



ROBERT GATES

Former Secretary of Defense of the United States

Jin Roy Ryu, Chairman & CEO, Poongsan Group, Republic of Korea

Talking about China, do you think China has a grand strategy for the coming decades and do you believe that it has a clear vision of its role in the international system and is willing to contribute positively to the world order?

Robert Gates, Former Secretary of Defense of the United States

I think with respect to the final question, that remains to be seen. People talk a lot about the emergence of China, when I think it is more accurate and provides greater historical context to talk about the re emergence of China. After all this was one of the greatest powers in the world for more than a couple of millennia. China was a great power when those of us with European backgrounds were still painting ourselves blue and dancing around campfires. Therefore, I think this history shapes China's view of its role not only in the Pacific but in the world as a whole. Their own self interest is in becoming a responsible stakeholder. They need the freedom of navigation as much as any of the rest of us. They need protection of the global commons as much as any of the rest of us. Their economy is deeply tied to other countries, the United States, South Korea, Japan, Europe and so on. As I say, they were a great empire for a couple of millennia, then they had a couple of bad centuries, but they are coming back from that and I think they expect to be treated as a world power. They expect respect and the question is how much deference they expect.

When it comes to the military, I believe that the Chinese are a lot smarter than the Soviets. I do not think the Chinese have any intention of trying to match the United States in terms of global military power, ship for ship, plane for plane and so on. I think that first of all they are focusing their development efforts in areas where we are vulnerable, not where we are strong. Therefore, they are putting a lot of focus on anti satellite capabilities, cyber and on highly accurate anti ship cruise and ballistic missiles that can hold our carriers at risk. I think they do intend to challenge us, our predominance militarily in the Pacific region. A recent report that came out indicated that by 2020 the United States will have 67 submarines and surface ships, warships, in the Pacific area, budget permitting, a key caveat. The Chinese will have 350. Therefore, even if you grant that ours may be technologically more advanced for the most part, at a certain point numbers actually do begin to matter.

The question is how we manage this relationship, and I think there is no inherent geostrategic reason for us to be adversaries. The key going forward is how effectively the leadership of both countries can manage this relationship, as well as the leadership in South Korea and the leadership in Japan, for that matter. I do not think that there is any preordained outcome to any of this. However, it is going to take some skill and we do have to recognise China's interests and its own expectations and its own view of itself. That does not mean we have to defer to that, but we at least better keep it in mind as we formulate our own policies.