**Global Affairs Session 5**

Background notes for the assignment:China and the US

The relationship between China and the US certainly is complex, marked by elements of cooperation and competition.The US is considered to be a Great power, if not a superpower,but declining given its economic weakness.For example, the US national debt is approaching $20 trillion.In comparison,China has trillions in hard currency reserves.As of early January 2016, China's reserves were $3.3 trillion down from about $4 trillion,as China used some of its reserves to support he value of the yuan.. China is a rising power, given its economic growth,whether 6% or 7% per annum,if Chinese statistics that are published are accurate.(note some analysts believe that China's real annual economic growth rate is more like 4 % Compare this to US annual economic growth,which is about 3.5%,which US economists think is pretty good.However, no one in the West really knows what is actually going on in China in terms of its political economy.The Chinese government is an authoritarian government, and is manipulating its economic data,and is not providing an accurate picture of economic measures.The authoritarian nature of the government has been marked by the consolidation of power in the hands of President Xi Jinping..He is not only President of the country, but also head of the Chinese communist party,and commander in chief of the armed forces.The latest five year plan of the Chinese communist party,adopted at the party Congress in October 2015,focuses on the economic development of the country,with a strong emphasis on innovation and technology.

Xi is also pursuing an ambitious reform agenda,especially in connection with the PLA or the People's Liberation Army.

The central question is whether or not China's rise has stopped and the economic slowdown is permanent,or is just temporary.

 In 2016,the Chinese economy experienced a slowdown, as its stock market experienced some volatility and in 2016, the value of its currency was depreciated..Given the fact that China has the second largest economy in the world,(based on GNP per capita,not purchasing power parity)the economic problems of the Chinese economy had a negative impact on the global economy.Also,although China was viewed as an economic superpower,it has a significant internal debt.The debt is held by the central and local governments, as well as companies or SOE's(State Owned Enterprises). The indebted companies are state owned enterprises.Consequently, China eased the regulations for foreign investors who wished to buy bonds issued by the Chinese government and Chinese companies based on an apparent decision to increase deficit spending.Some experts believe that China's internal debt is its most serious problem.Some experts also believe that China's bankig system is not as solid as it could be.

US-Chinese trade relations are also an important issue for the Trump administration.President Trump has accused China of being a "currency manipulator."This means that China has kept the value of its currency as artificially low in order to gain a competitive advantage in  selling its exports at lower prices in other countries.However, according to economic experts, China has over the past several years allowed the value of its currency to rise in relation to other currencies.President Trump,nonetheless, had accused China of being a currency manipulator, which could have triggered a series of actions against it.The Chinese may consider this as unfair, since there are other states such as Germany that could be considered even a worse currency manipulator, according to financial experts.However, after meeting with President Xi Jinping in early April 2017,President Trump backed off from accusing China of being a currency manipulator,especially since President Trump believed that China was helping to defuse a crisis between the United States and North Korea that developed in April 2017.However, clearly China had failed to persuade North Korea to freeze its nuclear arms program, as evidenced by the successful launch by Pyongyang of an ICBM(Intercontinental Ballistic Missile)on July 4, 2017.President Trump subsequently threatened to put a tariff on steel imports into the US.China supposedly produced about half of the steel made in the world,and given the glut of steel in the world market,has been dumping steel in the US.

TAIWAN

Neorealists such as John Mearsheimer in your assigned readings,believe that if a war were to take place between China and the US it would be caused by a conflict between China and Taiwan.Although Mearsheimer argues that it is not in the core interest of   the US to got to war with China over Taiwan.

 Elections in Taiwan in January 2016  resulted in the defeat of the KMT(Kuomintang Party)and the victory of the Democratic Progressive Party under its new President Tsai.The KMT President of Taiwan who was defeated by the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party was more inclined to want to cooperate with Beijing, even though about 80% of the Taiwanese are opposed to reunification with China.The Democratic Progressive Party is more inclined to favor the independence of Taiwan which could certainly add to the problems which the U.S.faces in its relations with China.Beijing contends that Taiwan is a province of China,and commented on the recent elections there as regional provincial elections.The U.S, State Department was rather circumspect in its comments about the elections.

Note that Taiwan in 2017 was  the 9th largest trading partner of the U.S.Taiwan is a de facto independent state, but not independent from a de jure point view as far as some countries are concerned.De jure independence would mean being recognized as a sovereign state in the international system.About 20 countries(out of a total of around 200,as of July 6,2017) recognize Taiwan as a de jure or sovereign state in the international system.Officially, Taiwan is known as the Republic of  China,and between 1945 and 1971 represented China in the United Nations.In 1971, the credentials of the People's Republic of China were recognized as the legal representative of China,and Taiwan was in effect expelled from the United Nations.

China had followed a policy of promoting greater economic interdependence with Taiwan.If  Taiwan were to declare de jure independence, a number of analysts believe that Beijing would not use military force to bring about the reunification of the mainland with the island but rather would use economic sanctions to pressure Taiwan.However, China has not ruled out the military option.

The U.S,. position on a cross-straits confrontation between the PRC(the People's Republic of China)nd Taiwan is rather ambiguous, a policy which is referred to as "strategic ambiguity".The U.S. provides Taiwan with "defensive" weapons, which obviously strains relations between Washington and Beijing.In 2017,the Trump administration announced that it would go through with an arms sale to Taiwan of about $1.4 billion.The arms consisted of missiles, torpedoes, early warning radar systems, and technical assistance.Beijing angrily objected to the sale of arms to Taiwan, arguing that it broke the spirit of trust that had been established between President Trump and President Xi when they met in Florida in April 2017.China also argued that the arms sale represented an interference in the internal affairs of China.There was a debate in the Trump administration as to whether or not to go ahead with the arms sale,for fear that it would jeopardize good relations with China, and possible Chinese mediation  between North Korea and the US.

The provision of defensive weapons is required by the Taiwan Relations Act which was adopted by the US Congress in 1979.The Taiwan Relations Act was necessary because in 1979, President Carter established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China,and terminated diplomatic relations with Taiwan.The Taiwan Relations Act was followed up by the "Six assurances" that were provided by the Reagan administration to Taiwan in 1982.To quote almost verbatim from the "Six Assurances", they are that the US will not set a date for the end of arms sales to Taiwan,the US would not alter the Taiwan Relations Act,the US would not consult in advance with the People's Republic of China about making decisions on arms sales to Taiwan,the US would not serve as a mediator between Taiwan and China,the US would not alter its position about the sovereignty of Taiwan and would not pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China,and the US would not formally recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan. The six assurances were adopted as part of the Republican party platform in 2016 for the first time in the history of the Republican party.In his confirmation hearings for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson said that the "Six Assurances"constituted one of the basic elements of Washington's relationship with Taiwan, along with the Taiwan Relations Act.

The main question is whether the U.S. would intervene militarily to defend Taiwan against a Chinese invasion. When  China launched missiles toward Taiwan, President Clinton sent two aircraft carrier battle groups into the Taiwan Straits. However, the balance of power has changed  in China's favor,as China has steadily built up its military power.China now(2017)has a large number of missiles facing Taiwan across the Strait.These missiles could wreak havoc on Taiwan.However, Chinese invading forces would have to cross about 110 miles of open water across the Strait.

 A Chinese invasion could be a cause of war between the US and China ,realists and neorealists argue ,as opposed to Chinese claims of sovereignty over rocky and uninhabited islands in the East China and South China Seas.Note however, that experts disagree over which problem is the most serious:the 'salami" tactics that China is following in taking over the disputed islands and constructing artificial islands, or the question of Taiwan.Some experts believe that the question of the disputed islands is at a lower priority than the question of Taiwan.Taiwan is a core issue to China, which is also fueled by Chinese nationalism.

President Trump will have to figure out which issue should be placed at a higher priority.In a telephone call with the President of the People's Republic of China,President Trump reaffirmed the "One China Policy".The "One China Policy"  maintains that a state which establishes diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China cannot maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan.The "One China principle" stipulates that there is only one China, and Taiwan is part of China.

The US does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign legal state.However,President Trump took a telephone call from the President of Taiwan congratulating him on his victory.This was the first time since 1979 that there had been direct communications between the President of Taiwan and the President of the United States, and obviously upset China,since it provided some recognition to Taiwan.However,on April 6 and 7, 2017,President Xi met with Trump in the US.According to media reports, the meeting went well, even though a joint communique was not issued by both countries at the end of the meeting.

The Chinese were further upset, when Congress announced that US naval ships  would resume port calls in Taiwan(which had not taken place since 1979) and would also help Taiwan to develop undersea vehicles.This means submarines.Taiwan currently has a submarine fleet of four diesel subs which are old and not in very good condition.Obviously, submarines (along with mines which have also been sold by the US to Taiwan)would be critical in  attacking a Chinese invasion force which would be crossing the Taiwan Strait.Submarines would be a useful tool of asymmetrical warfare, given the overwhelming preponderance of force which China could mobilizein an invasion of Taiwan.Obviously, the issue of Taiwan, which has been quiet for some time, is heating up.

A s part of a naval build-up, China is constructing what has been called a 'String of Pearls" as it gains port facilities and provides economic aid for the construction of ports in  in such countries as  Pakistan, Thailand and Sri Lanka.This is allowing China to develop the capacity to project its maritime power into the Indian Ocean, as China is a peer competitor of India.India views the Chinese strategy as part of a policy which is designed to contain and encircle it,and to challenge Indian regional hegemony in the IOR(Indian Ocean Region).According to Jonathan Wade, in an article which deals with the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean,the Indian ocean has assumed great geopolitical significance for China because it is the major transit route for the importation of energy and raw materials from Africa and the Middle East to China.

This Chinese strategy certainly has major economic and commercial components to it,as well as military. political, and diplomatic dimensions.Much of the oil which China consumes is imported from the Middle East,and the "String of Pearls " strategy will help Beijing to protect its shipping lanes through such vital international passageways as the  Straits of Malacca,from the Middle East and  Africa(This is why China has also participated in multinational efforts to deal with the threat posed to commercial shipping in the Indian Ocean by Somalian pirates).But the strategy also provides China with greater access to the Middle East and Africa,a maritime strategy which also can be seen as part of a broader Grand Strategy of projecting the power of  the People's Liberation  Army Navy into the South China and East China Seas.The "String of Pearls" strategy also represents the maritime dimension of the "One Belt,One Road" strategy,which represents the Eurasian land dimension of China's Grand Strategy,in which China is engaged in  huge infrastructure projects to connect Beijing through Central Asia to the Middle East and Europe.The "String of Pearls"maritime strategy allows China to circumvent the Eurasian land route(One Belt,One Road)in case it is blocked by hostile Central asian regimes or by Russia which prefers to keep the Central Asian states within its sphere of influence. .Anotherwords, Beijing is hedging its bets by spending billions on the construction of  corridors which can transport energy over the ocean or through the Eurasian land mass to fuel China's rise and realize the "Chinese Dream."(the rejuvenation of China).

John Mearsheimer, a leading neorealist,as is discussed in his article in Global Issues,believes that China desires to become a regional hegemon in Asia,and this can result in a conflict with the US which opposes the regional hegemony of Beijing.Mearsheimer also argues that no state can ever become a global hegemon, because of what he calls the "stopping power" of water.States cannot permanently project their power across vast distances of water(oceans and seas)The US is the regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere,and China wants to become the regional hegemon in Asia.Mearsheimer believes that it is not in the core national interest of the US to defend Taiwan,even though the majority of the people living there now identify themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese.At some point in the future,as its  power grows, China will be too powerful to stop from reuniting Taiwan with the mainland.Taiwan could develop a nuclear capacity which could deter Beijing from regaining control over the island.However,in the past,the US has prevented Taiwan from developing the bomb.The US does not want to get involved in a nuclear war with China over Taiwan.Mearsheimer believes that the best solution to the problem is the Hong Kong solution.According to this plan,Taiwan would be reunited with China,but would retain a considerable amount of local autonomy.There would be  one China, but two systems.

However,China is pursuing a "Grand Strategy", which is designed to project its  power beyond East Asia.Although China does have geopolitical concerns in its immediate neighborhood,such as its relations with Russia..

So China is a rising power and the US is a declining power, which results in a power transition.Some realist experts believe that a power transition is extremely dangerous because either the declining power wants to preserve the status quo, while the rising power is a revisionist power,which wants to change the regional and international order in a way which would be more favorable to its interests.Furthermore, even though the United States stretches from one end of the North American continent to the other,experts in international relations consider it to be a sea-power, rather than a land power.The US is considered as following in the tradition of the previous seapower ,which was a global hegemon,although Mearsheimer argues that no state can become a true global hegemon) namely the United Kingdom.The US navy currently(2017)consists of 274 ships,and about 100  of these ships are constantly at sea.The US focus on land wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan, has resulted in a reduced priority for the development of the navy.However, President Trump would like to increase the navy from its current number of 274 to 350 ships.

Some experts believe that the US needs to expand its maritime power, to face the naval challenges from such peer competitors as Russia and China in the future,especially by 2030.Note that the U.S. also has eleven aircraft carriers of the Nimitz class.The U.S. aircraft carriers carry 55-70 aircraft,and are capable of engaging in night-time combat operations.A brand new U.S. aircraft carrier, has also now come on line, at a cost of $ 13 billion.President Trump and the Navy plan to construct another aircraft carrier,which will increase the number of U.S. aircraft carriers in the fleet from eleven to twelve.Aircraft carriers take, of course, an extremely long time to build.The question for the U.S. is what kind of mix of ships should be added to the fleet,that is what should the architecture of the fleet expansion look like.The question is how many large and or small ships should be added to an expanded fleet, as well as how many submarines.In 2017, Senator McCain, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Commitee,supported the idea of adding more smaller warships , so that the Navy could be in more places at once.

.The Chinese have one aircraft carrier(a refurbished  and renovated Soviet warship), which carries 24 aircraft,has a speed of 20 knots,and cannot engage in night-time combat operations.Recently(in 2017),  Chinese aircraft carrier went around the Straits of Taiwan, as kind of a naval demonstration.China also has constructed a second aircraft carrier ,which however does not have the capacity to launch planes by catapults..

In connection with this, one of the fundamental principles of US foreign policy is freedom of navigation.Remember that this was the reason for US entry into the Great War in 1917(The US also entered World War II partly because the defeat of France by Germany brought Germany up to the Atlantic,and Germany could claim French possessions in the Carribean;the US was involved in an undeclared shooting war against German submarines even before Pearl Harbor,which was followed by a German declaration of war against the US)

Consequently,US policy in Asia is based on the fundamental principle of maintaining freedom of navigation.Note that one of the factors that led to the outbreak of war between the United Kingdom and Germany in 1914,was the German effort to build a fleet which would challenge the hegemony of the UK as a world seapower.(read the essay in the Global issues reader that deals with World War I).China is pursuing a policy of building up its naval forces, which could challenge the power of US naval forces in Asia.For example,China has constructed a submarine fleet,but the US has the technological capability so far to track Chinese submarines, which are apparently too noisy .However, the Chinese have continued to work on the technological development of their submarine fleet,which may make it increasingly more difficult to detect them.China is also engaged in an ambitious program of constructing more submarines,and may have about 70 submarines, which may exceed the number of submarines which the US has soon.China has also developed anti-ship missiles which can attack U.S. aircraft carriers.

Experts at the Belfer Center at the JFK School of Government at Harvard have studied the possibility of war between the US and China, which some experts feel is inevitable, given the structural distribution of power in the international system.The Belfer team looked at 16 case studies in which war broke out in a majority of instances between rising powers and status quo powers.However, in some cases it was possible to avoid war.For example, the United States and the United kingdom avoided going to war with each other at the turn of the century, as the US replaced the United Kingdom as a global hegemon.(keep in mind that the US had fought the revolutionary war, and the War of 1812 with the United Kingdom.By the 1890's, the British had conceded that Latin America fell within the U.S. sphere of influence,and was more concerned with the rise of German power as a threat to the national security of the home islands)

US defense experts are concerned that the number of US naval vessels during the Obama administration has dropped below the goal of having a 300 ship navy.However, the Obama administration pursued a policy of executing a pivot or rebalancing) from Europe and the Middle East to Asia,as Asia has assumed more economic and strategic significance in the Grand Strategy of the Obama administration.(Read the National Security Strategy 2015 of the Obama administration, available  at the Whitehouse.com or google it) Although international relations experts like to think that they have developed a solid scientific basis for the field,global affairs have an irritating tendency to be marked by surprises and unpredictable events which are not foreseen by the experts.There are 'strategic surprises".In connection with the pivot to Asia,the Russian invasion of Ukraine in Europe,and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, was not foreseen,making it difficult for the Obama administration to extricate itself from Europe and the Middle East(also the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan has continued to bog the US down in Afghanistan, at least until 2017).It remains to be seen whether or not the Trump administration will continue the policy of rebalancing toward Asia.The Obama administration viewed the TPP(TransPacific Partnership)not only in economic terms, but also in strategic terms as a counterweight to a rising China.The TransPacificPartnership is a Free Trade Agreement which involves 12 countries stretching from Vietnam to Peru.One of the first things which President Trump did was to sign an executive order withdrawing the U.S. from the TPP.This may work to the advantage of Chinese security strategy.

THE SOUTH CHINA AND EAST CHINA SEAS

The US principle of freedom of navigation in Asia, has been especially challenged by the Chinese projection of air and naval power into the East China and South China Seas.(Check out a Chinese defense white paper issued in May 2015,online)China has claimed sovereignty over several islands in these seas.Some of these islands are also claimed by other states in the region.For example, the Senkaku islands(Japanese name)are claimed by Japan.There have been several incidents in which Japanese  fighter jets have scrambled to meet Chinese fighter jets overflying territory claimed by Japan.There can be a miscalculation and a serious incident can escalate.into a more serious confrontation.The US has a security arrangement with Japan in which it is supposed to come to the defense of Tokyo.

Incidents have also occurred between China and other countries in Southeast Asia which claim sovereignty along with China over several disputed islands.There have for example, been incidents between China and Vietnam, and China and the Philippines  over possession of the disputed islands, and the right to exploit the resources off the coasts of the islands(oil, natutra gas, fisheries)The Chinese are interested in exploiting the energy resources that lie off the disputed islands, but the issue of sovereignty over territory which China claims that it has historic rights to is more important to Beijing.The Chinese are also constructing artificial islands which will provide them with airbases and bases for military and naval forces to defend their claims.China also has a dispute with Indonesia(there is a dispute between China and Indonesia over Natuna  island) and Malaysia over the control of some of the Paracel islands, but the dispute is not as intense as it is with Japan, the Phlippines, and Vietnam.

However, one of the unexpected surprises has been the development of growing tension between the U.S.and the Philippines during the closing days of the Obama administration.The Philippines has conducted its own "pivot"in improving relations with  China.President Duterte of the Philippines was disappointed with the failure of the US to help Manila resolve its dispute with China, for example, over the Scarborough Shoals, in the South China Sea.Consequently, President Duterte visited China in October 2016.The result was an agreement to set up a bilateral commission to work on resolving the dispute.

If China were to consolidate its control over the South China Sea,which some Chinese policy-makers have referred to as China's Carribean,China would be in a position to threaten the flow of energy to Japan.China has claimed control over virtually the entire South China Sea based  on the  nine dash line.However, in 2016 the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague rejected Chinese unilateral claims over the control of the disputed islands.China, in turn, did not accept the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.In July 2017,about a year after the ruling ,it still had not been complied with.China has taken the position that the problem can be settled by bilateral negotiations.China does not accept arbitration as a diplomatic modality for resolving the problem.However, as some legal experts have pointed out,since China is a member of the United Nations, it should accept resolution of the dispute by article 33 of Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which does include arbitration and judicial rulings as a means of resolving disputes between states.

2016 did see a rise in the level of tension between China and the US, as China continued to militarize some of the artificial  islands that it was constructing.In 2016 satellite photographs indicated that China was placing missiles on some of the islands,which it had artificially built up

**NORTH KOREA**

In spite of the difficulties in extricating itself from Europe and the Middle East, the Obama administration had continued to pursue a policy of pivoting, or perhaps it is better to use the term rebalancing or reconfiguring its military assets and diplomacy and alliance building and consolidation in Asia.Chinese and US interests collide in Northeast Asia, where US and Chinese interests intersect.Neorealists believe that Northeast Asia is one of the two places in the world in which a Great War could start, because the interests of so many Great Powers intersect in that region:the US, China, Japan, and Russia.(note that some experts believe that China is not the problem in Northeast Asia, but rather North Korea is the most dangerous challenge to peace in the region and in 2018 was the most dangerous foreign policy problem which the Trump administration faced and indeed which the international community faced) .By 2018, the greatest fear which the International Community had was that another Korean War(the first Korean war took place between 1950-1953) could start not by intention,but by miscalculation and misunderstanding.After all, World War I has been called the "accidental war"..Concern has been expressed about the bellicose exchange of rhetoric which has taken place between President Trump  and the President of North Korea,Kim Jong Un.

Most recently in early January 2018 ,President Kim in a New Year's message, threatened the US by stating that he could push a nuclear button on his desk, and launch an ICBM (Intercontinetal ballistic missile)attack which could reach the mainland US.President Trump responded with a tweet that he had a bigger and more powerful nuclear button to launch a nuclear strike against North Korea.In an earlier speech, at the UN General Assembly in the Fall of 2017,President Trump had threatened to destroy North Korea.

The foreign policy of the Trump administration has alternated between threatening military action, applying economic sanctions, and stressing diplomacy and negotiations as a means of persuading the North Koreans to freeze and abandon their nuclear weapons program.The threat of a military option(a conventional or nuclear preemptive strike),economic sanctions, and diplomacy, have all been emphasized by the Trump administration simultaneously.The policy has been described as "maximum pressure" as opposed to the "strategic patience " of the Obama administration.

The North Korean regime currently has taken the position that its nuclear weapons program is not negotiable and that it will not give them up.The North Koreans point to what happened to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq and President Gaddafi of Libya when they gave up their nuclear weapons programs.Both leaders were subsequently overthrown and perished.Saddam Hussein was executed and Gaddafi was murdered in the street during the Libyan revolution in 2011.Pyongyang's objective in obtaining nuclear weapons and delivery systems is not to attack the United States,but to deter a US attack on North Korea(Note;following 9/11, the Bush administration had stated in its National Security Strategy that the US had the option of launching a preemptive strike against an enemy).The dangers of miscalculation, however, were underscored  on January 13, 2018,when there was a false alarm that a missile was on its way to strike Hawaii.This underscored the urgency of trying to resolve the dispute by diplomacy instead of the exchange of bellicose rhetoric.

North Korea also wants to possess the bomb for purposes of prestige,and also use it as a means of leverage to extract economic concessions from South Korea.The bomb can also be used as a means of leverage to negotiate a peace treaty   which will finally bring an end to the state of armistice which has existed since the Korean war(1950-1953).

The North Korean goal is to preserve the Kim dynasty and the communist system. US Secretary of State  Rex Tillerson has stressed that the US is not interested  in pursuing regime change in North Korea.Of course, this statement is for public consumption and diplomatic reasons, and certainly the US would find it in its national interest to see a change in the leadership of North Korea that would be less threatening to the United States.Whether North Korean ICBMs could be seen as fully operational in 2018 after a few tests remained to be seen.In the past(1994 a deal was also negotiated in which the US and Japan would help North Korea build light nuclear reactors.The US had also promised to export oil to North Korea.However, the deal was never consummated because of allegations of North Korean cheating.

The Korean War (1950-53)did not end in a peace treaty, but  rather ended in an armistice which has been maintained for over 70 years.Consequently, another goal of North Korea is to negotiate a peace treaty with the United States and South Korea. The peace treaty could focus on the denuclearization   of the Korean peninsula,its reunification, the withdrawal of US troops(the US maintains about 28,500 troops in Korea),and security guarantees for North Korea.The US could also provide North Korea with much needed economic aid.The US has provided economic aid to North Korea in the past, and could do so in the future.

 The US intelligence community has consistently underestimated the ability of North Korea to develop nuclear weapons, as well as the capability to develop missiles which could reach the United States.The US was surprised by the speed with which the current ruler of North Korea, was able to make progress in the development of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile which was capable of hitting the mainland United States.

Note that in 2016 the Obama administration had not engaged recently in negotiations with North Korea,although his administration had engaged  earlier in an unsuccessful effort to negotiate a denuclearization deal with the North Koreans in exchange for food aid.Previous US administrations had engaged in what were known as the Six Party Talks(North Korea,South Korea,the U.S. Russia, China, and Japan which came to an end in 2009.)One  current proposal to break the impasse over the denuclearization of North Korea is to restart the Six Party Talks.

As mentioned earlier,the Obama administration engaged in a policy of "Strategic Patience"in dealing with North Korea..That is, President Obama's did nothing at all during the closing stages of Obama's second term to resolve the problem.All of the attention of the Obama administration, in connection with dealing with the problem of the proliferation of nuclear weapons had been focused on Iran.Moreover, much to the alarm of the US, North Korea claimed in 2017 to have successfully conducted a test of an ICBM,which was capable of reaching the mainland United States.(On January 13, 2018,Hawaii was swept by panic when it was falsely reported that a missile was on its way)Some experts, however, raised the question of whether or not North Korea had solved the problem of the reentry of an ICBM  into the atmosphere without breaking up.Also it was not clear whether North Korea could make a warhead  small enough to fit onto an ICBM.

Some experts believe that North Korea may have as many as 50- 60 nuclear weapons.Experts believe that North Korea is producing 4-8 nuclear warheads  a year.Most experts do not believe that North Korea is led by a"crazy leader"(even though Kim has engaged in a brutal purge of the inner circles of leadership,reportedly executing 130 people ,including the Defense Minister, his uncle,and also probably was responsible for the assassination of his half-brother in Malaysia in 2017) but makes foreign policy decisions based on rational calculations.In January 2018, President Putin of Russia referred to Kim Jong Un as a "mature" and "responsible" leader.Of course it is in the interest of Russia to say so.Russia shares a short border with North Korea.

North Korea's nuclear weapons program is designed to bolster Kim Jong Un's regime ,as well as to serve as a deterrent against a U.S. attack, and to function as a bargaining chip to provide for an eventual peace treaty.However, there needs to be more explanation of how rational the decision-making process in North Korea actually is.A major problem is that the current inexperienced , leader of North Korea may make a miscalculation which will result in the decision to use nuclear weapons.The regime engaged in a pattern of bombastic tirades threating to use nuclear weapons to attack its enemies(the U.S.,South Korea, orJapan).Although in early January 2018, Kim Jong Un stated that the nuclear weapons were not to be used against South Korea, but were  a deterrent to prevent an attack by the United States.North Korea also stressed that its nuclear weapons were not targeting China or Russia.

It is also worth noting that North Korea also has one of the largest submarine fleets in the world, with about 70 submarines, which rivals the number of U.S.and Chinese submarines each.The submarines are diesel submarines, but some of them are relatively new.North Korea is also working on the development of a  submarine launched ballistic missile(SLBLM),but according to experts, is in the stage of test launches  of the SLBLM.Experts estimate that the number of ships in the North Korean navy range from about 600-800, many of which are smaller boats,such as Hovercraft,supply and auxilary ships.Allthough, obviously there is an enormous difference in the quality of the submarine fleet of the two powers(North Korea and the US).

In April 2017, tension between the U.S. and North Korea increased,as the U.S. initially pursued a policy of brinkmanship The U.S. Secretary of State,Rex Tillerson, in a visit to Asia,in March 2017,stated that all options, including the military option, were on the table in dealing with North Korea's nuclear weapons program.Tillerson was referring to North Korean efforts to develop an ICBM armed with a nuclear warhead that would be capable of attacking the mainland U.S.US threats to North Korea were also reiterated by Vice-President Pence when he visited the region in April 2017.Pence stressed that a recent US attack(April 2017) on a Syrian military base and the dropping of the largest conventional bomb in the US arsenal on an ISIS complex in Afghanistan were also designed to send a message to North Korea.In 2018,the US deployed three Stealth B-2bombers which were capable of carrying this 30,000 conventional bomb which could destroy underground North Korean infrastructures and tunnels(footnote:the bomb is known as the "Massive Ordnance Predator").

Although as the crisis unfolded, the US stressed that it would not engage in a preemptive strike against North Korea.(In the field of applied global affairs, a distinction should be drawn between what is meant by a preemptive strike,and what is meant by a preventive strike.A preemptive strike takes place when one is convinced that an attack by an enemy state is imminent,that is may be coming within a matter of hours.A preventive attack is when a state expects an attack by an enemy to occur at some point in the future, even in years.)

Concern has been expressed by Western experts that North Korea had made significant qualitative improvements in its missile delivery systems during 2018.It is not known whether or not North Korea has the capacity to put nuclear warheads on small and medium range missiles,which could be used to attack South Korea ,Japan, or Australia.It is assumed that North Korea could deliver nuclear bombs from aircraft.

 The continued improvement of North Korea's capacity to produce and deliver nuclear weapons,is putting pressure on South Korea to develop its own nuclear weapons capacity.There are elements in South Korea which would like to pursue the nuclear weapons option.

When President Obama was on a trip to Asia(as part of the rebalancing policy of the Obama administration,as the trip also involved attending a G-20 meeting in China)North Korea detonated its largest nuclear underground explosion to date.The test was to test North Korea's ability to put a nuclear warhead on a missile.According to reports the explosion detonated an earthquake which measured 5.5 on the Richter scale.Although experts claim that it is difficult to measure the size of an underground nuclear test from a distance, it was estimated to be at least 10 kilotons,(one kiloton is equal to one thousand tons of TNT)and perhaps as large as 20-30 kilotons.Japan called the test a grave threat to its security, and called for a Security Council meeting.The purpose of the meeting was to adopt additional sanctions against North Korea.Even China called the test unwise, but urged nations to remain calm.In 2017,North Korea conducted a sixth nuclear test, which was confirmed by experts to be a test of a hydrogen bomb.As tension increased, North Korea also threatened to test a hydrogen bomb in the Pacific(it did not state whether this would be underground or in the atmosphere)

The US would like China to do more to pressure the North Koreans to freeze their nuclear weapons program .China is also clearly upset by North Korea's nuclear weapons program,and has also supported UN economic sanctions against North Korea to pressure it to stop or freeze its nuclear program.In 2016, China imposed economic sanctions on North Korea for testing missiles during a visit by Prime Minister Abe to the United States.The missiles were aimed at Japan(the US has military bases in Japan-the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan is based in Yokohama)and fell into the Japanese zone in the Sea of Japan.There always is the danger of an accident occurring when the missiles are fired.

As punishment for continued missile tests in spite of Chinese requests not to do so, China stopped the importation of North Korean coal for the rest of 2017, which constitutes about 40 % earnings of North Korean exports.(90% of North Korea's trade is with China)The announcement ceasing the importation of North Korean coal for 2017 was made by China in February 2017.China also ceased importing lead and Iron from North Korea as well.Publicly, the Chinese said that they were complying with a UN Security Council resolution which had called for sanctions against North Korea in an effort to stop its missile testing program.

Relations between North Korea and China in 2017 were strained,but there are hardliners in the Chinese military who continue to support North Korea.Some Chinese military officers in their 70s and 80s fought with the North Koreans against the Americans during the Korean War(1950-53).Although the Chinese leadership does not like the current Kim dynasty,they do not want to see a collapse of the current regime.Furthermore, North Korea serves the purpose of forcing the US and South Korea and Japan to devote some of their military assets to deal with it,reducing the quantity and quality of military assets that could b eused to deal with China.

In April 2017, the US increased its pressure on North Korea to cease the development of its nuclear weapons program.The Trump administration stressed that the North Korean issue was the most important problem which Washington faced,as it looked as if North Korea was getting ready to conduct a sixth underground nuclear test on April 15 to celebrate the 105th birthday of the founder of the North Korean communist state,Kim Il Sung.

The US sent a naval task force into the region headed by the aircraft carrier Vinson,accompanied by two guided missile destroyers,as well as subsequently dispatching a nuclear powered submarine to the South Korean port of Busan.The aircraft carrier,which had engaged in naval maneuvers with the Japanese navy,went on to conduct naval maneuvers with the South Korean navy.A second US aircraft carrier was also sent into the region laterFrance and the United Kingdom also sent warships to the region to particpate in naval exercises as well, underscoring NATO's commitment to support Washington.

There was concern that the US might even launch a preemptive strike to take out the North Korean nuclear testing site.North Korea responded by threatening to engage in a thermonuclear war with the US.Russia and China urged the United States and South Korea not to allow the situation to escalate,as President Trump said in an interview that there was a chance of a "major,major conflict "with North Korea.,as he continued to practice some brinkmanship..

.By June 2017, some of the brinkmanship and rhetoric had died down,although the Trump administration still lacked a clear-cut strategy on how to resolve the issue.One useful proposal was to persuade the North Koreans to put a freeze on the development of their nuclear arsenal, based on the model of the nuclear freeze which was negotiated with the Iranian regime by the Obama administration.This would be a much better alternative to military action which could be catastrophic,and also preferable to the US accepting the possibility that North Korea would be able to develop an ICBM which could strike the US homeland in 2-3 years time.

The US praised Chinese efforts to help persuade North Korea to freeze its nuclear program,although China stressed that North Koreawas not responding to pressure from the US.The Trump administration stressed that it was open to diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict.On April 26, the Trump administration invited the entire US Senate to the White House, to explain its strategy toward North Korea,although some senators were mystified as to why the briefing was not held at the Senate itself.Senators who were interviewed said that there was nothing new at the classified briefing,and no clear strategy was evident,as the Trump administration appeared to be dealing with the crisis on an ad hoc basis in terms of waiting for North Korea's reaction to various steps taken by the US,and hoping that Chinese intervention could persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program

.On April 28, 2017, a UN Security Council meeting took place,in which US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson,urged the UN to adopt new and strengthen existing sanctions against North Korea.The meeting was at the foreign ministerial level, and chaired by the US. Secretary of State.The US representative suggested that countries should not accept North Korean guest workers who send their remittances back to North Korea which could be used to fund the nuclear weapons program,that more states should sever diplomatic relations with North Korea to further its isolation from the international community as a means of pressuring it(in applied global affairs pressure does represent a form of power, and can take a number of forms ranging from the use of certain words and language,as constructivists argue, to the use of economic, diplomatic, military, and idiosyncratic power based on personal relationships between world leaders),there could be an oil embargo applied against Pyongyang,,and states could also ban North Korea's airline.Secretary of State Tillerson also suggested that the US could take punitive action against International companies that were  involved in the development of North Korea's nuclear weapons program.There was some speculation that this could involve Chinese banks.

On April 29, 2017,the day after the special meeting of the UN Security Council meeting Council,North Korea tested another shorter range  missile which also failed.Experts argue that the North Koreans can learn valuable  technological lessons even from failed missile launches which brings them steps closer to being able to launch a missile equipped with a nuclear warhead(s).The U.S. in turn began the deployment of THAAD(Terminal High Altitude Area Defense)missiles in South Korea which were designed to shoot down North Korean missiles.China objected to the deployment of the THAAD missiles because Beijing saw them as a threat to its national security.The radar associated with the missiles could reportedly penetrate into China,and therefore was seen by China as upsetting regional stability.

Tillerson stressed that the US was not interested in engaging in regime change in North Korea.The US representative indicated that Washington was even willing to engage in direct negotiations with North Korea.The U.S. was  willing to resume economic and financial aid to North Korea.The U.S. had provided North Korea with about $1.3 billion in aid from 1995, until it was discontinued.However, North Korea indicated that it was not interested in participating in negotiations which would stop or freeze its nuclear weapons program.North Korea did not attend the special Security Council meeting on the issue.

To further compound the difficulties in reaching a settlement,the Trump administration sent mixed signals when President Trump tweeted Tillerson not to waste his time in engaging in diplomacy with the North Koreans.However, various channels of communicaion were still kept open with the North Koreans,ranging from the work of a Special Ennvoy for North Korea who secured the release of an ill American student ho subsequently died to the work of private organization still searching for the remains of American servicemen who perished during the Korean war(1950-1953)

However, much to the surprise of the international community,North Korea successfully tested an ICBM on JUly 4,2017.According to experts, if the ICBM had flown in a flatter trajectory it could have reached Alaska.This was ahead of schedule and clearly upset the strategic balance of power in East Asia.Following the test, President Xi met President Putin en route to the G-20 summit meeting in Germany.Russia and China issued a joint declaration calling on the US and South Korea to freeze their annual joint military exercises in return for a North Korean freeze on its nuclear weapons development program.This proposal was not that novel, since it had been made in previous negotiations.The US and South Korean response was to engage in a live missile firing exercise ,using precision missiles which were capable of striking the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.The South Korean government stated that it would not stop joint military exercises with the US,and North Korea stated that it would not give up its weapons.The question of North Korea was certain to dominate talks at the G-20 summit which was meeting in Hamburg,Germany from July7-8,2017.Experts commented that North Korea would still have to solve some technical problems connected with the separation and re-entry of the warhead,and the problem of placing the warhead  on the missile.President Trump had three options(1)accept the development of a nuclear weapons capability by North Korea(2)launch a military strike against North Korea(3)engage in a diplomatic solution to the problem.

Tension between the US and North Korea continued on into the Fall 2017.President Trump delivered  a speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations, in which he said that threats by North Korea to the United States(and its allies) could result in the total destruction of the country.President Trump also derisively referred to Kim Jong-Un, the ruler of North Korea, as "The Little Rocket Man."Kim in return referred to President Trump as a old dotard and a "mad lunatic"

In early November 2017, President Trump engaged in an exhaustive tour of Asia.The general purpose of the trip was to underscore the continuing US commitment to Asia under the new administration.However, President Trump also sought to mobilize the Asian states to join with the US in exerting more pressure on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program.President Trump met with the leaders of Japan, South Korea,China, and Vietnam.Trump also met with leaders of several other Asian states who were attending the meetings of regional economic meetings in Vietnam and the Philippines.While Trump was in Asia, the US continued to put military pressure on North Korea.  For example, two  U.S. B-1B bombers flew off the coast of North Korea further North than any previous flights.It is known that the B-1B bombers do not carry nuclear payloads.In 2018 they were repalced by three B-2 bomberswhich were capable of carrying nuclear payloads.While Trump met with Asian leaders,three US aircraft carriers(the USS Ronald Reagan,the USS Theodore Roosevelt,the USS Nimitz) came within about 90 kilometers of the "Northern Line of Limit-a maritime border which delineated North Korean waters from South Korean claimed territorial waters.The North Korean Ambassador sent a protest letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.The three aircraft carriers are nuclear powered, wiith the Ronald Reagan a supercarrier of 100,000 tons.

However,in early January 2018,there was a reduction in tension on the Korean peninsula,.In his annual New Year's speech, Kim Jong Un offered to participate in the Olympic Winter Games which were scheduled to be held in South Korea in February 2018.President Moon of South Korea quickly accepted the offerAn agreement was reached that North Korea would send a delegation of 500 to participate in the Winter olympics which were held dubbed by South Korea as the "Peace Games."President Trump also adopted an attitude of wait and see,as it was hoped that this would be a breakthrough in the crisis which could lead to negotiations on some of the more important issues.There had been previous thaws over the  years in North korea's interactions with South Korea and the US, so it remained to be seen where the latest North Korean "peace offensive " would lead.

This breakthrough was made possible by the decision of South Kprea and the US to postpone joint military exercises that were scheduled to take place during the Winter games as well as the Para-Olympics which were to follow in South Korea.North and South Korea also agreed to restore a direct communications link that had not been used for the past two years.The agreement did not break any UN sanctions that had been imposed on North Korea.Some experts believed that the peace offensive by Kim Jong Un was designed to drive a wedge between the US and South Korea.South Korea did not want the US to engage in any military action against North Korea without the approval of the North.President Moon, who had recently been elected, wanted to pursue a more conciliatory policy toward North Korea, somewhat reminiscent of the "sunshine "policy,that had been pursued by previous South Korean administrations.

.Another scenario is the possibility of a war between the US and China over North Korea.

**THE INDO-PACIFIC**

The U.S. rebalancing to Asia also has an Indo-Pacific component to it, with an increased U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean.The US would like to cooperate with India to counterbalance China,although India has other national security priorities, such as the threat from Pakistan, as both India and Pakistan are nuclear weapon states..Note that India also continues to maintain good relations with Russia.India also still has unsettled border issues with China.China and India fought a brief border war in 1962.

The rebalancing also includes alliance building between Washington and several Southeast Asian nations.

In September 2016, as part of the rebalancing effort,President Obama became the first sitting President to visit communist Laos, within the framework of a regional summit meeting,

The second place in which a Great War could start is Europe, also because of the intersection of the interests of a number of Great Powers.The Russian annexation of the Crimea, for example, and Mosow's invasion of the Eastern Ukraine,have raised the level of tension in Europe.Northern and Central European countries also were increasingly threatened by Russia,resulting in a change in military strategy by NATO to meet what states in the region perceived as an increasing threat from Moscow.

,US policy is designed  to reassure Japan that its security interests will be protected by the US.There is also historical emnity between China and Japan, dating back to World II, and the Japanese invasion of China.Recently, China held a massive military victory parade in Beijing, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the defeat of Japan by China.An impressive amount of military hardware appeared in the parade, which was designed to send a clear message to Tokyo.The US and Japan have taken bilateral measures to strengthen and consolidate their alliance.The US has also focused on trilateral cooperation with Japan and South Korea, and moved military assets to northern Australia,as well as the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan to a base in Japan.US naval ships also participated in the review of the Japanese fleet, along with ships from such countries as Australia and France.Japanese military and naval power is significant.For example,Japan has about 150 warships,including 20 submarines.

Under Prime Minister Abe, Japan has moved in a more nationalistic direction,and the US has supported the move by the Japanese government to adopt legislation which allows its Self-Defense forces to engage in a more offensive posture to come to the aid of friendly states,presumably threatened by China.Japan, also for the first time participated in naval maneuvers with India in the Bay of Bengal,as India sees the projection of Chinese naval power into the Indian Ocean as a threat to its security.The US also participated in the naval exercises, as India is now a strategic ally of the US.

Furthermore,ironically, the U.S. and Vietnam have a common interest in countering the rise of China.Vietnam is now interested in becoming a strategic ally of the US.Senator John McCain, who has visited Vietnam recently has recommended that the US provide weapons to Vietnam, to enhance its capability to deal with what it perceives as a threat to its security interests.According to a recent statement(2015)by a high-level US defense official,the US was considering providing Vietnam with some maritime weaponry.In a visit to Vietnam toward the end of May 2016,President Obama  announced that the US was lifting its arms embargo against Vietnam.This would provide Vietnam with an increased capacity to defend itself against China.The lifting of the arms embargo was criticized by conservatives in the US as removing the only leverage which Washington had to exert pressure on Vietnam to improve its human rights record.Nonetheless, realism prevailed as the US continued with part of its grand strategy, which encompassed a "pivot" to Asia.

Japan has also developed closer naval ties with Australia. Japan and the US have also developed closer military ties since Prime Minister Abe assumed power AGAIN IN 2012.

However,one should not buy into the neorealist approach that war between China and the US is inevitable.Liberal internationalists argue the the US should pursue a policy of constructive engagement towards China,and that China has a vested interest in maintaining the liberal international order, which is economically beneficial to its interests.As mentioned previously, experts at  the Belfer Center at Harvard have engaged in an extensive study of the possibility of another Great war taking place, which would involve the US and China.Graham Allison, the Director of the Belfer center, thinks that, with a lot of work, it would be possible for the U.S. to avoid the" Thucydides Trap"(the Chinese President in a recent speech in 2015, even mentioned the possibility of avoiding the Thucydides Trap).The idea of the Thucydides Trap is based on the classic realist history of the Peloponnesian War which took place in the 400 BC's over a period of 30 years, resulting in the victory of Sparta over Athens.According to the logic of the Thucydides Trap, the war was caused by the fear which Sparta had of the rising power of Athens.Athens was a seapower which was building an empire which challenged Sparta, which was a land power.In the same vein, the logic of the Thucydides Trap might be applied to China which is a rising land power which is challenging the seapower of the United States.