

INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES



Dr. Teng Jianqun



*Dr. Teng Jianqun is Director of the Department for American Studies and a senior research fellow at China Institute of International Studies (CIIS). He has worked at CIIS since his demobilization in September 2004. Dr. Teng served in the PLA (People's Liberation Army) for 25 years, first in the Navy (1979-1992) and later in the Academy of Military Science (1992-1994). He was an editor-in-chief of the Academy of Military Science journal *World Military Review* and an assistant research fellow there. Dr. Teng has published dozens of articles on the issues of arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation, in addition to authoring several reports and books.*

We talked with Dr. Teng in Bratislava, where he was attending the [GLOBSEC 2014](#) conference.

First of all, I would like to touch on the developments in Ukraine and the Chinese position. We have seen China walking a fine line between its relationship with Russia and upholding of international norms of territorial integrity and noninterference in internal affairs. Would you please elaborate on the Chinese position and comment on what the Chinese stakes are in this whole situation?

Actually, in my understanding, no position is the best position for China. China-Russia relations are very important and China-Ukraine relations are also very important. We are also good partners with the EU countries, especially the countries neighboring Ukraine and we are constructing a new model of big power relations with the United States. Therefore, I think at this moment, China's no position is the best position for dealing with the crisis in Ukraine.

There has been the notion that China is actually the only winner of the Ukrainian crisis as Russia, under pressure from the West, will increasingly look east and towards China. As a consequence, there could be progress in energy or arms deals and other issues. Moreover, the United States might have to invest more resources and attention to Europe, giving China more breathing space in the Asia-Pacific region.

That might be one side of the crisis, China might get some benefits as regards the oil deals and also the easing of pressure from the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, especially after the U.S. adopted a strategy called rebalancing to the region. But I don't think that it is the intention by the Chinese government to manipulate the crisis. As I just mentioned, China has taken no position in this crisis so far and has insisted that all the parties concerned should sit down and find a peaceful solution.

Actually this is a crisis not only in Ukraine. It's a struggle among all the big powers in this region. In recent two days I heard a lot of speeches by the European scholars and the European officials who only criticized the Russian side. But I think we had better take another side of the crisis. Actually it is a coin with two sides. I think the most important consideration for Putin to take such a strong action, especially the takeover of Crimea, was the concern of security. I am sure the Russians learned the lessons from the early 1990s when Yeltsin was in power and the NATO promised no enlargement, no expansion to the Eastern European countries, but broke the promise and they enlarged.

The United States, in my opinion, actually benefited the most from the crisis. Candidly speaking, Obama was of course humiliated by the action taken by Putin. But after the crisis, the European countries, especially the NATO countries, will ask the United States to continue their presence in this region. We have witnessed some requirements from Germany and Belgium for a withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons and this crisis will, I'm sure, fundamentally change these requirements and the United States will continue to be the number one, big boss here.

We have already touched on the U.S. rebalance so I would like to ask you what you think about this policy which has been announced in 2011. Some claim that the United States is actually trying to contain China, not at least through increasing its military presence in the region and other political and economic initiatives. Do you consider Washington's policy as an instrument to encircle and contain China?

I don't think the United States today can contain China. Looking at the comparison of their power we see the declining power of the United States and the increasing power of China. This is my answer to your question in brief.

I've actually seen it not from 2011 but already from 2009, that the United States adopted the so-called pivot or rebalance to the Asia Pacific region. It's actually an old game played by the UK one hundred years ago, when they tried to manipulate the weak side and the strong side on the continent for their own benefit. There was a strong country like Germany, and the UK would help France to have a standoff between the continental countries. That's the balance of power, a very famous theory in international relations studies. Actually the United States mentioned this theory in 2001 before 9/11, you can check the national security report by the Bush administration. At the time President Bush said that in order to avoid any clash among big powers there should be a more balanced power on global scope. So this is an old story and an old theory played again.

But I don't think that this time the Obama administration or any other administration after Obama can make it because this is a very tricky practice. Actually, the so-called rebalancing strategy has two tracks. One is security. Another is economy. OK, you play a theory with two wheels. It's not a clear-cut policy; it's not a clear-cut strategy for the United States. The result of such a double check practice by the Obama administration is that no country in the Asia-Pacific region is happy.

Of course, the United States heavily relies on Japan in security issues and they have enhanced the security cooperation. On the other side, they cannot deny the cooperation in trade and economy with China. So these days you can watch the American officials- for example when the Vice President Biden paid a visit to Japan he said a lot of good words to the Japanese and when he came to China he said a lot of good words to the Chinese. I don't think that the Chinese were happy when they heard what Biden said in Tokyo and I'm sure the Japanese were not happy when they heard what Biden said in Beijing. I compare this to a gangster. A big boss or a gangster cannot say good things to you and then say good things to that guy.

So I think it is a tragedy for the United States to have a balancing strategy with two tracks, because I'm sure the United States cannot rely on one side and balance another side. In security, the United States heavily relies on its allies, Japan, ROK and the Philippines, and in economy the United States heavily relies on China. I think last year the total trade amount reached \$520 billion. I heard a lot of criticism of the strategy in DC when I was on visit there last month. This is not a good strategy.

In the last few weeks there has been a re-escalation of disputes in the South China Sea with Vietnam and the Philippines. The former dispute reignited after a Chinese oil rig was towed to the vicinity of disputed Paracel islands, followed by clashes between Chinese and Vietnamese vessels and large anti-Chinese protests in Vietnam. As regards the dispute with the Philippines, several Chinese fishermen were detained and Manila accused Beijing of constructing an air strip on a disputed island. What is your view of the situation?

Firstly, I would say that the dispute between China and Vietnam has actually been caused by the Vietnamese side. The oil rig is 16 nautical miles from one of the Chinese islands Zhongjian, yet more than a hundred nautical miles from the coast of Vietnam. This is a traditional territory of China. There is a background I can tell you, that this is not only a one side standoff. I think the Vietnamese government tries to make it internationalized and attract international attention to put pressure on China. On the other hand, we see it as protecting China's sovereignty and territorial waters. If you have a further study on China's diplomacy in recent years you can find that there is a fundamental change from a trade-oriented diplomacy. In the 35 years since our economy opened up, China has actually carried out a trade-oriented foreign policy and retreated step by step, especially over the territorial disputes with neighboring countries, including the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and in the South China Sea.

How could these disputes affect China-ASEAN relations? This has been the most contentious issue in the relationship, yet the resolution appears elusive, on the contrary, the trend seems to be in the direction of further escalation.

Actually, I think that the relations between China and the ASEAN nations, the 10 countries, have been so far so good, especially in trade. And in recent years we have seen a large cooperation in security. Last year we sent our combat troops, not the logistic troops, to participate in the drills in Brunei. It is only some countries, the Philippines and Vietnam, which try to continue their occupation of these islands. I think China has been very patient in dealing with these disputes and this will not hurt the relations with the ASEAN nations, especially with the other eight countries.

interviewer: Filip Šebok