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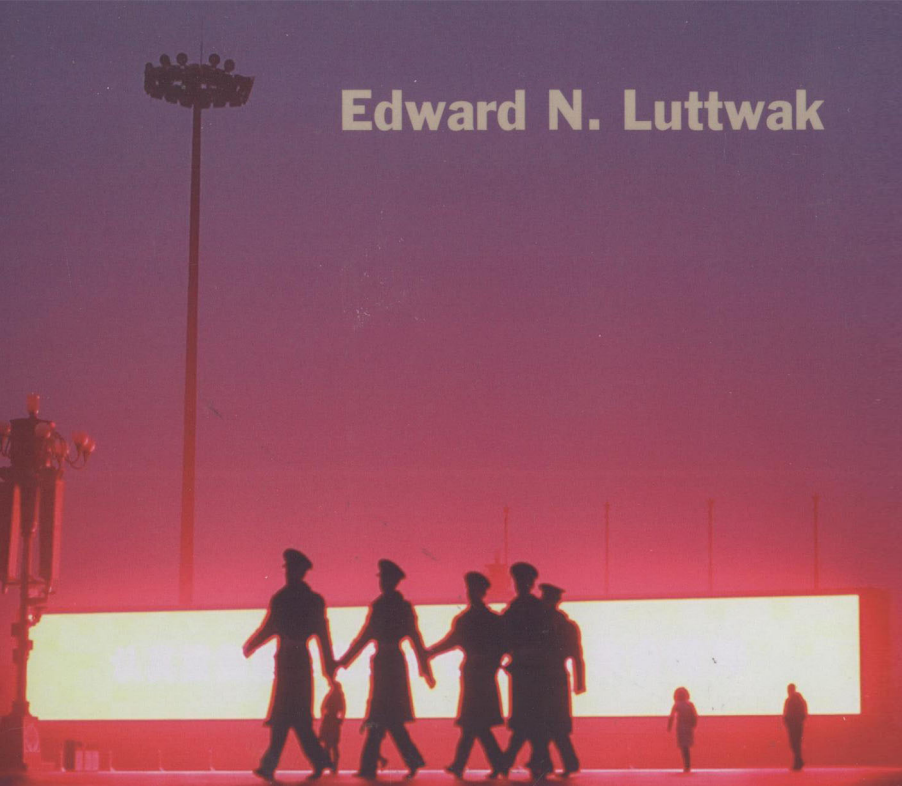

THE RISE OF CHINA VS. THE LOGIC OF STRATEGY

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Preface

It is as a strategist and not as a Sinologist that I approach the phenomenon of today's China, for the universal logic of strategy applies in perfect equality to every culture in every age.

While my text relies on documents and the works of the scholars here cited, and others too, no doubt, I confess that it is also colored by my own travels in and around China, which started long before its opening to the world, and even then reached its most remote parts.

Since that time, in conditions ever easier, I have continued to travel far and wide in China. For that reason, I am acutely conscious both of the atrocious miseries that persisted while Mao Zedong lived, and of the wonderful transformations that started very soon after his death, that continue still. While recognizing that all manner of abuses and shortcomings still persist, I cannot but rejoice in the very great advances of the peoples of China in both material conditions and personal freedoms—outside the still strictly reserved political realm, which regrettably encompasses national and ethnic self-expression as well. Thus, it is not as a detached observer that

I view China and its peoples, but rather as one thoroughly engaged in their hopes and anxieties, as manifested by those in China who have long ago proven their strong and true friendship, for which I am most grateful.

Hence I cannot rejoice in the sad, even sinister consequences that must ensue if China's rapid advance were to collide with the paradoxical logic of strategy. Indeed, if this book has a further purpose beyond the analysis on which it must stand or fail, it is the hope, howsoever naive and improbable, that China's rulers will disenthrall themselves from the illusion that magnitude of planetary dimensions, very rapid economic growth, and an equally rapid increase in military strength can all coexist in the same world, and simply persist. It is only *un*-balanced growth—economic but not military—that the logic of strategy will allow to China in its present condition, and that logic cannot be circumvented by conciliatory words or clever stratagems. Instead, to avert cruel consequences, the logic must be obeyed even when it contradicts common sense and every ordinary human instinct. Rapidly increasing wealth hardly inspires humility or restraint, yet no other course is possible in a world of independent states bound to resist aggrandizement on China's unique scale.

As a nonspecialist, I have benefited greatly from the global expertise on China, much of it from China, constantly offered by the C-Pol network that Professor Richard Baum's serene authority keeps miraculously free of on-line drivel.

This book started as an inquiry commissioned in 2010 by Andrew W. Marshall, head of the Office of Net Assessment of the Department of Defense. To have worked with him more than once over the years has been a privilege, for Andrew Marshall's talent as a strategic thinker is as legendary as his unique longevity in office: born in 1921, he created, in 1973, the office he still directs in 2012. I have also benefited from the advice of his collaborators, and notably David F. Epstein, while Adam S. Lovinger was most helpful from start to finish. Naturally, none of the above is in any way responsible for the text, which is entirely my own.

Because this was not an adversarial investigation of an enemy power, but rather an open-ended attempt to explain the conduct of a great state with which ever-expanding cooperation is at least as likely as intensifying rivalry, and altogether more desirable, I could naturally benefit from conversations with friends in China as well, including senior military officers and prominent governmental advisors. In addition, one of my closest friends, Francesco Sisci, has been a Beijing resident for decades, and although he disagrees with some of my conclusions, he did make my recent visits to China all the more agreeable.

Finally, it is a particular pleasure to thank Michael Aronson of Harvard University Press, who has long been an initiator as well as an editor of my books, never uncritical but always constructive.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Fallacy of Unresisted Aggrandizement

It is now widely believed that the future of the world will be shaped by the rise of China, that is, by the continuation of its phenomenally rapid economic growth—even if less rapid eventually—and what comes naturally with such an immense growth in economic capacity, from ever-increasing influence in regional and world affairs, to the further strengthening of China's armed forces.

These expectations are certainly consistent with China's economic performance since the death of Mao in September 1976. Its economy started to grow rapidly in the 1980s, recessions since then have been neither long nor severe, and there are no signs of structural deceleration even now, after more than three decades of rapid economic expansion. Recent gross domestic product increases have exceeded 9 percent annually—twice the maximum sustainable growth rate of the economy of the United States, and almost three times as much as the equivalent rate for mature European economies—let alone the dismal growth rates actually experienced in the post-2007 crisis years.

Nor is there any inherent reason why China's economic growth should decelerate greatly in the near future. In rural China, even in patches and pockets not very far from major cities, vast numbers are still grossly underemployed in traditional agriculture, in the lowest rungs of commerce, and in humble personal services. As the rural poor find new employment in manufacturing, even of the most manual kind, in construction, and in modern services, their productivity increases sharply and, with it, China's gross domestic product. In addition, there is of course the organic growth of China's modern economic sectors, several of which remain highly competitive and can therefore grow rapidly even as global markets grow more slowly.

As for China's military expenditures, in recent years they have reportedly increased as rapidly, or almost as rapidly, as the economy as a whole, with estimates of the order of 9 percent per annum in real terms—a phenomenal rate of growth at a time when military expenditures worldwide, including those of the United States, but for immediate war costs, have been mostly stagnant or declining.[1]

The People's Liberation Army, the PLA, has thus received an expanding torrent of resources—and the days are long past when more resources could not yield much new military strength, because they were mostly absorbed by belated remedies for long-neglected basic necessities.

Pay and benefits have now increased to levels sufficiently competitive to recruit men and women in sufficient numbers in spite of expanding civilian employment opportunities,[2] while

the rehabilitation or replacement of decrepit barracks, bases, depots, and other installations has been largely accomplished, along with the provision of adequate maintenance facilities, equipment, and tooling.

With past neglect remedied, in spite of a great deal of supplier fraud (even attentive civilians purchasing on a much smaller scale are regularly defrauded by false labeling for substandard products), and outright misappropriation by its own officers,[3] the PLA has been able to acquire new platforms, weapons, munitions, and ancillary equipment in rising numbers for every branch of every service, and to build, enlarge, and upgrade facilities of every kind while concurrently increasing its training and operating tempo.

All this results in rapid and all-round military aggrandizement, of the kind last seen in the United States long ago during the years of the Korean War rearmament, and in the Soviet Union from the later 1960s until the 1980s. In both cases, vigorous qualitative advancement was coupled with numerical increases in the weapons and personnel of every service; and as the Marxists liked to say, large quantitative increases can generate their own qualitative effects, compounding the overall result. That is why, for example, when spending on the U.S. Air Force more than tripled from 1950 to 1960 and both the number and the performance of its aircraft rapidly and concurrently increased, the Air Force's capabilities became not merely greater but altogether different—and disproportionately more powerful.

It is the straightforward assumption that China's economic and military growth will persist at a rapid pace, and that China's global influence will also increase in step, that generates the now widespread expectation that China is bound to emerge as the world's predominant power in the foreseeable future, eclipsing the United States.[4] Yet that must be the least likely of outcomes, because it would collide with the very logic of strategy in a world of diverse states, each jealous of its autonomy. Some states, moreover, are culturally predisposed and politically structured to try to influence other states rather than be influenced.

It is true that the three-sided growth of China's economy, military strength, and political standing was perfectly complementary in the 1980s and 1990s (after the 1989 interval), but that was so only because China was not yet rich, or strong, or influential by American standards—or by Japan's, for that matter—and still remained mostly an exotic offstage presence for Europe and Latin America. But adversarial reactions are bound to be evoked as China's economic and military growth continue beyond the levels that can be accepted with equanimity by other powers—that is, beyond the culminating level of unresisted Chinese achievement.

With that natural reaction under way, any further increase in the level of Chinese power could only be accepted unresistingly if there were radical changes inside or outside China—whether by a democratic transformation of China itself and the consequent legitimization of its government, or

the emergence of more pressing threats that convert China from a threat to a desirable ally for the country in question. (Pakistan is the exemplary case; as China's power increases, it becomes a yet more valued patron.)

Democratization would not nullify the strategic significance of China's rise and the reactions it must evoke—after all, even the very democratic United States evokes resistance from its own good allies on occasion, simply because it is overwhelmingly powerful. But if democratization did take place and China's policies were no longer formed in total secrecy by a few party chiefs, and if its policies were no longer so largely focused on the maximization of power, there would certainly be less concern over China's rise, and less resistance by neighbors and peers. Democratization would not suspend the logic of strategy that mandates growing resistance to growing power, but it would raise the culminating level of unresisted Chinese aggrandizement.

As it is, China's rise has already passed that level, whether in the economic, military, or political sphere, activating the paradoxical logic of strategy[5] through the reactions of all the other powers large and small that have started to monitor, resist, deflect, or counter Chinese power. No matter at what level, from a knife fight in an alley to the multidimensional and multilateral engagements of grand strategy in peacetime, the logic is always the same: action—in this case the growth of power—evokes reaction, which need not stop the action but which does prohibit its simple, linear progress.

In this case, because of the mounting opposition it is evoking, China's continued and rapid growth in economic capacity *and* military strength *and* regional and global influence cannot simply persist. If Chinese leaders ignore the warning signs and forge ahead, the paradoxical logic will ensure that instead of accumulating more power, they will remain with less as resistance mounts.

Far from being the inevitable result of the simple prolongation of recent trends, China's emergence as the world's predominant power through an uninterrupted and concurrent rise in economic capacity, military strength, and global influence would require the intervention of improbable events.[6] The logic of strategy itself presages the slowing down or even partial reversal of China's rise, with the former more likely if Chinese policies are more conciliatory or downright emollient, and the latter if they are more alarming.

None of the above presumes any form of provocative or threatening behavior by the Chinese. It all derives from the reactions necessarily evoked by the very rapid growth of a power that is very great to begin with. Given China's dimensions, its rapid growth is destabilizing in itself, regardless of its conduct. Recent suggestions that China is in need of an Otto Von Bismarck to direct its foreign policy in less counterproductive ways therefore miss the point: the essential problem is not China's conduct but the growth in its all-around magnitude.

Riders in a crowded elevator cabin into which an extremely fat Mr. China has just stepped in must react self-protectively if

he is becoming fatter at a rapid rate, squeezing them against the walls—even if he is entirely unthreatening, and indeed affable. True, the crowded elevator cabin already contained an even fatter, louder, and frequently violent Mr. America, but simply because he had long been a fellow rider, almost everybody had over the decades come to a satisfactory accommodation with his noisy bulk, with the exceptions—Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela—themselves an advertisement for Mr. America's respectability. Most important, Mr. America is not rapidly becoming fatter, thereby undermining past accommodations and compromises, and it is also very helpful that no sudden threats are to be feared from him, because of his mostly very open democratic decision processes.

It will be obvious by now that the approach here followed, which is indeed my own way of understanding the workings of power between states modern or ancient, is far different from that of the prevailing "realist" school. It is frankly deterministic. Instead of seeing leaders striving to act pragmatically in pursuit of their goals and preferences within the operative political constraints, I see them as trapped by the paradoxes of the logic of strategy, which imposes its own imperatives, all the more so when they retain the delusion of free choice in the presence of conflict. Were it not so, the history of humanity would not be a record of its crimes and follies.

CHAPTER TWO

Premature Assertiveness

As it happens, China's recent conduct has been far from affable with a number of countries, and with some it has even been threatening in some degree. In a process disregarded at the time but quite evident in retrospect, the 2008 financial crisis, the seeming downfall of the "Washington consensus" and the seeming vindication of the "Beijing consensus" greatly emboldened the Chinese ruling elite, inducing a veritable behavioral shift that became manifest in 2009–2010. There was a sudden change in the tone and content of Chinese declarations, which became sharply assertive on many different issues, from monetary policy to the relevance of Western democracy. More strikingly, mostly dormant territorial disputes were loudly revived with India, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam—and all more or less at the same time, amplifying the effect. Actual incidents duly followed with the vessels or island outposts of Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, with successive episodes that have continued till the present writing.

Because no discernible policy objective was served, or could have been served, by verbal outbursts and actual incidents that