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Transcript

CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST

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Guest: **John Garver**

Episode 51: How China's Rise Affects Its
Neighbors, Part I

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Zhao: You are listening to the Carnegie–Tsinghua China in the World podcast, a series of conversations with Chinese and international experts on China’s foreign policy, international role, and China’s relations with the world, brought to you from the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, located in Beijing. I am Tong Zhao, an associate of Carnegie’s nuclear policy program based at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. I will be your host today.

I am very delighted to be joined by professor John Garver, who is a professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Institute of Technology. He specializes in Asian international relations, specifically China’s foreign relations, and has written considerably on this subject. He is the author of 11 books and over 100 articles dealing with China’s foreign relations. His book *The Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China* is one of the most widely-used textbooks in the United States on China’s foreign relations. Dr. Garver has served on the editorial boards of a number of journals. He is a member of the national committee on U.S.-China relations and the U.S.-China People’s Friendship Association. In the past, Dr. Garver lived in China for six years and facilitated various college exchange programs. He enjoys discussing China’s foreign relations in various forums and has today joined us in Beijing to talk about the impact of China’s rise on its relationship with the United States and its neighbors. So, welcome, Dr. Garver, to Carnegie–Tsinghua. I’m very thrilled to have you here today.

Garver: Thank you very much, Zhao Tong, it’s great to see you again after working together at Georgia Tech, and I’m delighted to be here representing the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech, and have this opportunity to talk about this very important problem.

Zhao: Thank you, this is a great reunion, and it’s a great pleasure for me.

So, when we talk about China’s foreign policy under President Xi, most people feel that China’s foreign policy is becoming more confident, becoming more proactive, willing to use its economic, political, and even military leverage to defend its national interests. And, this is a new path from the traditional foreign policy guideline of “keeping a low profile” embraced by Deng Xiaoping. Of course, today’s China is totally different from Deng’s era, its so-called comprehensive national power is much, much greater. So, in your view, how are China’s neighbors responding to the so-called rise of China, the growth of China’s overall economic, political, and even military power.

Garver: I agree entirely with how you framed the problem. China’s comprehensive national strength, economic, military, even political and diplomatic is growing very, very rapidly. The world very seldom sees the rise of a new great power in this fashion—only a few times in a century—and I’m confident that China is an emerging great power, a world power. The problem that I perceive, is that China’s increasingly active use of its military power—I’m not so much concerned with economic power, but with military power—is causing profound unease among its neighbors, especially Japan and India but also some of the Southeast Asian countries, and in fact what is happening, I believe, is that those countries are pulling together to form security relationships based upon common apprehension of China’s growing power. They are pulling together, they are arming themselves with China in mind, and, of course, they are looking for great power supporters, supporters beyond the region, which, of course, is the United States.

From the Chinese perspective this is *bahui zhongguo*, containment of China, the encirclement of China, and I think that as this happens, the common Chinese response is that, of course, it can’t be China’s own strength which is frightening its neighbors. How in the world—the

Chinese perception in my experience is—how in the world can China threaten Japan? Given the history, given the relationship, how in the world could China constitute a threat to Vietnam, or to the Philippines, or to India? So, if it's not China's own actions, it must be the United States.

So, the deepening encirclement of China, I fear, will be perceived by the Chinese as a manifestation, as a product of American policy towards China. So, you will have a growing convergence of a loose coalition, maybe even a tighter coalition, of Asian countries, probably lead by Japan and India but with southeast Asian countries joined in, and that will confront the United States with a choice of basically acceding to China's dominance in Asia and withdrawing from the western Pacific, somewhere to the mid-Pacific, or of confronting China, supporting Japan, India, the Philippines, and whoever else in this coalition. Those would be the two choices. And, I have no way of knowing what the United States, what the American people would decide. And, at that time China will be very, very powerful—it's already very powerful—and a confrontation between China and the United States would be extremely costly to both countries, and I wouldn't pretend to imagine that I would know the outcome of that. But, I do know that confrontation would be very costly to both countries, and if you look at the history of the United States, would the United States withdraw from the western Pacific and cede the western Pacific to China's dominance? Or would it support Japan, the Philippines, and India in resisting China?

Well, basically, the reason that the United States confronted Japan in 1940 was a decision at the highest levels that the domination of east Asia by a single country would constitute an unacceptable geopolitical threat to the United States, and therefore the United States began supporting China, it began resisting Japan in various ways: sanctions, economic sanctions and so forth. So, historically, when the United States was presented with this choice at that time, they decided to confront the rival power. You could also argue that the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, circa 1964-65, was also inspired by the desire to prevent the domination of eastern Asia, by China.

We're all familiar with the domino theories. But if you look into the U.S. thinking and the logic of the domino theory, you find the power that was pushing the dominos was revolutionary China. China was supporting these insurgencies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, across southeast Asia and from the American perspective, all these insurgencies were Chinese proxies and if the United States didn't intervene to draw a line, again China would control east Asia, dominate east Asia; so, twice the United States went to war to prevent the dominance of east Asia by a single power. Now if some years in the future, China also challenges the United States in that way—I would say what I perceive is that China is already challenging the United States in this way. What I see is an emerging geostrategic confrontation between the United States and China, caused to a substantial degree by China's active use of its military power to cause apprehension among its neighbors, again Japan, India, but also the Philippines and Vietnam.

Zhao: I think the most immediate indications of China's increasing power in the region are felt by its neighboring countries. You talked about American perceptions of China's rise and its impact, but from the perspective of China's neighbors, how do you think, so far, these neighboring countries have reacted to the increasing Chinese power.

Garver: If you look at Japan the critical issue, of course, has been the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and from the Japanese perspective, the Chinese government first began challenging Japan directly in the Senkaku/Diaoyu areas in December, 2008. According to the website of the Japanese coast guard—the Japanese coast guard has a very, very interesting line graph and bar chart showing the "intrusions" by Chinese state vessels and private vessels, fishing ships, into the 12 nautical mile

wide territorial sea and into the 20 mile wide contiguous zone. And, according to the Japanese coast guard, the first time that a Chinese government ship, that is the *Haijin*, entered the areas of those contested islands in December 2008. Actually, it was on 8 December, 2008, and if you know your history, you know that's the day the Japanese offenses across east Asia began. Of course, on the other side, on the eastern side of the date line, that was 7 December, which was the attack on Pearl Harbor. But coterminous with the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese forces landed on the Kra peninsula and began moving south toward Singapore. They marched south from Japanese-allied Thailand into Burma with the objective of marching into India. They seized Hong Kong. So, it was the beginning of Japan's grand offensive in southeast Asia. And history resonates in east Asia—it resonates everywhere in the world—so, there's that. Why did this Chinese ship arrive outside the Senkakus on that day? Then after this thing, after the first-ever, according to the Japanese coast guard, entry by a Chinese government vessel into that zone, it was quiet for the next several years until 2010 when there was the collision incident between a Japanese coast guard ship and a Chinese fishing vessel. The Japanese coast guard also posted a very interesting video. Have you seen that video?

Zhao: Yes.

Garver: If you watch the video you see that the Japanese coast guard ship—if you look at the wake of that vessel—you can see it's circling the Chinese vessel, the Chinese vessel is stationary in the water, and according to the Japanese narrative they're pulling up their net and so forth. They've been ordered to go, to leave the area by the Japanese coast guard ship, and before that time, when Chinese ships had been ordered to leave they had done that, according to the Japanese coast guard. This time, however, when the Chinese fishing boat finished pulling up its nets, it fired up the engine—and you can see that the black smoke starts coming out of the smokestack—and it starts going forward and accelerating. And, the Japanese crew says “It's going faster, coming towards us,” and when you look at the wake of the Chinese fishing vessel, it's turning towards the Japanese ship and *clap* collides with the Japanese ship, and then, after the collision runs away—attempts to run—well, it does leave the scene. Now, from the Japanese perspective, they were following traditional practice of ordering the Chinese ships to leave. Previously, [the Japanese] had let them. On this occasion, the Chinese ship rams the Japanese ship.

From the Japanese perspective, this is like a policeman stopping you for speeding—you get a ticket for speeding, it's not a problem—but if you hit the cop, you slug the cop, and get in your car and drive away, that's a problem. So, the Japanese arrested this guy and charged him, and I understand, from the Chinese perspective, the problem was that he was charged under Japanese domestic law, which meant that the waters in which the incident happened were Japanese territorial waters. But, from the Japanese perspective, they were upholding the law by arresting this crew member.

Now, I think what made this especially explosive was when this [incident] happened, anti-Japanese demonstrations exploded in cities across China. And, the huge crowds, thousands, maybe tens of thousands of people, shouting slogans, blood curdling slogans like, “Burn Japan,” “Kill Japan,” singing songs and shouting slogans from the 1930s and '40s, and this upwelling of hatred, popular hatred in China towards Japan.

And, then what happens is that you have—going back to the graphs, the bar chart and line chart by the Japanese coast guard—starting in September 2012, [incidents] shoot off the charts to an unprecedented high, like over 100 intrusions per month. The Japanese data is presented by

month, and so you have intrusions into the contiguous zone of maybe 125 per month, and Chinese intrusions into the *linghai*—into the territorial sea—of 50 or 60 per month throughout 2012 and 2013. Now, in 2013, what happens is, according to the Japanese coast guard, for the first time, Chinese warships, PLA Navy warships patrol in the vicinity of the disputed islands. From the Japanese perspective, and from the American perspective, those were signals.

There was a very interesting study by the U.S. National Defense University on China's naval diplomacy, about the growing global scope of China's naval activities, and it raised the question of "Is China signaling with this?" There were dozens, scores of Chinese exercises in various regions of the world and this study concluded there were only three incidents in which the Chinese were signaling. Those three incidences were in 2013, during the spike, during those higher levels of confrontations in the Senkakus.

So, what's happening is, China is asserting itself more and more forcefully to uphold its claim to these islands, and is sending warships to maneuver in the area, and the Japanese thought, and this U.S. Navy war college study thought, that China sent these ships to the region to signal Japan, "You better be careful. If there's a confrontation, we're a powerful country, and you better be careful." At the same, in the second half of 2012, 2013 and into 2014, you had PLA airplanes, surveillance planes, fighter planes, flying over the area. According to the Japanese coast guard, on at least one occasion a Chinese ship—it must have been one of these Chinese warships—turned its fire control radar onto a Japanese vessel and locked on. So, you had escalating confrontation over land that, in the Japanese perspective, is indisputably Japanese.

Zhao: So, I think, you know, the 2010 incident between the Chinese fishing ship, and the Japanese coast guard was completely an accident. The captain of the Chinese fishing ship was drunk.

Garver: I've heard that, yes.

Zhao: It's his individual action that started this problem. But, in any case, it was an accident, it was not directed by the Chinese government. The important thing, is that the government needed to be calm enough to solve the accidents, to manage the crisis in a sober and calm manner, to defuse the crisis. The Chinese government was really uncomfortable with the manner in which the Japanese government conducted itself following the incident—it's the first time that the Japanese government had tried to prosecute a Chinese fisherman under Japanese law. That really provoked the Chinese. But, in any case, that was a singular incident and that what happened following that [incident] was really unfortunate. But, I think that—since you mentioned the Chinese-Japanese case—what really caused the further deterioration of the bilateral relationship is the purchasing of the islands, the nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands.

Again, there are different interpretations of who was responsible for changing the status quo, et cetera. But, I agree with you, that China currently has increasing capability to defend its perceived core national interests, to defend its territorial claims, but I also wanted to point out that China has never expanded its territorial claims. All those territorial claims have been there for decades, if not longer, and it's just now the case that China has the capability to defend those claims, and that's what we have been seeing so far. So, I don't think that signals the Chinese expansionist intention in any manner.

Garver: That is the Chinese view, I understand, but that is not the Japanese view. The Japanese view is that China, starting in 2008, began using military power for the first time to change the status quo in the area. Before that there were no Chinese government ships, after 2008 there were Chinese government ships. Before 2008 there was not Chinese military activity around the islands, after 2008 there was. So, yes, I understand the Chinese view, I just also hope the Chinese understand the Japanese view.

But, that's not really the important thing in my mind; the important thing is Japan's response, and Japan's response was to start reaching out to other powers to form a strategic partnership, a security partnership, on the basis of common concerns. I have been told that in Washington in 2014, that Japanese leaders were so concerned about the possibility of some kind of conflict in the Senkakus that they were actually pushing for very specific talks with the United States about, "If something happens, what do we do? What will the Americans do, what will the Japanese do, and what will we do?" At the same time, Japan was reaching out towards India. If you look at the visit by the Japanese defense minister to India in January, 2014, followed at, the end of January, by Shinzo Abe's visit to India during the Republic Day parade, also in January, 2014. Abe's administration was pushing for and, to some extent, received, security cooperation with India on the basis of common concerns, especially in the maritime dimension. Now, of course, they didn't say what those common concerns were, but you can infer that. So, what I see is, that you may be right, that from the Chinese perspective this is entirely defensive, non-expansive, but that's not the way China's neighbors see it. And, Japan is reaching out to India, it's reaching out to the Philippines, it's reaching out to the United States.

Zhao: I totally agree with you on that. But, a country's perception of what constitutes the status quo is divergent, is different, and that's the fundamental cause of all the troubles. So, let's look beyond Japan and talk about China's overall relationship with its neighbors.

So, China is, actually, in recent years, investing a lot into so-called periphery diplomacy. Shortly after Xi Jinping took power, he participated in the 2013 work forum, *Zuotanghui*, on Chinese diplomacy towards the periphery, which was a landmark for China's foreign policy, because it signaled that the new leadership is assigning great priority to China's relations with its neighbors. And, in recent years, China has made a commitment to providing public good in the region, providing investment, building regional inter-connectivity, combating terrorism and transnational crimes, helping solve regional crises such as that over the Korean peninsula, and we also have seen an increase in Chinese contribution to UN peacekeeping operations. So, what are your thoughts on these consistent efforts by China to reassure its neighbors of its peaceful intentions?

Garver: I would not object to, and I don't think the United States would object to, any of the things that you mentioned—expanding economic cooperation, construction of infrastructure. There might be rivalry between the United States and China in those areas, but that's ordinary politics, ordinary economics. Of course, there's rivalry, there's competition. But, again, I'd go back to the security. I think there are intensifying security concerns in the east Asian region that are undermining this whole thing. For example, the Philippines.

From the Philippines perspective—and I'm not sure that the Chinese really understand the Philippines perspective. From the Chinese perspective, there are these Nine Dash Lines through the South China Sea, very close to the coast of the Philippines and Vietnam and Indonesia, actually, but those Nine Dash Lines were drawn in 1947 and, therefore, there they are and it

belongs, those belong, everything—China has never really explained what the meaning of the Nine Dash Line is, but it seems to be that everything within that Nine Dash Line belongs to China.

The Philippines' view, is that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS, signed in 1974, signed by China in 1996, provides the littoral countries—that is, countries on the sea—have a legal claim to a 200-mile wide exclusive economic zone, which extends well into and towards the middle of the South China Sea. The Philippines' perspective is that this is international law, agreed to by China, and agreed to by the United States, even though the United States has not signed, has not ratified UNCLOS—the American position is that it accepts UNCLOS as traditional, customary international law and abides by it, except for the few provisions it objects to. So, from the Philippines' perspective, it has a legal right—that nine-dash line, of course, was drawn unilaterally by China and no other country has agreed to it. The Philippines believes that its claim is based upon this multilateral convention negotiated and signed by over a hundred countries, and that the Philippines' multilateral claim is far more valid than China's unilateral claim, and, in any case, let's just turn this whole case over to the international court.

So, from the Philippine perspective, is this aggression? Well the Philippines, it thinks “of course, this is Chinese aggression.” The Philippines has a claim to a 200-mile wide exclusive economic zone, and China's denying that and says, “This all belongs to us.” So, again, the question in my mind is not “who's right or who's wrong,” but, “what's the consequence of this?” And, the consequence of this is that the Philippines is going to Japan and saying, “We need a coast guard.” And, Japan is helping the Philippines strengthen its coast guard capabilities. And, the Philippines goes to the United States and says, “We need a marine corps.” And, the United States says, “Well, okay.” And, the Philippines is reaching out to other countries of common concerns, and it's strengthening its security cooperation based on those common concerns. And, this is happening, I fear, all across China's eastern and southern peripheries. And, of course, the Chinese don't think that this—“How could we be aggressive, how could we be aggressive in the South China Sea, we've had that nine-dash line since 1947?”—but that's not the way the Philippines looks at it.

Zhao: Again, I agree with you that countries have different perceptions, and it also comes down to the issue of UNCLOS being established decades after China made its claims in the South China Sea. So, there is this question of how far we can extend the legal validity of UNCLOS into the historical era, decades before UNCLOS was established. But, in either case, as we have talked a lot about the territorial disputes between China and its neighbors and, apparently, these disputes remain a very important point of friction between China and its key neighbors. My question is, what do you think China can do to better reassure its key neighbors about its peaceful intentions.

Garver: My own view, is that the whole question of which has the stronger legal force—China's prior drawing of the nine-dash line in 1947 or the Philippines' claim based upon UNCLOS—we're not lawyers, I don't know. That whole issue should be settled by the international legal system, the international court, and to say that, “No, no, it should be settled purely by bilateral negotiations,” is to say that “power should govern international relations.” And, China is very strong, the Philippines is very weak, and China's insistence on bilateral negotiations is that a weak power should negotiate face-to-face and alone with a very strong power, and, of course, the result can be apprehended. But, the very purpose of law is to equalize the position of claimants under the law, so the rule of law is based upon the idea that a very rich and powerful person has the same

standing as a common citizen. And, in terms of China's rise, China is going to be the strongest power in Asia, maybe the strongest power in the world. In my mind, that's indisputable. But the question is, "is that going to occur in a situation in which China's neighbors are comfortable with its power, or apprehensive of its power?" That's the big question.

Zhao: That's it for this edition of the Carnegie–Tsinghua China in the World podcast. If you'd like to read or learn more about the U.S.-China relationship, you can find more articles, events, and podcasts on our website at www.carnegietsinghua.org. I encourage you to visit and see the work of all our scholars at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. Thanks for listening, and be sure to tune in next time.