia, and its empire
  o Similarly, US hated having Soviet troops in Cuba believing only the US should be free to roam in the region
Bottom line: Starting with the five assumptions above can eventually get to an ideal situation where a state must be the biggest, baddest, hegemon in its region with no peer competitors elsewhere

The Theory and US History
• In 1783 the US was only 13 measly states all along the Eastern Seaboard
  o Over next 60 years it expanded across the continent by killing huge numbers of native Americans and taking their lands
  o Even attacked Canada numerous times and took the Southwest US from Mexico
  o US has a voracious appetite but it was successful – so much so that Hitler admired it
    ▪ Hitler called the Volga his Mississippi, using US history to justify his plans
  o US justified its expansion under the concept of manifest destiny
• US kicked the Europeans out of the Western Hemisphere using the Monroe Doctrine in 1823
• Took until 1898 when Spanish were kicked out in the Spanish American War but this was during a time when there were really no European challenges
  o By 1900 US had a huge continent and had not allowed any states to secede
  o The country was populated with immigrants mostly from Europe
  o By then no country could challenge the US in the Americas
• Luckily, US had no real potential competitors in the 19th century
  o France declined in birth rate after 1815
  o Germany had a rising birth rate but it had only become a state in 1870 so it was not a problem until the early 20th century
  o Last potential peer competitor in Europe was Napoleonic France until 1850
• US faced four potential peer competitors in the 20th century: Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and the Soviet Union
  o US played a key role or the key role in ending each of their ambitions
    ▪ Soviets paid the heaviest price for ending Nazi ambitions but the US had a role
    ▪ US played the key role in thwarting the Soviets
• Bottom line: US wanted and still wants to be the dominant power on the planet
  o Defense guidance leaked from the George H.W. Bush Administration shows that the US intended to be the strongest country on the planet and planned to remain so forever

What will China likely do as it rises in power?
China will likely behave like the US did in the past
• China wants weak neighbors – especially Japan
  o Prefers to see a Japan with more 80-year-olds than 8-year-olds
• China wants to be very strong because of its history of being overrun by the Europeans and Americans when it was weak from 1850-1950
  o Being overrun often happens in international politics when a country is weak
• No 9-1-1 authority to call
• China wants its own Monroe doctrine
  o US objects and sends warships into the Taiwan Straight
  o China does not like the US roaming up and down its coasts with bases so close by
  o Expect China to try to push the US back beyond the first island chain
• Expect China to plan to push back on the US throughout the region
• Expect China to want to dominate Asia and push the US out entirely

Big Question: What will the US do in response?
• Based on historic precedence expect the US to act aggressively
• US is an aggressive country so expect each side to contain the other
  o US is forming alliances with China’s neighbors: S Korea, Japan, Vietnam, India, Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, etc.
  o Neighbors are already wary of China’s rise; willing to play in a balancing game against China much like what was done with the Soviets in the Cold War

International Security Dilemma: what one country does to defend itself usually looks like offensive moves to others
• US “Pivot to the Pacific” looks offensive to China even though it is done for defensive reasons
• Containing China looks like encirclement to China
  o Similarly, in 1912 the Triple Entente looked like encirclement to Germany
  o Also, Soviet containment looked like a U.S. offensive to the USSR
• Anything that China does to defend itself would be interpreted by the US as offensive
  o The Pentagon is full of experts on threat inflation and they can put all Chinese moves in a negative light
  o Every move can be seen as a threat to the US or its allies
• Bottom line: There is nothing China or the US can do that won’t exacerbate the situation because each move looks negative to the other side
• Another problem: there are many Asian flashpoints – Taiwan, Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, S. China Sea, Korea
  o Disputed areas often involve operations at sea where it might be thought that the risk of escalation or for collateral damage is not as great
    ▪ These concepts make such situations more dangerous

Conclusion
Given:
• The basic structure of the international system;
• The incentives China will have to dominate Asia and push the US out; and
• The incentives the US will have to prevent China from becoming a peer competitor
Will result in a very dangerous situation

Whether you think China can rise is largely a theoretical question
• International political theories are crude instruments
• Good theories (such as his appears to be) are right 75% of the time – wrong 25% of the time
  o There are no fool-proof theories
  o Can expect that even his theory to be wrong 25% of the time
• Dr. Mearsheimer hopes that this is the one time he will be wrong
QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

Re: Are There Alternative Theories?
There are other theories that give different views for the future of China:

1. Economic Interdependence Theory: China, the US, Japan, and China’s neighbors are hooked on global capitalism and are highly interdependent for economic reasons
   - Since each needs all of the others to continue growing richer, no one will do anything that upsets trade or *kills the goose that lays the golden egg*
   - This is the most common argument used against Mearsheimer’s theory, especially in China and by Chinese

2. Nuclear Weapons & Nationalism Theory: Given the presence of nuclear weapons and the power of nationalism, it would be hard for China to become a regional hegemon in Asia
   - Would make it easier for the US to contain China
   - This is a more powerful argument than the one above
   - Would make the security competition remain at a low, not particularly dangerous level so it could be relatively easily moderated

3. Blend of alternative theories: Combination of 1 and 2 above plus some others.
   - More sophisticated way to counteract Mearsheimer’s theory

Re: India as a Counterweight to China?
India now has more people than China and is growing more rapidly but will not end up in the same economic class
   - India does not have the same human capital as China does because of its poor educational system
   - India will still be important and an important ally to the US
     - Now more friendly to the US than during the Cold War because Soviet Union went away and India fears China on the horizon
   - India has two potential zones of conflict with China
     - Border areas near China where there have been clashes caused an expansion of the nuclear chain of events leading to proliferation
       - The Soviets got nukes because the US had them
       - China got nukes because the Soviets got them
       - India got nukes because China got them
       - Pakistan got nukes because India got them
     - Maritime regional concerns
       - India understands that China has two areas of potential crisis with the US
         - Asia-Pacific / Western Pacific region
         - Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea because China, as it develops a stronger navy, will want to move into the region to get to the Middle East
         - If the Chinese Navy operated near Indonesia or had bases in Pakistan, India would worry since India would need to worry about its SLOCs
Re: Role of Diplomacy in the Mearsheimer Theory?
Mearsheimer sees himself as a structural realist – the structure of the international system allows leaders really very little room to maneuver

- Tragedy of Great Power Politics – get trapped into competing in ways that have disastrous outcomes
- Henry Kissinger or Steve Walt would call Mearsheimer too deterministic
- If the US had another Kissinger or Bismark to run foreign policy over the next 20 years then diplomacy might matter
- Steve Walt comes from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard where they teach how to solve very hard and complex problems so he does not think that Mearsheimer leaves enough room to do that
- While having a realist like Kissinger in charge would be preferable, can’t expect that to happen
- Bottom line: Diplomacy just does not have enough influence to have an impact under Mearsheimer’s theory

Re: North Korea’s Future?
The current North Korean regime has a bright future because China will go to any length to make sure it remains as a buffer state between China and South Korea because S. Korea is tied so closely to the US

- If N. Korea collapsed and S. Korea reunited the peninsula, China would worry about the US on their doorstep as they did in the Korean War
- China is not all that upset about N. Korea having nuclear weapons since that makes the US and its allies reluctant to intervene there
- It is still possible that N. Korea could have a melt down
  - Can only hope that the US and China have talked about handling such a situation

Re: Changes in International Relations?
- What has not changed is the basic structure of international relations
  - Disagree with Francis Fukuyama about the “End of History” in the 1990s
  - Nothing structurally changed with the fall of the Soviet Union
- Changes are always happening – no one had to grease the skids to eliminate the Soviet Union
- It has been assumed that China will continue to grow, but the US could also
  - US could become much more powerful than it is today in relative terms
  - US is not depopulating as much as its 20th century peers are – only China keeping pace
- Look at primary regions of concern in DoD planning for force structure: Europe and Northeast Asia (where the other Great Powers are ) and the Gulf (where the oil is)
  - In WWII Japan attacked the US
  - US then adopted a Europe-first / Pacific-second strategy
  - The Cold War was Euro-centric with a strategy to swing forces out of Asia if needed
  - Now Europe is the 3rd most important region
    - US forces will need to swing away from Europe and toward Asia
  - DoD used to see Asia and the Mid-East as two separate theaters but now see them as connected
  - Persian Gulf will be of immense strategic interest to the US because of the region’s connection to the requirements of China and India
- Bottom line: US should invest in more Air Force and Navy forces
  - Must decide which areas are most important in US calculations (East Asia and Mid East) and the types of forces that are needed in those regions
Mearsheimer was generally opposed to the war in Iraq since it is always lunacy to fight a war in the developing world.

Money would be better spent on US infrastructure and education.

DoD should invest in Air Force and Navy assets to handle the China situation rather than on COIN capabilities.

Re: Chinese Military Capabilities?
Chinese military capabilities are growing rapidly but they started from a very low basis.

- Navy has little projection capabilities into the India Ocean
  - China would be foolish to pick a fight with the US outside the Western Pacific
  - Things might be somewhat different 25 years out
- An increasing Chinese military budget not an issue now; will be if growth continues at this rate
- US shot itself in the foot by going to war in Iraq and Afghanistan
  - US must pick its battles more carefully
- What matters most in determining the strength of a nation is: Population and Wealth
  - US has always grown because of immigration
  - US is wealthy because of its education system
  - China has had lots of people for a long time but has only recently become a concern
    - But China is now getting wealthy
  - China’s economy could keep growing and that would be good for the US economy
    - If it stops growing, that would not be good for the US economy
  - Realists might say that we don’t want China powerful since that could cause problems
  - Big Business would say that this is not a zero sum game
    - Allow China to grow to a huge size would be OK
    - But what would China’s intention be then?
      - So best not to allow China to get too big

Re: Passing the Law of the Sea Treaty?
US should ratify it – Business and the military support it.
However, ratification won’t change anything that has been discussed here.

Re: Russia and Europe?
Russia is in deep trouble with a grim future – can no longer dominate the eastern part of Europe or anything beyond that.

- Most significant problem for the US, if it pulled all of its forces from Europe, would be what would happen to Germany
  - It would no longer have the US nuclear umbrella
  - The EU’s Nobel Peace Prize should have gone to NATO – which is really a euphemism for US control of Europe
- At the end of the Cold War, if both the Soviets and the US pulled out of Europe, they might have gone back to their traditional internal warring ways
  - US did not pull out but actually moved NATO eastward
  - The American pacifier was extended
- No European country has asked the US to pull out its forces
  - Europe is nervous about the Pivot to the Pacific
  - Taking away that American pacifier makes Europe nervous
Re: The Origin of Country’s Intentions?
Intentions basically come from the heads of the individuals who run a country
- If you want to know what the US intentions are today toward Syria, you need to know the thoughts of President Obama and SecState Clinton
- But can never be certain about individual intentions because each needs to maximize power
- Structure of the situation pushes leaders to have aggressive intentions
- US is basically a brutal actor in international politics – structure of the system leaves little choice

Re: Power and Social Safety Nets?
China will have a big problem because of its lack of social safety nets exacerbated by the one-child policy
- Japan’s situation is already worse demographically but it relatively wealthy
- Difference between China and Japan is that Japan got rich before it got old but the opposite is true of China
- US has a big social safety net with Social Security
- There is a tradeoff between spending on defense and spending on social safety / welfare issues
  o Bottom line: China is going to have to spend a lot on social issues where that money could have gone to defense

Arguments used against Mearsheimer’s theories by the Chinese
- Economic interdependence argument – the most popular
- Confucian argument – as a Confucian society China is peace-loving so never starts trouble
  o This is the flip side of the US concept of Exceptionalism
- China won’t be growing at such an enormous rate because of its problems with things like its social safety net

Mearsheimer does not want to see China continue to grow even though he is very fond of the country and is not hostile toward it in any way
- China has a more congenial intellectual environment – comfortable with realists there
- Many more realists than in the US and very few liberals

Power: one of the most difficult concepts to define – most international relations scholars don’t try
- There is no such thing as the right definition – look only for a useful definition
- Mearsheimer’s definition distinguishes between latent and manifest power
  o Latent is potential power – all about population size and wealth
  o Manifest power – all about military capability (how many tanks, planes, etc.)

Re: Importance of Culture?
Kissinger in his recent book on China cites big cultural differences between the Americans and Chinese
- Mearsheimer has been told by the Chinese that he has a western viewpoint but they are in Asia
  o Even though he feels more intellectually comfortable among Chinese realists
    ▪ Chinese love international relations theory and realism
    ▪ More realists per capita in China than in the US
  o Has talked to many leaders in China but could never identify a different way of looking at international politics
- Similarly, Japan behaved just like a European power before 1945 – Even imitated western
Re: US as an Empire?
US is not an empire as the British, Ottoman, or French empires were
- US does not get the sort of revenues that were produced by empires
- US pays a lot to keep troops overseas but it is wealthy enough to do so
  - US can continue to do this if it doesn’t overreach as was done under the Bush doctrine
  - US is not bankrupting itself with world-wide commitments, but the commitments must be managed well

Re: Innovation, Competition, Cyber Warfare?
States often try to imitate their rivals but also try to innovate to get a jump on them
- Cyber-warfare is now an arms race between the US and China involving competition and innovation to grab an advantage
  - Both are going to great lengths to get a leg up in the development of coercive leverage should they need it
  - China is definitely going down this road but will not likely succeed
    - US will be able to checkmate them at each point
    - Neither side has an inherent advantage
- In the competition always look for advantage by innovation
- Arms race problem: hard to develop a capability that the other side won’t match immediately
  - Once in a war hard to come up with an innovation that creates a decisive victory
  - Wind up standing toe to toe and slugging it out until the last one standing wins
- As China continues to grow economically, it will have more money to spend on defense
  - Will be harder and harder for the US to come up with ways to best them and vice versa
- In such situations, best you can hope for is that the other side decides to go fight a war in a developing world
  - China should push the US to continue its war on terror and stay in Iraq and Afghanistan
  - A few analysts realized that the Soviets move into Afghanistan was very good for the US
    - Same thing happened to the US in Vietnam – France said don’t do it
    - China had the same problem with Vietnam in 1979
- US will eventually lose in Afghanistan
- US can only hope that China will go after some developing world country and get bogged down there