The Cobra and the Mongoose:

China and Japan in Conflict

(Why Should America Care?)

Tuesdays, 1 PM-3 PM : starting Jan 13, 2015

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Class Summary:

This class will analyze historical and current conflicts between China and Japan over hegemony in the western Pacific Ocean, and America’s challenging role in this volatile environment. China and Japan have historically clashed with one another, going as far back as the 13th century, and are now once again threatening to resume open warfare over ocean boundaries and strategic resources in the Pacific Ocean.

Other Asian neighbors have also been caught up in this growing conflict between these two big Asian powers. As China aggressively expands its southern oceanic border, Japan has emerged as an ally of the small states in Southeast Asia, offering diplomatic and military aid, and assistance to fend off China’s naval expansion into the open waters of the South China Sea. Why would Japan support S.E. Asian states in their struggle against Chinese oceanic expansion? There is no threat to Japanese territory in the South China Sea. Is this a reflection of Japanese right-wing revanchism, or a struggle with China for hegemony in Asia?

If China succeeds in expanding its ocean borders in the Western Pacific:

(1) China protects its territorial borders from aggression by Japan or by threat from U.S. naval forces (see recent Chinese jet’s challenge to an American spy plane off the coast of Hainan Island);
(2) China gains control over the vast ocean commerce passing through the South China Sea and existing energy flows into Asia;
(3) China wins the battle for exploiting new energy resources outside of the Middle East.
(4) China restores and expands the borders of its traditional Empire.

Only the power of the United States Navy (supported by land-based forces in Japan) which has patrolled these waters since 1945 and maintained peace and stability throughout this region, can re-confirm traditional ocean borders of all Far East nations (under the United Nations Law of the Ocean), offering support/protection to smaller Asian states (see new military agreements with the Philippines) from Chinese territorial expansion, as well as containing potential Japanese military revanchism.

The Obama Administration’s recent efforts to “pivot” toward Asia in its military, economic, and diplomatic policies attempts to bring America even closer to direct involvement in any conflict between Japan and China over supremacy in Asia. As our principal treaty ally in Asia since 1960, Japan has taken the lead in “containing” Chinese military-led expansion while still pursuing peaceful trade and economic opportunities with China. But much of Asia, particularly China, still remembers the terrible damage and loss of life caused by Japan in the 20th century, and remains wary of accepting too close a relationship to Tokyo, even to this day. Hence, the United States remains the only realistic alternative to balancing the “rise of China” (economically) while opposing an expansionist China (militarily) in the waters of the Eastern and Southern Pacific Ocean.
OUTCOMES:

1. Learn about the historical background to recent areas of conflict in the Asia-Pacific region and new threats of war between China and Japan.

2. Analyze historic and current claims to territory between China and its Asian neighbors

3. Identify existing treaties and alliances among Pacific powers and with the USA

4. Identify the role of “victimization” and “glorification of past history” in China’s and Japan’s foreign policy

5. Identify the new paradigm in world geo-politics: the use of force to achieve changes in oceanic and land borders by authoritarian states

Format of the class:

Each session will initially be divided into a 40 minute lecture, with 10 minutes for questions/discussion, followed by a 10 minute break. (Second hour- 50 minute lecture, followed by 10 minutes for questions/discussion). Brief questions are welcome during lectures.

A course bibliography is provided for additional optional reading.
Instructor’s Assumptions:

China appears to be following a policy which seeks regional hegemony in Northeast and Southeast Asia by a political and military-led expansion over ocean territories surrounding the Chinese mainland. China seeks to achieve this goal through economic superiority over other Asian states, plus diplomatic pressures to achieve political subjugation, and finally through military provocation. Seeing itself as the victim of past aggression by Japan and the West, China now seeks to restore its historic claims to geo-political dominance in East and Southeast Asia through its control of the seas around China’s landmass in Asia: a new “Oceanic Great Wall!”

Confronting China’s plan of expansion to achieve regional dominance is Japan, the only other Asian power with sufficient economic and (potential) military capacity to obstruct and oppose China’s goal of regional hegemony. And behind Japan lies the United States, as Japan’s principal treaty ally, and the only other global power with sufficient naval capacity (and nuclear threat) to oppose Chinese oceanic expansion in Asia through military means.

At the same time, the United States is seeking to implement its own stated “pivot” towards Asia. Is the “pivot” actually an effort by the United States to “contain” the rise of China? Or is the pivot an attempt to restore the United States as a Pacific power with national and strategic interests in maintaining peace and stability in the region, as a partner alongside a rising China?

Finally, will the United States actively support its treaty ally, Japan, in Japan’s efforts to compete with China, economically, diplomatically, and militarily? Will the United States help defend Japanese land and ocean boundaries and support Japan’s military forces in the face of Chinese expansion? Will the U.S. collaborate with Japan in its active, multi-faceted defensive support for other Asian states who are also confronting an expansionist China over control of their own oceanic borders and island territories?
Accommodations for disabilities:

Anyone with hearing or visual disabilities should sit in the first several rows of the classroom.

Anyone who cannot see or hear the instructor should bring it to the attention of the instructor, immediately, for remedial action.

Schedule of Classes:

Jan 13: Overview of the Asia-Pacific Region: Historical conflict zones among Pacific powers

Jan 20: Chinese and Japanese Conflict History

Jan 27: Today’s Conflict Zones between China and Japan
- East China Sea
- South China Sea

Feb 3: America’s “Pivot” to Asia
- Japan-United States Security Treaty
- American military basing in Asia
- America’s role as a “Pacific Power”?

Feb 10: NO CLASS

Feb 17: Chinese and Japanese Strategic Objectives in Asia

Feb 24: Historical imagery and myth in Chinese and Japanese foreign policy in Asia
Key Questions

-Will there be war between China (the Cobra) and Japan (the Mongoose) over ocean territories in Asia?

- Will the United States be drawn into a war between China and Japan?

-Is this conflict between China and Japan about:
  1. finding/controlling new energy resources in the oceans surrounding the Chinese mainland
  2. competition between China and Japan over the regional hegemony in Asia
  3. Chinese and Japanese domestic politics
  4. Splitting the Japan-US alliance apart

-Is China’s expansionist policy an “offensive” or a “defensive” strategy?

-Does the American “pivot” toward Asia seek to:
  1. “contain a rising China” which is seen as a threat to regional peace and stability?
  2. stabilize the Asia-Pacific region and retain the balance of power between Asian states to promote trade and investment?
  3. enhance the alliance with Japan to protect U.S. interests in Asia

-Where happens to Taiwan and South Korea amid a conflict between China and Japan

-What happens to North Korea and Russia in the event of Sino-Japanese conflict?