

The Importance of Evolutionary Epistemologies for Exploring the Limits of the Asian-Pacific Nation State

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Abstract

This paper explores the limits of the nation-state in the Asian Pacific by an analysis of particular epistemological orientations. These differentiated orientations are based upon an analysis grounded in the work of John Boyd, who developed an approach to strategy known as “the OODA loop” (Observation, Orientation, Decision, and Action). Boyd’s work developed from study of military tactics and was influenced by Asian sources, including Sun Tzu and Musashi. It is now broadly applied to management and political studies and offers unique insight into the tensions that reside in current notions of state and regional (i.e. “Asian”) strategies, whose “aim or purpose” is to “improve our ability to shape and adapt to unfolding circumstances, so that we can survive on our own terms” (Boyd).

Keywords: Strategy, Asian regionalism, Reflexivity, USA Foreign Policy, Entropy

A Boydian approach to organizational and national epistemologies

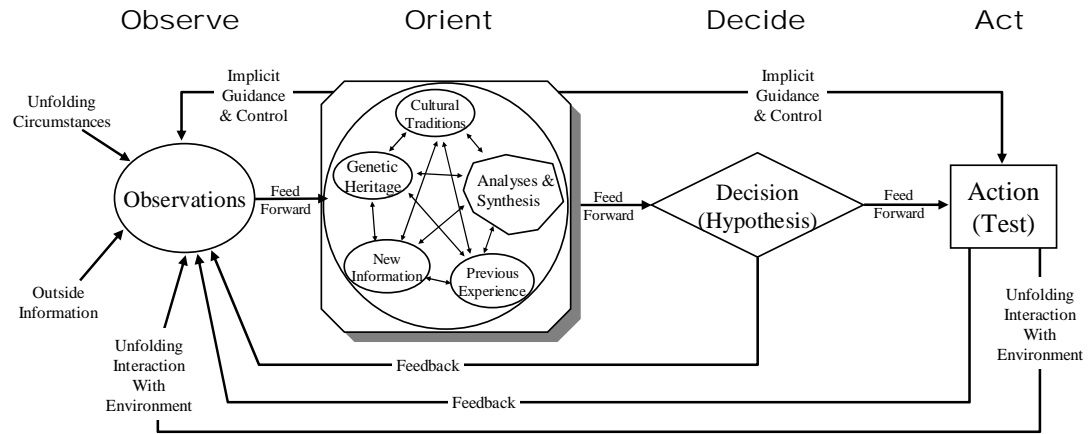
The OODA loop (Observation, Orientation, Decision and Action) is a simple way of stating, or restating, the idea of reflexivity¹ so basic to Western epistemology. What makes it different, and inspiring, is the way it incorporates of the element of speed. With superior speed in the processes of observing and understanding the observed, it becomes easier to decide on a course of action, and with that, individuals and organizations gain a superior ability to adapt to changing external circumstances. This is especially important in conflict situations, but it is also important for a deeper and usable understanding of what is happening in the world of today. In Asia, or the Asia-Pacific, arguably the world’s most rapidly changing region, the ability to synthesize and adapt quickly

¹ For one of the many statements about the concept of reflexivity, that shows its centrality in modern thinking, see f.ex. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Polity 1991), especially pp.36-ff.

to unpredictable events will help individuals, organizations or nations survive, and those who have the better understanding of the directions and shapes of change than others, may well be able to survive on their own terms. How we arrive at this understanding is what this paper will try to sketch.

The figure below graphically represents the way in which thought and action are intertwined. To some, the notion of a loop suggests some kind of sequential and repetitive action. That would be a distorting and misleading way of looking at it. Note the words in the box underneath the sketch itself about the simultaneity of the processes. Nonetheless, the loop must be seen as an iterative process that will reflect the extent to which an individual or an organization understands and interacts with its environment. The process must also provide new and energizing inputs to the individuals who work together to ensure survival of the organization or institution in focus.

Boyd's OODA "Loop" Sketch



Note how orientation shapes observation, shapes decision, shapes action, and in turn is shaped by the feedback and other phenomena coming into our sensing or observing window.

Also note how the entire "loop" (not just orientation) is an ongoing many-sided implicit cross-referencing process of projection, empathy, correlation, and rejection.

From "The Essence of Winning and Losing," John R. Boyd, January 1996.

Defense and the National Interest, <http://www.d-n-i.net>, 2001

Figure 1.

The essential Orientation phase

Boyd and his successors emphasize that the central part of the OODA loop is to be found in the Orientation phase. This phase shapes both observation, decisions, and actions.

As we see from the sketch, or as we can read in *Destruction and Creation*², many aspects help to shape Orientation: We may perhaps disregard the impact of our genetic heritage in the short run, but any individual, and organizations as

² Boyd Destruction and reation http://www.belisarius.com/modern_business_strategy/boyd/destruction/destruction_and_creation.htm

well, will try to work on the basis of past experience, cultural heritage, on new observations of what is happening around them, and analyses/syntheses of these inputs/retained ideas. The constant interplay of these factors is what constitutes drives and shapes orientation.

The old saying: *Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!* comes to mind. More seriously, the inability of, for example, the US military leadership during the Vietnam War to understand the shortfalls of a technologically oriented approach to the war helped to cause their defeat.³ A more recent example is the Chinese government's initial reactions to the SARS outbreak, where it was ignored and then underreported. Only when the potential impact of the outbreak on Chinese trade was forcefully brought home to the authorities, did they undertake efficient action. Currently, in the Asia-Pacific, we may well be witnessing certain mindsets that are generating increasingly distorted views of the unfolding circumstances of the region. The result of this is that people or organizations whose survival may well depend on a realistic appreciation of developments will experience problems of the kind that relate to cognitive dissonance and their futures will be at risk. These examples show that the OODA

³ Boyd served as a Colonel in command of the base in Thailand from where the interdiction attempt known as *Igloo White*, or the "*Mc Namara Line*" was run. He shut it down, (Coram, p.274).

loops of individuals⁴ may well be resistant to suggestions/observations indicating the necessity of changing your orientation. On the other hand, if an adversary is able to shape your perceptions of reality, you may well be seduced into changing an approach to a problem that might well have worked. This is an example of Sun Tzu's idea of attacking an enemy's strategy.

The Organizational Harmonic within the Boydian Analytical Loop

Boyd's work is primarily focused on how to survive and thrive in conflict situations. The way in which he arrived at this is, to my mind, a story worth retelling, and is included, with a few illustrative anecdotes, at the end of the paper.⁵ Despite his point of departure in conflict (or perhaps, because of it,) Boyd's legacy, particularly as developed by some of his associates,⁶ places exceptional emphasis on the cultivation of internal organizational harmony. Extreme situations necessitate deep trust and implicit understanding between the people who are involved. Further, Boydian thought argues that all organizations lose their focus over time. Here is where Boyd places especial

⁴ We talk of organizational OODA **loops**, in the same way that we talk of organizational memory, but this is potentially misleading shorthand. There may be expert systems embedded in an organization, but if they are not kept alive by individuals, they lose their significance for the organization. The constant production and re-production of knowledge is essential to living organizations.

⁵ (pp.19-22) If you wish to know even more, see Franklin Spinney's eulogy "Genghis John" in Proceedings of the U. S. Naval Institute July 1997, pp. 42-47. This is a good place to start.

⁶ Chet Richards and Donald Vandergriff, especially, come to mind.(see www.belisarius.com)

emphasis on the inevitability of (organizational) entropy.

In *Destruction and Creation*, Boyd notes the following about entropy:

High entropy implies a low potential for doing work, a low capacity for taking action or a high degree of confusion and disorder. Low entropy implies just the opposite. [...] From this law it follows that entropy must increase in any closed system--or, for that matter, in any system that cannot communicate in an ordered fashion with other systems or environments external to itself.⁷

In his further work, he uses the Second Law of Thermodynamics a metaphor for portraying the way any social entity tends to forget its original purpose and naturally, as time passes, becomes increasingly dysfunctional. Internal decay is characterized by the idea that an organization becomes so inward-looking, so locked up in internal struggles, that it ceases to be able to communicate internally or externally, to do what it actually was intended by its originators or founders. Different parts of an organization cease to communicate with each other, critical differences of opinion within the organization begin to dominate discussions, friction increases and obsessions come to dominate individual thinking. Disillusion with the original goal, or loss of faith in its possible attainment will cause individuals within it to seek other alliances, or just to stop doing anything. Unless an organization is able to obtain, and use, input from the outside, it will gradually slide into this (entropic) state, and die.

⁷Boyd, *Destruction and Creation*, p.13.

In a conflict situation the cultivation of disharmony and disaffection in the ranks of your opponent makes victory easier, therefore, pumping up your opponent's entropy level is good strategy.⁸

Data, its value and the need for proper evaluative ports: Gödel's proof and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

Gödel's proof says that it is "impossible to embrace mathematics within a single system of logic. Further, he proved that even though such a system is consistent, its consistency cannot be demonstrated within the system."⁹ But Boyd goes on to note that this merely proves the necessity of going outside your system in order to prevent its stagnation. By extension, it is argued that we need to conduct internal evaluations to know how we are doing in our institutions. From time to time, however, we may also need *external* evaluators to look at what we are doing, in order to ensure that nothing is being overlooked or hidden. Fine. But then, we encounter another problem. Metaphorically stated, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle notes that you cannot with absolute certainty determine the momentum and position of a (small) particle, because when particles become small enough, energy coming from the observer causes erratic

⁸ Here is an excellent example of a Sun Tzu parallel. In *The Estimates*, verse 25, We read the following: *Sometimes drive a wedge between a sovereign and his ministers; on other occasions separate his allies from him. Make them mutually suspicious so that they drift apart. Then you can plot against them.* (Griffith, p. 69).

⁹ *Destruction and Creation*. p.8-9

behavior. It might be said that the observer becomes part of the system, at which point Gödel's proof begins to become important again.¹⁰ Boyd would say that the resulting confusion and disorder contributes to rising entropy levels.

Faced with the seeming inevitability of increasing organizational dysfunction or death by entropy, one question naturally arises. How does the individual or the organization communicate, and with whom, in such an *orderly* fashion that it may postpone or slow down or even reverse, for a while, the build-up of entropy levels?

First of all, *within* an organization you have to be able to communicate with a minimum amount of friction. Ideally, you strive for what Edward Hall calls a high-context type of communication, one where much is implicit. Where this is not possible, you have to communicate in a low-context manner, that is to say, rather more explicitly, in order to avoid misunderstandings. Organizations will always oscillate between these two levels, but it should be noted that, as time passes, messages tend to lose their meaning, and it becomes necessary to recharge words with meaning so they are truly understandable to all members of the organization. Boyd argues that the way to attain this is to ensure that members of the organization have a common goal, and that they are in

¹⁰ This can be illustrated by thinking of the failure of the Auditing Firms that serviced Enron and some other companies. They actually became part of the organization, with goals, profitability in consulting, rather than from auditing, that prevented them from giving an objective assessment of what the true nature of the company was.

agreement as to what the common goal is. He would call this the *Schwerpunkt*,¹¹ or the focus of effort. To the extent this goal, be it a business objective or a military one, is well understood as a common goal within the organization, the people at the front line in the organization should be given maximum freedom in deciding how the goal should be reached. Top-down implementations of brilliant leaders were, to the extent they were detailed orders, seen as something negative in this way of thinking. Top-down usually implies that information is flowing only one way, and that the director of a battle, or a business idea therefore may be receiving information that is dated or skewed, whereas the people at the point of contact have the chance of observing and adapting to reality as it unfolds. To give them freedom of action is possible to the extent they have a clear conception of the organization's *Schwerpunkt*, or overall idea of what its objectives are. This freedom of action, in turn, means that special opportunities that arise in a fleeting moment can be exploited. Exploring a market with multiple attempts to penetrate it can be a fruitful way of gaining entry. In war, probing for weakness may be the way to find the key to a victory. This, of course, makes for a complicated environment that is highly dependent on trust, both from below, but certainly also from above, and that must be based in a common outlook.

The cultivation of organizational harmony, which can well be applied at

¹¹ Like many of his terms, this is derived from German military thinking of the 19th and 20th century.

state and national levels, no less than trans-national functions such as NGOs, can be specified quite simply as an iterative complex of OODA-loops operating at the different levels of the organization. Naturally, the more data to be assessed as usable information, the slower any loop will run, and the greater reliance must be placed on the good judgment of the lower level processing, no less than the actual executive levels of the organization. In a word, the driver must have confidence in the rubber that meets the road.

In addition, communication with the *outside* world is also important, because of the information you can gather that will be useful in combating internal entropy, as well as discovering new explanations for the expanding system they are part of.

The grand integration, a view towards global governance

Can Tactics drive Strategy? US grand strategy in the coming years, a possible view:

The significance of Boyd's strategic insight into organizational and, even, national re-inventive processes lies in his particular intellectual appropriation of divergent theoretical insights that occurred during his lifetime. For the sake of human endeavor, he appropriated Gödel's proof, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and the Second law of Thermodynamics in a remarkable metaphoric

application to the human horizon that specifies the processes that take place in organizations and nation states. Significantly, for the prospect of Asian societies, these processes he specifies as always being inherently dangerous but also, depending on the rigor of the analytical cycle, potentially fruitful in unimaginable ways. There is no certainty underlying this statement, only a promise that a participant in the Asian regional process must stay attuned to what is going on, and be able to reinterpret and synthesize increasing amounts of information. This might be done from the perspective of the macro-level, thinking in very broad terms.

In addition to developing tactics and strategy on the basis of the OODA-loop, Boyd also studied the principles of grand strategy. Again, I think it would not be wrong to say that here we see the mind of Sun Tzu influencing a kindred spirit across the ages. Students of Sun Tzu will recognize the basic aspects of his thinking in Boyd's five principles for a successful grand strategy. First, though, it is worth noting that Boyd arrived at his strategic thinking by way of his study of tactics. In turn, it is fair to argue that his study of tactics based itself on a constant series of testing in the real world. His work and his way of thinking and doing were totally intertwined and inseparable. In this way he is absolutely modern, and by consciously using the scientific method developed by the practitioners of natural science, rooted in the European Enlightenment. But his eclectic nature

constantly sought out, and tested ideas from other cultures and periods. To the extent that ideas were testable, they were tested, and if applicable, his attitude was to use them, or those parts of them that were usable. He was truly an interdisciplinary mind roaming around, before that term became fashionable.

This explains why many aspects of Boyd's work relate to the strategic thought patterns developed in Asia long ago. Both Sun Tzu and Musashi Miyamoto figure in his briefings and in comments and writings by his colleagues, of what he saw as central approaches to surviving in a conflict. In one of the early Boyd briefings, **Patterns of Conflict**,¹² one of the first slides discusses Sun Tzu's **Art of War**.¹³ He summarizes Sun Tzu's ideas as being composed of themes and strategies, which are related to outcomes. The desired outcome is to subdue an enemy without fighting and especially, to avoid protracted war. The themes are interesting, as they lay the groundwork of how to act: (internal) harmony, deception, swiftness-of-action, fluidity-of-action dispersion/concentration, surprise and shock.

With these concepts as a loose framework for action, you then:

- probe the enemy to unmask him
- shape the enemy's perception to manipulate his plans and actions
- attack his plans,

¹² 1986 version, slide 13 in A discourse on Winning and Losing, mimeographed, 1987. .pdf here: http://www.d-n-i.net/second_level/boyd_military.htm#discourse

¹³ One of the editions Boyd used was the Samuel B. Griffith Translation (Oxford, 1963).

- and employ zheng-qi (orthodox-unorthodox) maneuvers to hurl strength against weakness.

This implies that two sides of the situation must be looked at: the internal and the external... your own situation and that of the opponent. To the extent that you gain a correct appreciation of a position or situation, you are doing well. To the extent that your opponent misapprehends the situation, your ability to overcome him is, of course, easier. If you can *shape* his perception of reality in such a way that he misapprehends it, you will also facilitate your strategic goals. And finally, when the time for action comes, overwhelm your opponent by doing the unexpected. Boyd once quoted from a film about the US World War II general, Patton, who (in the film) says: "Grab the enemy by the nose, and kick him in the pants" Meaning: feint a frontal attack so as to focus attention there, and then let your main attack fall elsewhere.

All of this is certainly part of elementary and even rote learning on the subject. Boyd's stressing rapidity of the ability to change direction and speed, (what he initially, on the basis of his experience as a fighter pilot, saw as the ability to gain and lose (kinetic) energy rapidly), is a central factor in any conflict situation, since maneuverability is a major factor in keeping the opponent off guard. When an opponent cannot be sure of where you are, he will have a harder time hitting you.

Here, however, his ideas concerning major strategic positions vis a vis

total surroundings, including potential allies and neutrals in addition to possible enemies will be looked at. As we shall see, his main idea is that the grand strategy of a country, such as the US, should avoid alienating countries operating in the same area as they are moving into.

The coming years will see the interplay of the grand strategies of the three main powers in the Asia Pacific: Japan, China and the United States. Here, I will limit myself to a few touchstones relating to the US options, based on Boyd's four functions of a "sensible" grand strategy:

Support our national goal, which at the highest level involves improving our fitness, as an organic whole, to shape and cope with an ever-changing environment. This can be done on three levels: the physical, mental and moral atmospheres of a country so that the country's inner spirit is strengthened. A country must be true to its founding principles, and hopefully, these principles should be attractive to others, as well. A unifying vision is necessary. In Boyd's view, the US Constitution, with its proclamation of equality and protection of individual rights would serve the US well. To the extent that the life of the country reflects the unifying vision, both inwards and outwards, it will be a positive factor. Americans and people living in the US will get the impression that they have the opportunities promised by the ideas, and people living in other countries might hope to enjoy the same liberties, and they will support the

country's initiatives. To the extent, however, that parts of society feel left out alienated from the vision because a country's leadership seems to disregard the vision, or because they feel they are not benefiting from declared improvements, it can be a dangerous thing.

Further, the view of the US as a positive beacon in other countries is important. If one of the positive aspects of the US has been, and is, the judicial system and the rights to a speedy trial and the guarantees against lengthy detentions without a trial, it might be possible for adversaries of the US to criticize, or attack the US as a hypocrite because of the lengthy detention of people, without trial, in the wake of the operations in Afghanistan.

Pump-up our resolve, drain-away our adversary's resolve, and attract the uncommitted. One of Boyd's associates notes in his commentary to this statement that we should:

"Note Boyd's mention of the "uncommitted," a group often slighted (or even antagonized!) in modern warfare. Grand strategy seeks to "influence the uncommitted or potential adversaries so that they are drawn towards our philosophy and are empathetic toward our success." If they choose to join our cause, great; but at the very least they should refrain from any actions that furnish comfort, support, or information to our adversaries.¹⁴

Sympathy for the United States in the wake of the attacks on the World

¹⁴ Richards' **Grand strategy**, on www.d-n-i.net

Trade Center and the Pentagon was widespread, and it must be remembered that the NATO alliance invoked paragraph 5, (an attack on one is an attack on all) during the attack on Afghanistan and the removal of the Taleban regime. This was a continuation of the tradition of collective security that started after World War II, and which characterized the whole of the Cold War. But the current operations in Iraq indicate that the US may be developing certain problems relative to both long-time allies, not to mention the uncommitted. American critics of the way in which Iraq was, first posited as an enemy and then, unilaterally, together with minor allies and dependents, invaded and occupied, is a fundamental shift in the perceived way the United States has conducted its foreign policy in the past 50 years or so. The negative results are noticeable, although it is probably too early to note how permanent they will be. Just to give a single example, The New York Times published an article on the second anniversary of the September 11 attacks which noted:

In Europe overall, the proportion of people who want the United States to maintain a strong global presence fell 19 points since a similar poll last year, from 64 percent to 45 percent, while 50 percent of respondents in Germany, France and Italy express opposition to American leadership.

Even in Japan, where support for America remains strong, the view of the United States as a bully has entered the popular culture. A recent cartoon showed

a character looking like President Bush in a Stars and Stripes vest pushing Japanese fishermen away from a favorite spot, saying, "I can fish better."¹⁵

End the conflict on favorable terms. The idea here is that vanquished enemies of the US should, like Germany and Japan after World War II, come to share the fundamental ideas espoused by the US. The countries thus affected might also expect great benevolence and help in reconstruction. There are those who question the resolve of the United States in connection with the reconstruction of both Afghanistan and Iraq, and also are, at best, at bit skeptical about the possibility or even the notion of introducing American-style democracy in these areas. Further, commentators from the United States regularly talk of instituting a *Marshall Plan* for an area where US aid is forthcoming. They forget that the Marshall Plan utilized around 2% of the US GNP for an extended period of time as direct aid to the receiving countries. Aid on this scale will not be forthcoming from the US in the near future.

Ensure that the conflict and peace terms do not provide seeds for (unfavorable) future conflict. It would appear that the US, in Iraq, at least, is going to be involved for a fair amount of time, and that rancor is spreading to other parts of the world as a result of the conflict. The US also finds itself

¹⁵ *New York Times*, September 11, 2003 **Foreign Views Of U.S. Darken Since Sept. 11**
By Richard Bernstein.

engaged, as it has been for over 50 years, in Asia directly, in Korea and because of this, in Japan. Further, small US units are involved in the Philippines, and there is the continued presence of the US (and NATO) in Afghanistan.

Asian Regionalism

In the book *Regionalism and World Order from 1996*¹⁶, Sum Ngai Ling argued that there were two emerging regional hegemons in the Asian Area: Japan and China, as well as two other great powers outside the area who would be able to play an important role: the US and Russia. The years since have given the impression that Russia is so internally troubled that it hardly will have an initiating role to play in the near future, though it will play a certain role in the region through the “Shanghai Group” and its relations with China. The United States, on the other hand, will continue to play a fairly central role here, both economically, as a market for the region’s products, as an investor and a borrower, and certainly by virtue of its military presence.

The present paper will limit itself in relation to Japan by noting the following quote from the end of an article by Tomoyuki Ishizu, an Assistant Professor at The National Institute for Defense Studies, of the Defense Agency, JAPAN. In 1997 he wrote:

¹⁶ Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, eds. **Regionalism and World Order**, Macmillan, 1996.

Finally, the words of the late Masataka Kosaka, "be friendly with the United States and do not quarrel with China," which encapsulate the wisdom of Japan's foreign and defense policy after World War II, still seem to hold water today. The end of the cold war is a door opening toward a diplomatic renaissance for Japan.¹⁷

The military aspect

The US has about 40 000 troops in Japan and Korea, each. In Asia the total force is between 90 and 100 thousand troops of all branches.¹⁸ The reason for their presence today is, I think, primarily the situation of the Korean peninsula. To maintain this military presence, it will be necessary to keep the present situation of a divided Korea. Should a peaceful resolution be brought about/happen, there would be no real reason for these troops to remain in the area. Should the US forces leave, we might also see a militarily rather more independent and self-sufficient Japan than has been the case over the past many years. A continued US presence will maintain the possibility of fairly close interaction with the countries involved, and might be considered a way to avoid strategic isolation. But on the other hand, the discussions going on in the US about a technologically based restructuring and repositioning of US forces might point in the direction of a withdrawal of at least a major part of the troops.

¹⁷ <http://www.glocomnet.or.jp/okazaki-inst/alliance-pro-eng/ishizu.e.html>

¹⁸ US Department of Defense figures, March 2003.

According to information from sources I have no reason not to rely on, the North Koreans have chosen their strategy of 'maybe we have, maybe we don't have nuclear weapons' in order to deter the US from attacking them. Seen from the other side, I think the US would refrain from actually attacking the North Koreans, because even without nuclear weapons, the US might find fighting on the Korean peninsula more trying than doing so in flat desert country. However, maintenance of tension means that the US will consider a fair number of troops permanently stationed there a necessity. Further, the present US administration's posture relative to North Korea may serve domestic political ends.

There is another aspect to the presence of US troops in Korea and Japan that the US has recently advanced. Schwarz and Layne argue that to the extent that the US provides a defensive shield for Japan, (and to a certain extent in Europe) these countries will not see the necessity of increased spending for the military, and that means that regionally based challenges to US hegemony in the area will not be an issue.¹⁹ They argue against this position, and advocate that the United States might do well to diminish its presence in the area, and instead rely on the local, regional hegemons, to maintain stability in the area. This is a possibility that probably will not develop immediately.

For the Chinese, the Korean situation has given them the possibility of

¹⁹ **A New Grand Strategy** Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne
The Atlantic Monthly January 2002

acting as a broker, thus gaining further credit and legitimacy in the eyes of other countries in Asia, and with the US, as well. According to a report recently issued by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Chinese strategy aims at regional stability. They would like to do this on the basis of the current strategic balance in the region, but worry that the extension of US military might into central Asia might spell trouble for China, and especially pose a threat to the oil supplies it will need from that area in the future. China is currently working “to project an image (of China) as a constructive and responsible member of the international community.”²⁰

It may well be that the US attitude to China is very much one of wait and see, and that it fits with Li’s report of what the Chinese Government is thinking.

The November-December issue of *Foreign Affairs* has, in a long article on Chinese Foreign Policy, come to the conclusion that in the coming twenty years, China will concentrate on its inward developments, and thinks it has a ‘strategic opportunity’ to do so.²¹ The article points out that Chinese Grand Strategy is based on cultivating friendly relations with its neighbors, traditionally a source of tension for China. Numerous other articles in the international media testify to

²⁰ Rex Li, The North Korean Nuclear Crisis and China’s Strategic Calculus. (In RUSI’s report on China.) <http://www.rusi.org/cgi-bin/public/view.cgi?object=obj114&uniqueid=AN00039>

²¹ China’s New Diplomacy [Evan S. Medeiros](#) and [M. Taylor Fravel](#): *Foreign Affairs*. [November/December 2003](#)

this. One has only to look at the Western press in connection with the recent meeting of ASEAN in Bangkok, and Bush and Hu's subsequent visits to Australia.

The New York Times had an interesting assessment on the occasion of the dual visit to Australia.

Answering a reporter's question before leaving Washington, Mr. Bush said mostly white Australia was not just a deputy sheriff for Asia, as the reporter suggested, but a "sheriff." This word, particularly associated with a major American military ally, provokes shudders and distaste across Asia. The Australian defense minister, Robert Hill, hurriedly disowned the comparison. "It remains too soon to pronounce that Asia has become 'China-centric,' "said David Shambaugh, professor of international affairs at George Washington University and a specialist on the Chinese military. "But the trend lines are clearly moving in that direction," he said. "To some extent this means that the United States is being replaced as the main power in Asia, but that perspective is really too simplified. The reality is that the United States and China together are dominating the region."²²

The Washington Post had a similar article where the following quote saw the light of day:

"More and more, China is doing the things the United States used to do: cooperating, pushing trade, offering help. . . . People are less scared of China now," said Sarasin Viraphol, a former Thai diplomat educated at Harvard and vice president of the

²² New York Times, October 18, 2003 Asian Leaders Find China a More Cordial Neighbor
By Jane Perlez.

*CP Group, an agricultural and retail conglomerate that has invested more than \$4 billion in China. "If Washington cares about its influence in the region, if it wants to win hearts and minds, it needs to do more than just talk about terrorism."*²³

Finally, here is a note that illustrates the growing importance of China as a benign regional power relative to Korea:

In the Age, an Australian newspaper, Hamish McDonald notes the following:

*Boston College's Robert Ross links it to South Korea's growing economic dependence on China - which, if Hong Kong is included, last year surpassed the US as South Korea's biggest export market and grabs the most South Korean foreign investment - as well as the growing South Korean perception of China as a benign power.*²⁴

It is not possible to say that the US is being isolated in the region, but it must certainly be noted that the Chinese government is engaged in expanding its level of interaction, commercially, as well as in other areas of foreign policy. As has been noted, it is now moving to act as a broker in the North Korean question, and its commercial expansion also indicates that it is finding a new assertiveness, both in commerce, and in foreign policy as well as. The same cannot be said for the Japanese activities on the foreign policy front, but its commercial activities in

²³ Washington Post, November 15, 2003 China's Improving Image Challenges U.S. in Asia Philip P. Pan.

²⁴ The Age, June 7, 2003 Neighbours toughen stance on North Korea.

the Pacific area are still growing. Recent indications are that Masataka Kosaka's words hold very true.

Whither the US?

With the current Bush administration's actions and declarations there is an impression that the unilateralists are currently in control of American Foreign Policy, and that we are seeing a change in policy from a collective security based on the UN and NATO, to a more unilateralist, though not isolationist, approach to problems perceived by the US. Some would argue that this is not so, and that the Wolfowitz plan, first seen in the early 90s, is merely a clear statement of the hegemonic manner of US foreign policy as it has been conducted for the past many years.²⁵

The change in others' perception may well be a reflection of the general reaction to the clearly unilateralist position in foreign policy that the US announced in September of 2002, as well some of the other acts of the US in international affairs, (Kyoto, Steel tariffs, and the like).

It is not easy to discern exactly what US policy in Asia will be based on... the US is keeping its options open, from an open and cooperating stance, as quoted here from the National Security Strategy paper of 2002, to the reserved right to choose preemptive war, if it so chooses, from the strategy paper. If one

²⁵ *A New Grand Strategy* Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne
The Atlantic Monthly January 2002.

recollects the Boydian recommendations for a grand strategy we see that some of the elements are there, but also that other aspects may result in some kind of increase in isolation. Apparently, the US feels so strong militarily that it is willing to risk partial alienation from its old allies of the cold war period.

The war against terrorism has proven that America's alliances in Asia not only underpin regional peace and stability, but are flexible and ready to deal with new challenges. To enhance our Asian alliances and friendships, we will:

- look to Japan to continue forging a leading role in regional *and* global affairs based on our common interests, our common values, and our close defense and diplomatic cooperation;

If the US perception of Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific actually fits what is written here, some people, including the author, would say that it is a slightly skewed view of reality. Economically, Japan may still be the strongest regional power by far, but as relates to international relations, or the projection of organizing ideas for the region, other countries' perceptions are that Japan is somewhat sclerotic and inward-looking. Neither South Korea nor China looks to Japan for leadership at the moment.

- work with South Korea to maintain vigilance towards the North while preparing our alliance to make contributions to the broader stability of the region over the longer term;
- build on 50 years of U.S.-Australian alliance cooperation as we continue working together to resolve regional and global problems—as we have so many times from the Battle of the Coral Sea to Tora Bora;

- maintain forces in the region that reflect our commitments to our allies, our requirements, our technological advances, and the strategic environment; and
- build on stability provided by these alliances, as well as with institutions such as ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, to develop a mix of regional and bilateral strategies to manage change in this dynamic region.

We are attentive to the possible renewal of old patterns of great power competition. Several potential great powers are now in the midst of internal transition—most importantly Russia, India, and China. In all three cases, recent developments have encouraged our hope that a truly global consensus about basic principles is slowly taking shape. ²⁶

Conclusion

The above analysis has primarily focused on possible ways for the US to ‘survive and thrive’ in the ever-changing environment of Asia-Pacific, and the American government’s OODA-Loop. It would be interesting to look more closely at the same process for the Peoples Republic of China and Japan, but that is beyond the scope of this paper and the ken of the author.

Briefly, it can be said that the grand strategies of the three most dynamic powers in the region, the US, China and Japan, have the potential to work together for peaceful growth in the region. This would mean, in a Boydian sense, that the three regional powers have the possibility of interacting and gaining

²⁶The National Security Strategy of the United States <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>

energy from each other. Each of the countries will, however, have to continuously reassess a central question, and each will have to answer it in a manner that fits with observed reality:

- What am I, and how does my identity change as time passes?
- How will my changing identity be perceived by the others in the region?
- How can I best survive, and thrive in my environment?

John Boyd, a brief biographical introduction.

The importance of John Boyd as a strategist and thinker is emerging from the relative obscurity in which he lived. Two biographies, quite a few articles in the business press, television coverage of his life, and several Internet sites are devoted to his work.

Boyd was born in 1927, in the USA, in Erie Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1944, and was inducted in 1945. He served briefly in Japan as part of the occupying forces. After he returned to the US, he went to University in Iowa, where he joined the ROTC.²⁷ This led to his becoming a pilot, and he served in the Air Force during the Korean War.

On the basis of his experiences in Korea as a fighter pilot, he became an instructor at the US Air force fighter weapons school in Nevada, where he was known as 40-second Boyd.²⁸

He had an interlude at an engineering school in Georgia, where he began to develop a theoretical understanding of what he had been doing in the real world. After he finished his degree, he was posted at Eglin in Florida. As a fighter pilot he had been a daredevil tactician who did things with planes that nobody else would even think of. On the basis of his studies, especially in

²⁷ Reserve Officers Training Corps.

²⁸ At Nellis Air Force Base, where he was a teacher, he had a standing bet that he could start with an opponent on his tail, and reverse the position within 40 seconds. If he lost, he would pay \$40 to the winner. He never lost.

thermodynamics, he developed a set of theories and analytical instruments that fundamentally changed the way fighter planes are designed and flown, even today. The work was developed with the help of computer access to an IBM 704, that he had an associate, who became one of his close friends, steal or finagle from the Air Force. The result of that work was the 'aerial attack study,' which still defines the way in which planes are optimally designed, and fight. Because of that, he became, in spite of himself, instrumental in the design of several aircraft, (A-10, F-15, F-16²⁹ and F-18).

Boyd was a renowned bureaucratic infighter in the US Department of Defense. After he retired from the Air Force as a Colonel, he was re-hired as a civilian consultant in the Pentagon. During the late 70's and early 80's, he became the head of the Military Reform Movement, which challenged orthodox thinking in the US Department of Defense and exposed procurement errors and general waste.

In 1975-76, after he retired from the Air Force, he read extensively, and wrote a 16- page essay **Destruction and Creation**. It is a simple piece, if you think that an attempt to synthesize Gödel's Proof, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and the Second Law of Thermodynamics is simple. It is also a piece that unsettles orthodox natural scientists because it employs concepts and theories

²⁹ In Japan, the F-2 is a further development of the F-16. Its permutation from the original design will make it popular with its producers, because it will cost three times as much per plane as its ancestor.

from the natural sciences in the social world in a metaphorical manner.

In ***Destruction and Creation***, Boyd also delineated his version of reflexivity, which is called the Boyd cycle, or the OODA-loop. This stands for Orientation, Observation, Decision and Action. The OODA-loop is also deceptively simple. If you think that it is a kind of linear cycle, where one part follows the next, and the whole thing then is repeated, you are wrong: the loop should be seen as a complex process where each of the stages feed forward and backward, constantly interacting with each other. The loop was initially developed as a way of explaining what happens in a conflict situation, and how one participant in the conflict prevails over the other. It was based on Boyd's experience as a fighter pilot during the Korean War.

From the Particular to the General

He noted that although the MIG-15 were basically a better plane (it could fly higher and faster than the American F-86, the Sabrejets had a 10:1 kill ratio compared to them. He discarded the idea that this was due to superior pilot training for the Americans, but noted that, whereas the MIG-pilots sat low and had a restricted field of vision, the F86 pilots sat high, and had a bubble canopy that gave a better view of the surroundings. In addition, he also noted that the

hydraulic assists in maneuvering the F-86, which the Mig-15³⁰ did not have, made the plane somewhat more agile. This meant that it was able to change direction (and speed) more rapidly than the opposing planes. This gave an incremental advantage to the US planes. On the basis of this knowledge, he theorized that if you can go through your loop faster than your opponent, you are well on the way to beating him or her. As such, the OODA-loop was developed primarily in and for conflict situations, and agility became the central idea. Agility is here defined as the ability to change speed and direction rapidly.

Boyd's theory claims that the key to success in conflict is to operate inside the opponent's decision cycle. Advantages in observation and orientation enable a tempo in decision making and execution that outpaces the ability of the foe to react effectively in time. This seemingly simple tactical formula was duly explained and copiously illustrated historically by Boyd in many briefings within the US defense community over the course of twenty years. The US Marine Corps has actually incorporated this idea as the foundation for its basic warfighting manual, FMFM-1 (1989, revised in 1995 as MCDP1). To various degrees, the Army has also incorporated his basic principles in its most recent operations. The rapid advance to Baghdad, and the armored envelopments that

³⁰ The MIG-15's controls were heavy to the touch, given the air resistance to the control surfaces. If a pilot had to move them many times in quick succession, he grew tired. The F-86's hydraulic assists meant that the pilot could maneuver the plane with his fingertips, thus saving energy. Think of the difference between parking a car with or without servo-steering.

characterized them, was very Boyd-inspired.

The OODA-loop may appear too humble to merit categorization as a grand theory, but that is what it is. It has an elegant simplicity, an extensive domain of applicability, and contains a high quality of insight about strategic essentials, such that its author well merits honourable mention as an outstanding general theorist of strategy (Emphasis added).³¹

Boyd pointed, time and again to Sun Tzu's idea that war should be avoided, and that adversaries should, if possible, be won over. Should that be impossible, it is better to help him become disoriented so that he collapses psychologically and loses the will and ability to resist or fight.³² If you can drive your opponent insane, taking over his territory will be easier.

Finally, he was, some people claim, the foremost strategist to have come out of the US, ever. It has recently been documented that he was central in shaping the strategy used by US and allied armed forces during the first Gulf War.³³

³¹ Colin Gray, [Modern Strategy](#), p. 91.

³² One of Boyd's colleagues' favorite stories shows that he was an able practitioner of this in a bureaucratic environment. One of his friends came to his office one day, and said that he had just been in the office of a colonel. The colonel was on the telephone, and after a short time, started foaming at the mouth. Eventually, he dropped the phone, fell out of his chair, and collapsed on the carpet in the office. Boyd subsequently revealed that he had been on the other end of the phone (Coram, 2003, p. 262).

³³ In Robert Coram's biography, **Boyd**, published in 2002, the author documents that then Defense Secretary Cheney met repeatedly with Boyd and was inspired by him in the planning phase of the first Gulf

War. The sweep around the left, combined with the direct invasion by the Marines, was a classic zhenq/qi operation, of the kind prescribed by Sun Tzu.

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