

# The Basic Predicament for the U.S. in China's Rise

The Skeptics

Ted Galen Carpenter | January 26, 2011

A few weeks ago on The Skeptics, Justin Logan authored a post that highlighted a major dilemma in the U.S.-China relationship: how can America contain China's rise as a military power, particularly in East Asia, if it simultaneously provides the largest market for Chinese exports? China's rise as a military power is only possible because of its economic growth and the U.S. is inextricably linked to this. U.S.-China trade is absolutely vital to both countries economies, but it is also what will allow China allocate more wealth toward their military.

Chinese President Hu Jintao's recent visit to Washington and Secretary of Defense Gates's visit to China the prior week, highlights this dilemma well. While Secretary Gates had mixed results attempting to forge stronger ties with China's militarily, President Obama proudly announced new economic deals with China. Secretary Gates's trip was mired by the apparently out-of-left-field flight test of a Chinese stealth fighter. And this of course riled up anti-China hawks who feel this is enough evidence for the Pentagon to continue weapons procurement aimed at preparing for conflict with Beijing.

In a recent article for *Aspenia*, I examined this dilemma in more depth:

Americans and others seemed to believe that China would forever be content to focus on its internal economic progress and be satisfied to play a subordinate role in international economic and security affairs. As the incumbent global hegemon, the United States obviously would find such an outcome highly desirable, but rising great powers do not tailor their policies to suit incumbent hegemons. We should not expect China to break that historical pattern.

The likelihood that Beijing will become steadily more assertive in the international arena, however, creates a dilemma for the United States. A majority of Americans regard the extensive US-Chinese economic relationship as beneficial and desirable. But as Cato Institute foreign policy scholar Justin Logan points out, that relationship greatly strengthens China's economy and, indirectly, Beijing's ability to develop political and military power.

Given that reality, one would expect that there would be growing wariness in the United States — especially among hawkish types — about maintaining, much less expanding, bilateral economic ties. Yet even most outspoken critics of China's regional and global behavior rarely advocate drastically curtailing the economic relationship. That produces the odd spectacle of many anti-China hawks simultaneously warning that China poses a growing threat to America's interests, and even the republic's security, while endorsing wide-ranging trade and investment links that contribute to Beijing's rising power.