China's Partnership Network Versus the U.S. Alliance System

Coexistence or Conflict?

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Abstract: One interesting fact to note about China's expanding partnership network is the inclusion of many security allies of the United States. China's partnership network (CPN) and the U.S. alliance system (UAS) are quite different in nature, with the former emphasizing economic cooperation and the latter focused on security deterrence. Due to such factors as the geographical locations of U.S. allies, strategic positions, and perceptions of external threats, China's partnerships with U.S. allies are generally more successful in Europe than in the Asia-Pacific. Based on an analysis of the dynamics of interaction between CPN and UAS, this article categorizes their past interaction into two basic models: coexistence (both easy and hard) and confrontation. With regard to the growing uncertainties in the global economy and global politics, the interaction between CPN and UAS may either create a platform for enhanced cooperation or an arena for escalating contention among related countries. To avoid the latter scenario, China must remain prudent in expanding its partnership network, and try to strengthen mutual security reassurance with the United States and its allies through more win-win cooperation in all areas.

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As one of the key initiatives in its foreign policy, China has taken increasing efforts in recent years to expand its partnership network worldwide, strengthening friendship and cooperation with partner countries both in scope and in depth. Interestingly, nearly a quarter of those in China's partnership network, or "circle of friends," are also members of the United States' alliance system. The interaction between China's partnership network ("CPN") and the U.S. alliance system ("UAS") has thus become a unique phenomenon that deserves much attention from global academia and foreign policy communities alike.

Beginning with a general comparison between CPN and the UAS, this article then closely examines the interaction between them based on two models: coexistence and conflict. Given the ongoing power transition of the world, especially from the United States to emerging China, uncertainties loom over the future dynamics of such interaction, which may either create a cooperation platform or an arena for growing contention between the two institutions.

Looking ahead, the United States and China must try to exploit the positive interaction between CPN and the UAS to enhance their mutual trust and lead the international system into a "community of common destiny for all mankind." Yet at the same time, potential escalation of tensions between CPN and the UAS may cause growing confrontation between China and the United States and further destabilize the entire world. Emphasizing the significance of strengthening Sino-U.S. relations at this critical time of global power transition, this article proposes several approaches to preventing the conflict scenario and promoting the coexistence model between CPN and the UAS.

A Comparison Between CPN and UAS

CPN is primarily a diplomatic network consisting of various kinds of partnerships between China and other countries,¹ while the UAS is a

¹"Full Text of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Speech on China's Diplomacy in 2014," Xinhua News, December 26, 2014, http://english.cntv.cn/2014/12/26/ARTI1419560668233850_2.shtml.

security alliance system between the United States and its allies. Both the UAS and CPN reflect the dynamics of power transition of their times. History shows that a rising power tends to establish its own diplomatic network or collective international institution, such as the colonial system under the rule of the British Empire, and the alliance systems established by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. By that logic, it is expected that, with its growing national strengths and rising global status, China will endeavor to expand its "circle of friends" and foster international institutions more favorable to itself, so as to exert more influence on the global stage. It must be noted, however, that CPN is not a simple replica of the alliance systems in history forged by hegemonic powers like the United States; rather, it has many distinct features from the UAS.

First of all, although both CPN and the UAS are deliberate arrangements of their times, they are based on divergent rationales about international politics and thus attributed with different roles. The UAS was born in an era of war and confrontation, with the purpose to neutralize and deter the perceived security threats to the United States and its allies. With shared perception of external hostility as a cornerstone, members of the alliance system tend to view the world as a dark forest in which only the strongest can survive; thus they must bind together to win the zero-sum game against their rivals and foes, real or potential. In contrast, CPN is a product of the era of globalization and cooperation, and it aims to enhance strategic trust and promote economic and cultural exchanges on an ever-broadening platform. Although there are still various conflicts in a globalized world, CPN encourages countries to seek common grounds in resolving disputes. More importantly, it does not premise on any hypo-

thetical enemy; nor is it targeted at any third party. Instead, it aims to handle state-to-state relations in a cooperative rather than confrontational manner, and by a win-win rather than zero-sum approach. Put simply, in an alliance system, only the enemy of a state's enemy can be its friend, while in a partnership network, the friend of a state's enemy can be its friend too.

Secondly, the UAS and CPN are quite different in structure. The UAS typically

China's partnership network differs from the U.S. alliance system in philosophy, structure and degree of institutionalization.

reflects an unequal power relationship, with the United States as the dominant player and its allies as followers for most of the time. Such a hierarchical structure represents an effective tool in consolidating the hegemonic system commonly called *Pax Americana*. CPN, on the other hand, advocates that countries should treat each other as equals. The ultimate pursuit of CPN is not hegemony, but a community in which countries, big or small, share mutual understanding and work collectively for the common good. What underpins CPN is economic cooperation featuring exchanges on equal footing and mutual benefit. In other words, an alliance system is exclusive in nature, and the fewer enemies faced by the alliance, the more unstable it becomes; however, a partnership network is inclusive, and the more members in the network, the more stable it will be.

Furthermore, the UAS and CPN differ in level of institutionalization. In general, the UAS is more institutionalized than CPN, since most countries are bound by formal treaties such as the mutual defense treaties the United States signed with Japan and South Korea respectively in the early 1950s. The UAS has also embedded its institutions at both supra- and intra-national levels. At the supra-national level, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has already integrated most of the U.S. allies into one systemic, coherent and highly institutionalized security organization. At the intra-national level, the United States has been strengthening military deployment to military bases of some of its security allies, such as South Korea and Australia, under the *Status of Force Agreement*. In comparison, CPN is more flexible and does not necessitate any formal institutional arrangement. Indeed, most of China's diplomatic partnerships are defined by non-binding joint statements or political/economic initiatives.

When CPN Meets UAS: Coexistence or Conflict?

So far, 16 of China's partner countries are U.S. security allies, constituting one-fifth in China's overall partnership network and about a quarter in the U.S. alliance system. For better understanding of CPN and the UAS, it is helpful to point out several salient features of the interaction between the two institutions. The most prominent one is that a growing

Table 1. Partnerships between China and U.S. Allies.

Country	Year of Establishment	Partnership Type
Britain	2004	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
France	2004	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Italy	2004	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Hungary	2004	Friendly Cooperative Partnership
Romania	2004	Comprehensive Friendly Cooperation Partnership
Portugal	2005	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Greece	2006	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Denmark	2008	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Spain	2009	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Thailand	2012	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
South Korea	2013	Strategic Cooperative Partnership
Bulgaria	2013	Comprehensive Friendly Cooperation Partnership
Australia	2014	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
Germany	2014	Full Scale Strategic Partnership
Croatia	2014	Comprehensive Cooperation Partnership

Source: Compiled by the author based on information from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn>).

number of U.S. allies have joined CPN in recent years, especially since China's entry into the WTO. As Table 1 indicates, most of the U.S. allies that have established partnerships with China did so after 2004. The overlap between CPN and the UAS seems to be a result of the maturity of China's partnership network. The increasing overlap also reflects China's growing national strengths and influence in international affairs. In particular, China's economy enjoyed skyrocketing growth in the 2000s, prompting many U.S. allies to join CPN. Meanwhile, China has been striving to expand common interests among members in its partnership network and has become an indispensable partner to more of U.S. allies.

Second, expansion of CPN progresses far more smoothly with the U.S. allies in Europe than with those in the Asia-Pacific. Within a decade or so, China has established various partnerships with many of the United States' European allies, such as the UK and France, and these partnerships have achieved substantial progress since establishment. By contrast, China's partnerships with the U.S.' Asian allies have encountered more difficulties. Not only has China established partnerships with only three out of the five U.S. treaty allies (Thailand, 2012; South Korea, 2013; and Australia, 2014),

but the development of these partnerships is often subject to the influence of changing political dynamics of the region as well.

Take the China-South Korea partnership as an example. To many observers, the bilateral relationship has been progressing rapidly since a comprehensive strategic partnership was established in 2013, which culminated in South Korean President Park Geun-hye's attending China's Victory Day Parade on September 3, 2015 — despite the U.S.' and Japan's opposition — to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. This close partnership, however, was soon undermined by the decision of the South Korean government in July 2016 to deploy the U.S.-operated Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, which is perceived by China as a potential threat to its strategic interests.

In addition, most of China's partnerships with U.S. allies focus on building political trust, promoting economic development and cultural exchanges; traditional security issues such as military buildup or defense policy have seldom been addressed. For example, the *Mid- and Long-term Plan of Cooperation of China-France Relationship* and *Action Outline for China-Germany Cooperation* provide the most comprehensive and concrete guidance for China's partnerships with the two close allies of the United States, but these documents only cover a few non-traditional security issues, such as UN peace-keeping and anti-terrorism.²

CPN has proceeded far more smoothly with U.S. allies in Europe than those in the Asia-Pacific.

In traditional realpolitik thinking, a rising power will seek to compromise the alliance of an established power so as to strengthen its own

²"Intensifying Cooperation with China," German Federal Government, October 10, 2014, https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2014/10_en/2014-10-10-dt-chin-regierungskonsultationen_en.html; and "Xi Jinping Holds Talks with French President François Hollande, Opening up the New Era of a Close and Enduring China-France Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership," Chinese Foreign Ministry, March 27, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpzxcxdsjhaqhfbfwhlfgdgbhlshlgjke-zzzbomzb_666590/t1141540.shtml.

sphere of influence and weaken that of its rival's. Thus, some argue that China's pursuit for partnerships with U.S. allies is but the country's "wedge strategy" aimed to split the United States and its allies. However, this mindset is rather outdated, because it neglects the innovative nature of China's partnership, which is to seek partners instead of allies, and to pursue common development while downplaying the significance of security cooperation. Such arrangement clearly indicates China's intention and efforts to avoid challenging the established UAS.

Basically, two models surface from China's partnerships with U.S. allies. One is coexistence, represented by China's successful partnerships with the U.S.' European allies, and the other is confrontation, represented by China's difficult partnerships with the U.S.' Asia-Pacific allies. These two models not only reflect the complicated geopolitical reality today, but also bring profound implications to future dynamics of CPN-UAS interaction. To be more specific, the outcome of interaction between CPN and the UAS depends on two major factors: the target of UAS deterrence, and potential security conflicts between China and U.S. allies. If China manages to avoid becoming the main deterrence target of the UAS and poses little security threat to U.S. allies, then the UAS and CPN will most possibly coexist and cooperate well; if neither condition is fulfilled, then there will certainly be more confrontation between the two institutions. In a third scenario where China becomes the main target of UAS deterrence but maintains rather friendly relationships with major U.S. allies, then UAS and CPN are likely to embrace more cooperation while experiencing occasional conflicts (see Table 2).

The model of confrontation refers to situations where CPN cannot coexist with UAS. Compared with their European counterparts, U.S. allies in Asia, especially Japan, tend to hold a less companionable stance toward China, so it has been quite difficult for China to develop substantial partnerships with them, which can be explained by the two security factors mentioned above.

Admittedly, the main target of the UAS in Asia today is to deter challenges from an ever-rising China. At the 2013 Shangri-La Dialogue, then U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel announced that the United States will deploy 60 percent of its naval and air forces to the Asia-Pacific

Table 2. Interaction Models between CPN and UAS.

Perception of Individual U.S. Allies/UAS Target	China as Primary Target	China not as Primary Target
China as a security threat	Confrontation (e.g. China-Japan)	N/A
China not as a security threat	Hard Coexistence (e.g. China-South Korea, 2013–2015)	Easy Coexistence (e.g. China-UK, China-France)

Source: Compiled by the author.

region by 2020.³ Similarly, the new Trump administration may also adopt a harsh stance on China and regard China more as a threat than a partner. For example, Rex Tillerson, new U.S. Secretary of State, said during his confirmation hearing in the Congress that China should be denied access to the South China Sea islands.⁴ General James Mattis, new Secretary of Defense, also stated publicly that China, Russia and Islamist militants are three of the U.S.’ biggest challenges.⁵ Besides these hostile remarks from incumbent government officials, U.S. think tanks also consider U.S.-China relations to be at a tipping point and becoming increasingly competitive.⁶

In the meantime, distrust arises between China and the U.S.’ Asian allies, mostly from their conflicting core national interests, such

³Peter Symonds, “Pivot to Asia’: US Military Build-up in Asia, Threatening China,” *Global Research*, June 3, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/pivot-to-asia-us-military-build-up-in-asia-threatening-china/5337361>.

⁴Javier C. Hernandez, “Chinese State Media Denounce Rex Tillerson’s Call to Block Island Access,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/world/asia/rex-tillerson-south-china-sea.html?_r=0.

⁵“Trump’s Pentagon Choice Says U.S. Needs to be Ready to Confront Russia,” Reuters, January 12, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congress-mattis-idUSKBN14W1KK>.

⁶Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., “How to Deter China: The Case for Archipelagic Defense,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 16, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-02-16/how-deter-china>; Thuc D. Pham, “Deterring Chinese Coercion in the South China Sea — What Steps Should the U.S. Take Next?,” *Diplomat*, January 17, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/deterring-chinese-coercion-in-the-south-china-sea/>; and Marvin. C. Ott, “Time for US Military Strategy to Stop China,” *National Interest*, August 24, 2015, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/time-us-military-strategy-stop-china-the-south-china-sea-13674>.

as China's territorial disputes with Japan over the Diaoyu Islands and with the Philippines in the South China Sea, or South Korea's deployment of the THAAD system. Unlike disputes in other areas like trade or human rights, territorial and security issues are always very sensitive and, driven by growing nationalism in Asian countries, can easily escalate into severe confrontation, even leading to military involvement. In the worst scenario, trust and friendship that have been accumulated through decade-long economic and cultural exchanges can be shattered overnight.

When a U.S. ally is involved in a security dilemma with China, it may naturally turn to the United States for assistance. One case in point is the down spiral of China-Japan relations. Undoubtedly, the current tension between them was triggered by Japan's "nationalization" of the disputed Diaoyu Islands in 2012. Facing strong opposition from China, the Japanese government rushed to strengthen its alliance with the United States instead of seeking to settle the disputes with China bilaterally. In 2015, Japan and the United States issued the new *Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation* to deepen their defense cooperation. Despite the neutral stance in the U.S.' official narrative on the territorial disputes over the Diaoyu Islands, some high-ranking officials proclaimed on various occasions that the Islands are under the protection of the *U.S.-Japan Security Treaty*. It is evident that the U.S.-Japan alliance has complicated the disputes, casting shadow on the prospects of a China-Japan partnership.

Unlike their Asian counterparts, most of the United States' European allies have developed quite robust partnerships with China. Such coexistence between CPN and the UAS in Europe can also be explained from the perspective of security. Given the geographical distance, NATO, the enduring U.S. alliance system in Europe, does not see China as a security threat; since its establishment, NATO's main target of deterrence has been the Soviet Union and later its successor Russia. Therefore, NATO can abide its members developing partnerships with China — in spite of close strategic cooperation between China and Russia — as long as those partnerships do not hinder its main target of deterring Russia.

Few NATO member states apart from the United States share traditional security relationships with China. By the late 1950s, most European powers had already withdrawn from their colonies in the Asia-Pacific, and

they have generally stayed away from security issues in the region up to the present day. As Stephen Walt puts it,

If 'rebalancing' means NATO acting together to counter a rising China, that just ain't gonna happen. If the United States pivots to Asia in order to prevent Chinese hegemony there (as I believe it will), Europe is not going to play a significant role in that effort and its strategic importance will continue to decline.⁷

In short, if China does not pose significant security threats to NATO or its member states, CPN and the UAS are likely to maintain their peaceful coexistence in Europe.

If the positive interaction between CPN and the UAS mentioned above can be called "easy coexistence," there is also "hard coexistence" where China is the main deterrence target of UAS, but manages to maintain substantial partnerships with U.S. allies — a case that demonstrates CPN's potential superiority to the UAS. There are basically three types of "hard coexistence": distance-driven coexistence, interests-driven coexistence, and state leader-driven coexistence.

CPN and UAS may encounter more conflicts in the Asia-Pacific.

A typical case of distance-driven coexistence is witnessed in the China-Australia partnership. The two countries established a comprehensive strategic partnership during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Australia in 2014. Since then, China-Australia relations have undergone further improvement, and Australia has become China's largest export market and a major source of import. Although Australia is a member of the UAS and has joined in U.S.-led balancing efforts against China from time to time, it does not regard its relationship with the United States as a great obstacle to its partnership with China. As a matter of fact, Australia tends to distance itself from the United States in foreign policy when it comes to deterring China. For instance, despite its support for the U.S.-coined concept of "freedom of navigation (FON)," Australia has

⁷Stephen Walt, "There's No Partnership in Pivot," *Foreign Policy*, July 8, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/08/theres-no-partnership-in-pivot/>.

refrained from participating in the U.S.' FON operations in the South China Sea.

The coexistence between the China-Australia partnership and the Australia-U.S. alliance is mainly due to Australia's geographical location and strategic position. Thousands of miles apart from China across vast lands and seas, Australia has no territorial disputes or significant security conflicts with China; besides, Australia positions itself as a medium-sized regional power, and is thus in a position to accommodate China's rise to a greater regional role. According to an Australian official report, there are four types of security objectives: domestic security, neighboring region's security, Asia-Pacific security and security of international norms, in the order of importance.⁸ Clearly, Australia's core national interests lie in its homeland security and stability of its neighboring areas, which do not conflict with China's endeavor to play a greater regional role.

The China-South Korea relationship serves as a good case for interests-driven coexistence. From 2013 to 2015, China and South Korea enjoyed a close and even intimate partnership regardless of the intrinsic drive of UAS. During that period, under the guidance of the *China-ROK Joint Statement for the Future and the Action Plan to Enrich China-ROK Strategic and Cooperative Partnership* reached by both governments on June 27, 2013, the bilateral relationship was further strengthened, especially in cultural and people-to-people exchange. That can be best explained by South Korea's calculations of its national interests. Undoubtedly, South Korea's major security threat has been North Korea, and the unification of the Korean Peninsula remains to be a top priority on the country's political agenda. Since South Korea established diplomatic relations with China in 1992, it has been trying to win China's support for its policies toward North Korea. Other than their ever-expanding bilateral trade and people-to-people exchange, both countries share the same history of being under Japanese invasion and occupation, as well as the same

⁸Australian Department of Defense, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Department of Defense, May 2009), pp. 41–45, http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2009/docs/defence_white_paper_2009.pdf; and Greg Austin, "Australia's Interests in the South China Sea," *Diplomat*, November 2, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/australias-interests-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

interests in denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula — all of these help to enhance a common identity between China and South Korea in the development of their partnership.

A typical case for state leader-driven coexistence is the China-Philippines strategic cooperative relationship. Before Mr. Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, the bilateral relationship had been seriously constrained by the U.S.-Philippines alliance and the territorial disputes between China and the Philippines, which hit a record low when the Philippine government launched an arbitration case against China over South China Sea disputes before an arbitral tribunal under the United Nations in January 2013. However, the bilateral relationship has quickly recovered since new Philippine President Duterte paid a state visit to China in October 2016, when both sides decided to shelve their territorial disputes and bring the bilateral relationship back on track. It is thus obvious that the China-Philippines strategic cooperative relationship is largely shaped by its newly-elected president, a change beyond the expectations of most observers and can hardly be explained by any long-term, structural factors except for the leader's own preferences.

Despite these successful cases of coexistence, it must be noted that the coexistence between China's partnerships with U.S. allies in Asia are still fragile and potentially unsustainable. Compared with the UAS, CPN is still in its infancy. The benefit from CPN is largely confined to the economic field and cannot be easily transformed into political or security gains. Therefore, China's partnerships with U.S. allies in Asia are always vulnerable to external shocks such as a new regional security situation or a leadership change.

One case in point is the deterioration of the China-South Korea partnership in 2016. Due to the perceived security threat from North Korea's repeated nuclear tests, South Korea finally decided to deploy the U.S.-operated THAAD system despite China's strong protest, which put the once intimate China-South Korea partnership in jeopardy. Similarly, the China-Australia partnership is also subject to external shocks. After the international tribunal gave its final verdict on the Philippine-initiated arbitration case on July 12, 2016, Australia immediately aligned its position with the United States, urging China to accept the verdict. On July 25, 2016, the United States, Australia and Japan issued a joint statement expressing their concerns over South China Sea disputes and pressuring China to abide

by the arbitration results.⁹ As for the Philippines, it is still too early to predict the prospects of its relations with China. As Tsinghua Professor Yan Xuetong points out, the currently warming relationship between China and the Philippines is more a gift than a victory; it is not achieved by efforts, but with good luck.¹⁰ The mercurial temperament of President Duterte and his radical domestic reform will keep casting a shadow of uncertainty over future China-Philippines relations.

CPN can hardly
replace UAS despite
close economic ties
between China and
most of U.S. allies.

So, what implications do the three interaction models have for Asia-Pacific geopolitics? In the first place, CPN can only coexist with the UAS in a world where economic development constitutes the main theme, or focal concerns, of the overwhelming majority of countries. Nevertheless, the international system is in constant evolution, with diverse themes at different times. CPN

was born at a time when peace and development prevailed over war and hostility. Therefore, coexistence between CPN and the UAS necessitates economic interdependence between China and U.S. allies as a precondition.

With its strong commitment to achieving shared benefits and common development for all, China has already become an indispensable economic partner for many U.S. allies. In the Asia-Pacific region, China is the largest trading partner of Japan, South Korea and Australia; in Europe, China's trade with and investment in Germany, the UK and France are also on the rise. In the *Mid- and Long-term Plan of Cooperation of China-France Relationship* and *Action Outline for China-Germany Cooperation*, more than a quarter of the items are related to economic and financial cooperation. The UK government also recognizes China's importance in its development:

The UK and China both face the tasks of reform, growth and innovation and are uniquely matched to cooperate on economic

⁹"Joint Statement of the Japan-United States-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue," U.S. Embassy in Beijing, July 25, 2016, <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/2016/joint-statement-of-the-japan-united-states-australia-trilateral-strategic-dialogue.html>.

¹⁰Jane Perlez, "Rodrigo Duterte Gets Closer to China, and the Neighbors Notice," *New York Times*, October 24, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/25/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-china.html>.

development. They stand ready to learn from each other's successful experience and find new models of cooperation to support the growth of sustainable economies underpinned by world-class science and innovation.¹¹

It is obvious that the tangible dividends from doing business with China make it alluring to establish partnerships with China. Moreover, as CPN is more inclusive and does not intend to challenge the existing UAS, it enables many countries to benefit from being a member of both CPN and the UAS.

Nevertheless, although economic interdependence is the starting point of the coexistence between CPN and the UAS, it is the security factor that determines the sustainability of such coexistence. As mentioned above, CPN can only coexist with UAS in a peaceful environment and the coexistence is more successful in Europe than in Asia. However, China enjoys larger trade volumes with the U.S.' Asian allies than with the European ones. If economy were the decisive factor, then China would have established much more stable and robust partnerships with U.S. allies in Asia, especially Japan and South Korea. Thus, the security factor will continue to determine the dynamics of interaction between CPN and UAS — without a peaceful relationship, economic interdependence and cultural proximity cannot guarantee the coexistence between the two institutions.

Finally, it is unrealistic to expect CPN to replace the UAS in the foreseeable future. Despite its innovative vision and progressive ideal, CPN is still weak in providing reliable and sustainable security common goods to its member states. The lack of institutionalization enhances flexibility of the partnership network, but weakens its coordination. Although some U.S. allies can maintain partnerships with China in spite of the more evident objective of the UAS to deter China, they will resort to the UAS instead of CPN for security assurance. At least in the mid-term, CPN will still be, by and large, limited to low politics that do not involve security issues.

¹¹"UK-China Joint Statement 2015," UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, October 22, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-china-joint-statement-2015>.

Toward Peaceful Coexistence Between CPN and the UAS

With growing strategic competition between China and the United States, uncertainty looms large in the interaction between CPN and the UAS, which may serve as a bridge between a rising power and an established power, making the world more peaceful and prosperous, or, in more likelihood, end up in a clash between the old alliance system and the new partnership network, thus bringing the world into more turbulence.

To promote peaceful coexistence between CPN and UAS, all related countries should help stabilize and promote Sino-U.S. relations, which is crucial not only to the future development of the two major powers, but also to peace and stability of the whole world. If China and the United States manage to avoid strategic confrontation, then CPN and the UAS are likely to coexist peacefully; if the two powers are engaged in an escalation of hostility, then CPN and UAS are certain to be in conflict with each other. Far from the notion of "total deterrence" as some tend to hype up (for the concept indicates severed diplomatic ties, suspended trade, and even a new Cold War), the U.S. strategy toward China has largely been engagement-oriented up to the present day. Though China is regarded as a main target of deterrence, the UAS has been defensive in nature, with the aim to protect its members from external aggression and restrain them from taking provocative actions. Therefore, even in the Asia-Pacific, there are still many opportunities for enhanced cooperation between China and the United States. In particular, China needs to learn from the successful experience from the rapid development of its partnership with South Korea in 2013 to 2015, and promote the compatibility between CPN and the UAS by shifting its focus away from sensitive security issues and back on economic cooperation.¹²

Furthermore, China should avoid direct security confrontation with U.S. allies. Throughout human history, direct security conflicts involving a particular member in a security alliance have caused escalating hostility that more often than not ended in war. Without such conflicts, China would

¹²Diao Haiyang, "奥巴马会晤朴槿惠称乐见中韩建立稳固关系 [In Meeting with Park Geun-hye, Obama Welcomes a Stable Sino-South Korean Relationship]," China News, October 17, 2015, <http://www.chinanews.com/gj/2015/10-17/7574266.shtml>.

be in a much better position to maintain and strengthen its partnerships with U.S. allies — even if the United States is determined to adopt a more deterrence-oriented policy toward China. After all, U.S. allies are primarily concerned with their own national interests when designing foreign policy. If its partnership with China can provide substantial material benefits as well as concrete security assurance, no sensible U.S. ally would choose to be a blind follower of the United States' deterrence efforts simply to sustain its regional hegemony; instead, the country will try to maintain a neutral stance between China and the United States, in the way that Australia and South Korea did before 2016. Such a stance is not only conducive to the coexistence between CPN and the UAS, but it will also facilitate the transformation of the UAS by foiling its attempt to deter a perceived, yet non-existent "threat."

In addition, China should adopt a long-term vision and an incremental approach on the integration between CPN and the UAS. The strength of CPN lies in its accommodation of win-win cooperation while that of the UAS in deterring potential threats. On traditional issues in international politics, especially such security issues as related to sovereignty and territorial integrity, the dominant logic of zero-sum game still prevails. However, non-traditional issues — such as cross-border trade, finance, counter-terrorism and anti-climate change — present ideal opportunities for mutual respect and win-win cooperation. Born in a new era of global politics, CPN should continue to prioritize non-traditional issues among its members, so as to foster a trusting and cooperative mentality, as well as facilitate its institutionalization process.

As the central player in CPN, China must be patient and prudent in expanding its partnership network, and try to strengthen various ties, especially security ones, with the United States and its alliance system. In the near future, CPN is likely to experience occasional setbacks due to lingering tensions in the Asia-Pacific and the possible disarray following the drastic policies of the new Trump administration. Yet if China exercises utmost strategic patience and stamina in promoting its partnership network, it is hopeful that the value of CPN will be increasingly recognized by the

A sound security relationship between China and the U.S., as well as its allies, is necessary for peaceful coexistence of CPN and UAS.

international community, and that CPN and UAS will coexist peacefully until merged into one broader framework for win-win cooperation among all related countries.

Conclusion

Through exploring the interaction between China's partnership network and the United States' alliance system, this article identifies two essential conditions for both institutions to coexist. Above all, the lasting growth of China's comprehensive national power, especially its economic strength, is key to peaceful coexistence between CPN and the UAS. Without China's economic inducement, there will be little incentive for other countries — least to say U.S. allies — to engage in a partnership with China.

Yet only economic cooperation is not enough. Despite the economic interdependence between China and its neighboring U.S. allies like South Korea and Australia, their partnerships are still, to a large extent, confined by the U.S.-led alliance system in the region. Thus, the other necessary condition for CPN-UAS coexistence is good management of security conflicts involving China, in particular those in the Asia-Pacific. As demonstrated in the "easy-coexistence" model of China's partnerships with U.S. allies in the NATO, CPN and the UAS basically share similar interests and no country needs to take sides, because there exists no direct security confrontation between the two institutions. However, if there is enduring security tension between China and the United States or U.S. allies like Japan, then CPN will face growing pressure from the UAS; any substantial progress of the institution will be difficult to achieve.

There is also a potential scenario where CPN and the UAS can manage to reach a temporary state of "hard coexistence" regardless of a harsh security environment for them, because of such contributory factors as geographical distance, common strategic interests and state leaders' personal preferences. Nevertheless, compared with the UAS that is based on the United States' overwhelming superiority in the global system, as well as the many institutional arrangements for its membership, CPN has largely remained an institution of convenience and short-term interests, which can barely endure the long test of hard coexistence with the UAS.

As China continues developing its overall strengths and expanding its partnership network, there may be more opportunities for constructive

interaction between CPN and UAS, especially when the world is faced by increasing uncertainties about the future trends of global economy and politics. Availing itself of more strategic patience and a larger diplomatic toolkit, China should endeavor to seek peaceful coexistence and integration of CPN and the UAS through more win-win results with related countries, so as to foster a new model of interaction between state groups that is conducive to enhancing their strategic trust and common interests.