# The Evolution of China's Security Challenges and Grand Strategy

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**Abstract:** This article examines changes in China's security perceptions since 1949 and sketches the evolution of China's grand strategy. In tracing the evolution of China's security perceptions and grand strategy since 1949, it identifies elements of change as well as continuity. The changes reflect dramatic developments in the PRC's capabilities and the international circumstances it faces, both of which have shaped the grand strategic choices of China's leaders. During most of the Cold War decades, a relatively weak China's vulnerability to serious military threats from much more powerful adversaries led the CCP to adopt grand strategies focused on coping with a clearly defined external security challenge. After the Cold War and especially in the 21st century, an increasingly complex array of internal and external security concerns confronts China's leaders with new challenges. The paper concludes with a discussion of the significance of the recently established National Security Commission and offers brief observations about its potential significance for the CCP's leadership in their fight against the new domestic and international security challenges it faces. The novelty of China's security challenges at home and abroad in the 21st century is a consequence of the end of the Cold War international order and perhaps more importantly, a consequence of China's successful modernization since 1979.

**Keywords:** security challenges; China's security perceptions; grand strategy; China's strategy

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Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, its leaders have faced both external and internal security challenges. Over time, however, the relative significance of the two has varied. In 2014, China is more secure against foreign threats than at any time in the PRC's history. At the same time, however, the regime has grown more concerned about internal security and its possible links to external threats than it has been for many years. The increased attention to the importance of internal concerns is reflected in three recent developments.

First, in 2012 China released data showing that central government spending on domestic security most likely exceeded spending on the nation's military.[1] Second, at the much anticipated Third Plenum of the 18th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress in November 2013, one of the first announcements was the intriguing news that China was going to establish a major new leading body, the National Security Commission (*guojia anquan weiyuanhui*). Initial speculation focused on the possibility that the new body would be China's equivalent of the U.S. National Security Council, a coordinating mechanism to manage international security challenges. But when more detailed documents from the plenum were released, the description of China's NSC was contained in the section on domestic security. Some wondered whether this placement meant the NSC would focus mainly on internal security problems and have little real role in handling international security affairs.[2] In the weeks following the plenum, however, Chinese commentary explained that the NSC would address important links between the external and internal security challenges that China faces in the 21st century. Third, Chinese discussion of current security concerns increasingly emphasizes the greater complexity of the security threats faced and the heavier demands a more challenging array of security concerns poses for the management of national security policy.

On the eve of the Third Plenum announcement, Renmin University's Wang Yiwei suggested that China's leaders were moving towards what he referred to as a "grand security concept," a term by which he seeks to capture the ever more complex and

1 Exact figures are uncertain but see estimates in David L. Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 328, n.15; and pp. 59-60. See also Jeremy Page, "China Real Time: Internal Security Tops Military in China Spending," *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/03/05/internal-security-tops-military-in-china-spending/.

2 For English and Chinese versions of the sixty-point resolution, see "CCP Central Committee Resolution concerning Some Major Issues in Comprehensively Deepening Reform," *China Copyright and Media: The law and policy of China's news and entertainment media*, November 15, 2013, http://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/11/15/ccp-central-committee-resolution-concerning-some-major-issues-in-comprehensively-deepening-reform/;"Xi Jinping will head The Central Reform Leading Group," *Xinhua*, December 30, 2013 (《习近平任中央全面深化改革领导小组组长》，新华网，2013 年 12 月 30 日 ), http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-12/30/c_118771223.htm. See also Wen-Ti Sung, "China's New State Security Committee," *The Diplomat*, November 25, 2013, http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/chinas-new-state-security-committee/; Zachary Keck, "China's 'Blurred Lines' on Security Threats," *The Diplomat*, March 1, 2014, http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/chinas-blurred-lines-on-security-threats/.

multifaceted dimensions of national security in the early 21st century.[3] In addition, his use of the adjective "grand" seems intended to resonate with its use in studies of grand strategy. Much as grand strategy denotes something more than mere military strategy by identifying the unifying logic that informs a state's foreign policy choices across military, diplomatic, and economic domains, so Wang's concept of grand security suggested a view of security extending beyond mere traditional (mostly military) security and including a more integrated view of what determines the level of security a state enjoys. Wang's meaning aside, the connection between strategy and security is a close one. Security concerns are key drivers of the strategy a state adopts to ensure its interests in light of national capabilities and the expectations it has about the reactions its policies will elicit from others. Indeed, one of the more widely cited definitions of grand strategy defines it as "a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."[4]

In this essay I examine China's changing perception of its security challenges since 1949 and the way its grand strategy has evolved along with those changes. I identify differences between China's contemporary challenges and those that prevailed during most of the Cold War. But I also highlight some continuities with security concerns that have long informed the thinking of the PRC's leaders.

## 1. Security and Strategy

While all states are concerned about security in the sense of providing protection against external threats to their homeland and the people living within their borders, they also seek to secure their ability to order domestic affairs as they see fit.[5]As such, national security encompasses the understanding that a country's leaders have about the internal order they are protecting against challenges from abroad.

3 Wang Yiwei, "Using Grand Security Concept to Resolve the Asian Paradox," *Renminwang,* October 11, 2013 (王义桅:《用大安全观化解亚洲悖论》，人民网，2013年10月11日), http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2013-10/11/content_1308376.htm; Wang Yiwei, "China Must Promote 'Grand Security Concept'," *China.org.cn,* October 16, 2013, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2013-10/16/content_30311812.htm; Wang Yiwei, "China's New Security Concept Provides a New Version for the World," *Renminwang,* April 17, 2014 (王义桅:《中国新安全观为全球换版本》，人民网，2014年4月17日), http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2014-04/17/content_1416031.htm. In some ways this was a further development of China's proposed "new security concept" discussed starting in the late 1990s. See David M. Finkelstein, "China's 'New Concept of Security'," in Stephen J. Flanagan and Michael E. Marti, eds., *The People's Liberation Army and China in Transition*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2003, pp. 197-209; Carlyle A. Thayer, "China's 'New Security Concept' and Southeast Asia," in David W. Lovell, ed., *Asia-Pacific Security: Policy Challenges*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003, pp. 89-107; "China Offers New Security Concept at ASEAN Meetings," *People's Daily,* August 2, 2002, http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/38502.htm.

4 Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 13, also pp. 7, 25. See also Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 17-20; Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 4, 21.

5 See Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965, esp. pp. 150-151; also Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Menlo Park, Ca: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, 1979, p. 96.

Moreover, because states do not exist in isolation, each state's pursuit of security affects, and is in turn affected by, the choices of other security-conscious states. One of the foundational concepts in the study of international relations, the security dilemma, describes this interdependence of decision-making among statesmen whose efforts to enhance their state's security can prompt others to worry about the possible implications for their own. The security dilemma identifies an important connection between a state's understanding of its security requirements (reflected in what Chinese analysts like Wang label "security concepts") and the strategy it formulates to meet those needs. Both security and strategy are shaped by the interdependence of choice among states in an international system where information is incomplete, uncertainty is rampant, and where the absence of a supranational authority that can reliably enforce rules or agreements encourages all states to do what they can to help themselves.

Wang's use of the term "grand security concept" also highlighted trends he saw as new challenges for China in particular — the inseparability of internal and external security; the growing significance of nontraditional security concerns; unprecedented diversity and complexity in the nature of security threats; and, the increasing challenge of effectively managing security policy. New, more complex challenges reflect important changes within China and in the international circumstances it faces that shape security perceptions and policy. To oversimplify, one could argue that during most of the Cold War decades China's vulnerability to military threats from much more powerful adversaries led to a narrow focus on coping with clearly defined external dangers. But even while they mainly attended to such external concerns, China's leaders also worried about internal security challenges and, at times, their connection with foreign threats. Thus, while a comparison of contemporary China's security situation with the situation that Beijing faced during most of the Cold War decades predictably reveals significant differences, the contrast between the apparent simplicity of the earlier era and the obvious complexity of the present one should not be overstated. The following discussion identifies continuities as well as change.

## 2. Cold War Security and Strategy

### 2.1 "Lean to One Side"

With military victory in the civil war, China's CCP had successfully consolidated its rule over the mainland. Aside from the KMT forces which had retreated to Taiwan, the CCP's military power and political organization had eliminated major domestic security threats. During its first decade in power, the CCP had established that it could preserve the political order within a Chinese state defined by borders it had inherited from its Qing dynasty and Republican era predecessors.

In contrast with its relatively secure domestic position, however, the regime faced

a daunting external threat to its survival from the militarily superior United States. As a result, China's security concept at the time was shaped mainly by the overriding concern about coping with this challenge. The expectation that the United States would be unwilling to maintain good relations with a communist regime in China, reinforced by the ideological polarization of the Cold War that emerged in the late 1940s, convinced Mao Zedong that his newly founded regime should ally with the Soviet Union as the only plausible counterweight to potentially devastating American power. His decision to "lean to one side," as it was labeled, seemed vindicated less than a year after signing the Sino-Soviet alliance when China became mired in a bloody war against U.S. forces on the neighboring Korean Peninsula. The war cemented mutual hostility between Beijing and Washington, and the scope of the military challenge from a hostile U.S. provided a strong incentive for China to sustain its alliance with the Soviet Union.

Balancing American power by allying with the Soviets reflected a straightforward traditional security calculation. The simplicity of China's security concept was matched by the relative simplicity in its national security policy process at the time. Mao Zedong exercised personal control over key foreign policy decisions with a bearing on security and strategy. He was responsible for the initial decision to lean to the Soviet side to ensure China's security, the decision to respond with Chinese forces to the perceived American threat that emerged in Korea in October 1950, and the risky decisions to escalate military pressure in the Taiwan Strait in 1954 and 1958.

Mao's grand strategic decision to "lean to one side," though driven by overriding security concerns about the American military threat, also informed China's international economic policies as it took on the difficult task of development in a war-torn, impoverished country. The decision to side with Moscow, and the reaction to it from the U.S. and its allies, limited China's opportunity for economic relations with the capitalist world and effectively required China to rely heavily on the Soviet-led socialist bloc for trade and investment. However, Mao was soon troubled by the political constraints that he saw resulting from this economic as well as military dependence on the Soviet Union. As the intensity of his fears about American threats to the survival of the PRC gradually eased, his began to concern about the political implications of leaning so heavily on the Soviets grew. After the mid-1950s, Mao began advocating economic policies that would enable a more self-reliant China to follow its own path for building socialism, a preference manifest most clearly after 1958 in a development push that became known as the Great Leap Forward (GLF). The desire to reduce dependence on the Soviet Union and the political constraints that came with it was also reflected in China's military policy during the late 1950s which placed a high priority on acquiring a nuclear deterrent that Beijing controlled despite Moscow's attempts to make this difficult.

Mao's push for greater economic and military autonomy put strains on the alliance and imposed costs on China. His more self-reliant approach to economic development

slowed the pace of China's modernization, most dramatically when the GLF resulted in a disastrous depression and famine. That price, however, was apparently one that Mao was willing to pay in order to reduce the leverage Moscow enjoyed as long as China remained a dependent "younger brother" integrated with the Soviet-led socialist economic bloc.[6] Absent from an imminent military threat from the US, Mao also balked at continuing close military cooperation with the Soviet Union. By the late 1950s, Mao apparently believed that Moscow's proposals for more efficiently integrating alliance military operations and policy portended an unacceptable degree of Soviet control over Beijing's freedom to freely exercise its sovereign choice about how best to deal with its international security challenges and concerns. As in the economic realm, the push for greater autonomy entailed costs for China. The tensions that resulted from Mao's insistence on military independence meant accepting the risk that the Sino-Soviet alliance would be a less reliable counter to a still hostile and vastly more powerful U.S. Yet, that risk was apparently not as troubling to Mao as his growing concern about the implications dependence on a Soviet protector might have for China's foreign policy autonomy. His thinking in this regard was almost certainly shaped by his perception of Soviet unreliability during the two Taiwan Strait crises of the 1950s that had revealed the uncertainty of Moscow's support for Beijing on a matter to which China assigned high priority — completing the historical task of reunification by bringing Taiwan under PRC rule.

### 2.2 Diffuse Security Threats, Strategic Misstep

By the early 1960s, China's perception of the external military threat from the U.S. was further diminished. At the same time tensions within the Sino-Soviet alliance were building. In 1959-1960, Moscow terminated its economic and military assistance to a Chinese regime that was balking at Soviet leadership. In 1962, Beijing criticized an already embarrassed Soviet leadership's reluctance to stand up to the US during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and fumed over Moscow's failure to clearly support its communist ally in the 1962 border war with noncommunist India. Questioning the benefits of alliance with the Soviets and discounting the immediate need for protection against American military power, Mao embraced a grand strategy whose core principle was that China would follow a more independent foreign policy. The result was a closer linking of international and domestic security concerns during much of the 1960s.

In Mao's new view, the viability of China's revolutionary socialist regime faced two external challenges. One was the enduring, but diminished, military threat from the powerful and hostile capitalist US. Although US involvement in Vietnam meant that this concern could not be ignored, both the Americans and the Chinese were successfully signaling their desire to avoid a replay of the tragic experience of direct conflict in Korea. Instead, Mao became convinced that the more immediate external

6 Although Mao accepted the need for temporary emergency measures to cope with the disaster the GLF created, he refused to countenance a return to the Soviet-guided economic development model adopted during China's First Five Year Plan (1953-1957).

challenge to China was the danger of "revisionism" that had taken root in the Soviet Union. This concern reflected Mao's belief that communist revolutionaries, once in office, are easily corrupted by the temptations of power that can transform them into members of a new ruling class that exploits the masses.[7] In the early 1960s, Mao rolled out his argument that the Soviet Union's communists had fallen prey to precisely this sort of political corruption and that, as a result, Moscow's domestic and foreign policies were becoming little better than those of the capitalist-imperialists against whom these communist allies had initially united.

Mao's deepening mistrust of the Soviet Union's ideological credentials compounded his earlier reservations about following its leadership of the communist bloc and shaped his decision to steer a new, decisively independent course in security policy. China staked out a position for itself as the true champion of revolutionary international forces, adopting a grand strategy more noteworthy for its fierce insistence on autonomy and bold claims of ideological correctness than its ability to gather supporters who could enhance China's security against serious foreign threats that might arise. But this potential shortcoming was discounted as Mao soon decided that the principal security threat to the regime was not external.

Rather than focusing on the dangers either the capitalist US or the revisionist USSR could pose, Mao was shifting his attention to the dire internal threat he saw from Chinese revisionists. Mao did see a link between this threat of revisionism at home and the threat from abroad; he accused revisionists within China's party and government of sympathizing with Soviet views. In 1966 Mao launched the Cultural Revolution. This campaign unleashed the masses to discover, punish, and either re-educate or eliminate China's Soviet-style revisionists. The Cultural Revolution quickly resulted in rampant factional violence.

For much of the decade, internal security concerns took precedence. International events in 1968 and 1969, however, yet again transformed Mao's understanding of China's security requirements. His focus shifted to a newly salient threat from an increasingly powerful Soviet superpower, an external threat that was military and not just ideological in nature.

### 2.3 "Lean to the Other Side"

As their disagreements deepened in the mid-1960s, China and the Soviet Union had begun fortifying their long and unsettled border. More troubling still, in August 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia had demonstrated its willingness to use military force to rein in members of the socialist camp if they strayed too far from the socialist

7 These concerns had been previewed in the short-lived Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1957, and echoed concerns about communist rulers in Eastern Europe that Milovan Djilas expressed at about the same time. See Roderick MacFarquhar, *Contradictions among the People, 1956-1957*, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, London: Published for Royal Institute of International Affairs, East Asian Institute of Columbia University and Research Institute on Communist Affairs of Columbia University by Oxford University Press, 1974; Milovan Djilas, *The New Class, an Analysis of the Communist System*, New York: Praeger, 1957.

mainstream as defined by Moscow, a doctrine that effectively put China's defiant Maoist regime on notice. By 1969, Mao saw China's ally and recently quarrelsome ideological rival as a powerful and potentially dangerous military adversary. When intense armed clashes occurred on the Sino-Soviet border in March, China confronted the prospect of war with a menacing Soviet superpower. The security challenge was clear. The gathering danger exposed in stark relief the risks that Mao had courted since the early 1960s when he had insisted on an independent grand strategy that determined friends and enemies by relying on ideological criteria rather than capabilities and national interests. In 1969, the risk of that approach bumped up against the harsh reality of a serious military threat to a China already weakened by the internal turmoil of the Cultural Revolution.

China's unrealistic, ideologically defined security concept and independent grand strategy were jettisoned. The urgent challenge of coping with the Soviet military power provided strong incentives for Mao and those around him to devise a grand strategy that better served China's interests. As in 1950, the world remained bipolar. Consequently, faced with an imminent threat from the military might of one superpower Mao again recognized he had little alternative to calling on the might of the other as a counter. Unlike the choice to ally with the socialist Soviets against the capitalist Americans in 1950, however, Mao decided to "lean to the other side" and align China with the U.S. After all, Mao had criticized the Soviet Union and launched the Cultural Revolution to ensure China's socialist purity, a stance that had also informed his independent international strategy. Shifting to cooperation with the world's leading capitalist state seemed incongruous. For four reasons, however, the problem was manageable.

First, by 1969, China's Cultural Revolution leaders had thoroughly trashed the socialist credentials of the Soviet Union. This made it easier to justify treating it like any other adversary that could pose a military threat. Indeed, the critique of Soviet revisionism suggested that Moscow's ideological failings explained why it, like capitalist states, had turned to militarized imperialism. Second, the importance of identifying a "principal contradiction" and a main enemy in order to forge cooperation with all who could be helpful allies was a staple of Maoist thinking about security problems dating back to the early years of the Chinese revolution. Just as China's security had required the CCP to ally with its once and future mortal Chinese rival, the KMT, when Japan posed the principal threat to the nation, in the 1970s the CCP needed to side with its former adversary, the U.S. against the Soviets. Third, Mao was more firmly than ever in charge on crucial policy decisions. And it was Mao who made the key decisions that set in motion the rapprochement with the US.[8] Fourth, Mao

8 "Report by Four Chinese Marshals−Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, to the Central Committee, 'a Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation' (Excerpt), 11 July 1969 [Document No. 9− Trans. By Chen Jian and Li Di]," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Winter, 1998, http://cwihp.si.edu/pdf.htm; "Report by Four Chinese Marshals−Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Nie Rongzhen, and Xu Xiangqian – to the CCP Central Committee, 'Our Views About the Current Situation' (Excerpt) 17 September 1969, [Document No. 11- Trans. By Chen Jian and Li Di]," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Winter, 1998, http://cwihp.si.edu/pdf.htm.

defined the new strategy of cooperation with the capitalist US in narrow security terms. Unlike the Sino-Soviet alliance of the 1950s, military cooperation with the US would not be matched by close economic ties. Under Mao's leadership, China continued to emphasize a self-reliant development strategy; the US would not gain the kind of leverage over Beijing that Moscow had enjoyed. China might have to compromise on ideological principles in order to cope with a severe military threat to its political and territorial integrity. But Mao was determined to minimize the constraints that the alignment with the U.S. placed on China's freedom to chart its own course at home and abroad.

Although China's security concept as it leaned to the US was shaped mainly by concerns about the external threat from the Soviets, concerns about internal threats did not evaporate. While cooperating strategically with the U.S., Beijing maintained strict controls on foreign access to China in order to prevent the infiltration of Western ideas. The putative links between domestic challenges and external threats were reflected even more clearly in the continuing concern about Soviet revisionism. As political struggles raged within the CCP during the years leading up to Mao's death in 1976, those who fell from grace were routinely portrayed as revisionists naturally inclined to favor the preferences of the country's main enemy, the Soviet Union.

Following Mao's death in 1976, reform-minded successors adhered to his view about the overriding importance of countering the military threat from the Soviet Union but not his extreme emphasis on ensuring economic self-reliance and limiting China's exposure to the outside world. Once it consolidated its grip on power in late 1978, a new CCP leadership headed by Deng Xiaoping decisively shifted the regime's focus from the struggle against revisionism to economic modernization. In large measure this shift represented an attempt to cope with what China's new leaders saw as the main internal security threat to regime's future − the potential for political and social instability among the Chinese people who had grown impatient with the country's lagging development while leaders in Beijing focused their attention on elite power struggles and abstract ideological debates about Marxism. The post-Mao reformers discounted what they deemed their predecessors' excessive concerns about the risks of opening China, especially its economy, to the outside world with which Mao had sought only carefully controlled military and diplomatic cooperation. Instead, they wholeheartedly began to seek out opportunities to increase China's engagement with foreign partners who could catalyze the country's modernization.

In opening up China, then, Deng and his colleagues saw a link between internal and external security concerns but a link quite different from the one Mao imagined. "Opening up" was expected to yield material benefits for the Chinese people that would strengthen their support for the CCP's continued leadership at home. To the extent economic modernization facilitated military modernization, it would also enhance China's own ability to offset the external threat from the Soviet Union that appeared even more menacing in the late 1970s. Perhaps fortuitously, the prospects for better

economic relations with the US and its advanced industrial allies were bright because they had developed their own interest in strengthening China as a useful counterweight to the Soviet Union that they viewed as growing menace.

Moreover, China's leaders knew that they enjoyed domestic support and embracing their pragmatic approach to evaluating the effectiveness of policies. This meant that they could adopt their new vision for relations with the West without the need for the sort of Byzantine ideological justifications provided when China first turned to the U.S. in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, although the new leaders did not share Mao's extreme concern about the possible internal security challenges that could arise from opening the country to the outside world, such concerns were not entirely absent. Even as they eagerly pursued a grand strategy that valued the economic and military benefits of alignment with the West, Deng and his colleagues periodically cracked down on what they deemed undesirable foreign influences that accompanied growing international engagement after 1978.

## 3. Transition from Cold War Security and Strategy

### 3.1 Security and Independence

Over the course of the 1980s, however, international and domestic developments again altered Beijing's perception of the security challenges that China faced. Intense concern about the Soviet threat at the beginning of the decade gradually faded. Moscow was shifting from its aggressive international posture that required shouldering the heavy burdens of interventionism abroad to a focus on dealing with serious political and economic challenges at home. Seeing these changes, Deng and those around him concluded that the danger of a major war had greatly diminished. Consequently, China's leaders downgraded the priority previously accorded military cooperation with the US. In the mid-1980s, China's close security ties with the U.S. loosened as the quasi-alliance morphed into something more like a hedge against the possibility of a renewed Soviet threat. And after 1987 when Mikhail Gorbachev decisively altered Soviet foreign policy with a major retrenchment of overseas military deployments and a concerted push for rapprochement with erstwhile adversaries, the improvement in relations between Beijing and Moscow accelerated. In May 1989, a Sino-Soviet summit meeting in Beijing symbolized the end of the Cold War in Asia.

During this period China was also beginning a serious effort to modernize its own conventional military forces (long hamstrung by Mao's focus on ideological tasks and insistence on economic self-reliance) and was finally deploying a credible nuclear deterrent. Beijing anticipated that the dawn of an era of peace and development would permit it to gradually improve its own military capabilities. It also expected that Cold War bipolarity world would soon give way to multipolarity, in which case China would

no longer face the tight external constraints that had limited strategic options and shaped its security concepts when the country had confronted existential threats from one of two superpowers. China's more relaxed view of its security requirements freed its leaders to safely embrace a more independent foreign policy.

The full articulation of an independent foreign policy reflecting Beijing's changing perceptions was, however, delayed for several years. Within a few years, however, China's isolation was easing and Jiang Zemin was establishing himself in Beijing as the leader who would carry forward Deng's vision for China's more independent foreign policy in the post-Cold War world.

A reemerging China initially embraced the security perception and followed the strategy that Deng had set in the late 1980s. Sustained improvement in relations with the Soviet Union and then its Russian successor state confirmed that China no longer faced any imminent external military threat. And as it became ever clearer that Cold War divisions had evaporated, China enjoyed unprecedented opportunities to forge improved relations and increase economic interaction around the world. The key to strengthening China's security during an era of "peace and development" was understood to be economic modernization Economic progress would have the twin security payoffs of providing a solid foundation for gradually strengthening China's own military capabilities to deal with future external threats and, more immediately important, bolstering domestic support for CCP rule by steadily improving the people's standard of living. China's leaders understood that the success of their economic modernization strategy would require boosting the country's participation in the global economy. As Deng and his immediate successors re-committed the regime to deepening the domestic economic reforms and opening the country to the outside world, China's post-Mao pattern of rapid growth resumed.[9]

Although China's international economic and military clout remained limited, by the middle of the 1990s the country's impressive growth trajectory was already prompting speculation about the role a richer and more powerful China might play in the Asia Pacific, with some nervously predicting the possibility of a "China threat." Most importantly, this worry was prominent among China's neighbors with security ties to the United States. Lingering territorial and maritime disputes with U.S. allies in the East and South China Seas, and renewed tensions in the Taiwan Strait as democratization empowered pro-independence candidates, increased the risk American power could once again pose a serious external security for China. Beijing's perception of this potential danger was heightened as China's leaders began to accept that Cold War bipolarity would not soon give rise to a multipolar world but that instead they would have to cope with unipolarity, and America's unmatched capabilities, for the foreseeable future. Of greatest concern, the possibility loomed that the peerless capabilities of the United States would be deployed in support of East Asian neighbors

9 See Suisheng Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 8 (August 1993), pp. 739-756.

with whom China had disputes and, in a worst case scenario, might even be harnessed to an American-led regional strategy to contain China. The prospect of deteriorating relations with the U.S. and its allies jeopardized China's security in several interrelated ways.

First, China's leaders had already concluded that the sustainability of economic growth essential to the regime's internal security depended on more fully integrating China with the global economy in which the US and its allies played leading roles.[10] Second, such sustained economic growth was also essential to provide a foundation for the military capabilities that China would require if it were to become a more self-reliant great power. Third, by magnifying the security challenge, an American-led neo-containment strategy would raise the standard against which the adequacy of China's modernizing military would have to be compared.

### 3.2 Security and China's Peaceful Rise

This potentially dangerous deterioration in China's security environment encouraged Beijing to adopt a strategy for dampening concerns about its growing capabilities. Beijing's response to the risk of major new external threats was eventually labeled a strategy of "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development."[11] It aimed to dispel worries about China's intentions as its capabilities expanded, and to more actively cultivate international opportunities that would facilitate the country's continued rise. This approach obviously contrasted sharply with the strategy of counterbalancing external security threats that Beijing had adopted during most of the Cold War. It also differed, however, from the approach initially advocated for the post-Cold War era – one that emphasized simply keeping a low international profile while China focused on domestic development.[12] The more proactive approach that took root after the mid-1990s aimed to defuse, not directly counter, threats. It sought to alter the incentives facing potentially hostile, powerful actors – most importantly the US – who could limit China's economic opportunities and threaten its vital interest in becoming a richer and more powerful state. Beijing touted the benefits for other states if they embraced, rather than attempted to block, China's rise. Beijing highlighted the gains from trade and investment available to China's economic partners, the useful role that China could play in helping to address prominent international concerns about nuclear proliferation, terrorism, the environment, and public health, and China's willingness to

10 On the steps China adopted to reduce impediments to further growth in its international economic role, see Nicholas R. Lardy, "Chinese Foreign Trade," *The China Quarterly*, No. 131 (1992), pp. 691-720; Nicholas R. Lardy, *Integrating China into the Global Economy*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002.

11 Zheng Bijian, *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian, 1997-2005*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005; Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*.

12 This has generally been identified with Deng Xiaoping's twenty-four-character admonition and especially the four characters *taoguangyanghui* usually translated as "hiding our capabilities and biding our time." See Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, "Lying Low No More? China's New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy," *China: An International Journal,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (September 2011), pp. 195-216; M. Taylor Fravel, "Revising Deng's Foreign Policy: Recent Comments by General Ma Xiaotian Suggest a Shift from Deng Xiaoping's Approach to Foreign Policy," *The Diplomat*, January 17, 2012, http://thediplomat.com/2012/01/revising-dengs-foreign-policy/.

cooperate with regional neighbors through more active multilateral engagement with ASEAN.

Although the driving force behind China's strategic adjustment was the perceived need to respond to potentially dangerous external security challenges in the mid-1990s, there were also links to the CCP's internal security concerns. Democratization on Taiwan was giving voice to citizens advocating steps towards greater independence, challenging a salient element of Beijing's definition of the country's political and territorial integrity. The CCP could not abide this challenge. Any leader in Beijing seen as wobbling on the "historical task" of national reunification could anticipate not only opposition from others within the elite but also an outpouring of public indignation about the failure to match unwavering rhetoric with action. Finally, Beijing's claim that American policy had facilitated a spike in cross-strait tensions prior to Taiwan's first presidential election in 1996 linked this domestic political consideration with China's concerns about coping with the potential external threat represented by U.S. power in a unipolar world.[13]

Beijing needed to balance its interest in avoiding the domestic risks of perceived fecklessness in reasserting China's claim to Taiwan against the risks of confronting a vastly superior US military. This tension provided Beijing with a strong incentive to reduce these dual dangers that a democratic Taiwan presented. China's strategic shift after 1996 helped Beijing cope with these linked security concerns. By cultivating improved relations with its East Asian neighbors and, most importantly, with the United States, China underscored their shared interest in discouraging Taiwan from taking steps that could jeopardize the economic and security benefits available through sustained cooperation with Beijing. The dividends from China's approach after 1996 were most clearly evident in Washington's periodic reminders to Taiwan's leaders to refrain from actions that could trigger a cross-strait crisis.[14]

China's strategic shift in the late 1990s – policies aimed at fostering a peaceful environment that would facilitate China's rise during an era of unipolarity in which fears about China's growing capabilities might lead to a counterproductive and potentially dangerous reaction from the US and its allies – artfully addressed China's chief internal and external security concerns. Foreign trade and investment boomed; economic development helped secure the CCP's domestic position. More active participation in multilateral organizations and diplomacy to establish bilateral partnership with major powers around the world was helping to defuse the fears about China's rise that had emerged in the mid-1990s. Indeed, some analysts in Asia and the

13 In 1995, the US unexpectedly decided to set aside previous assurance to China and granted Lee Teng-hui, a leading contender in Taiwan's "presidential contest," a visa permitting him to attend a reunion at Cornell University where he delivered a speech that included a vision for Taiwan's future that Beijing viewed as provocative. China responded with military exercises intended to warn Taiwan's voters about the dangers they would face if they backed a push for greater independence. China's coercive diplomacy triggered a strong American reaction including U.S. naval maneuvers that clarified the risk of U.S. intervention if China escalated its use of threats and force against Taiwan. See Robert S. Ross, "The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force," *International Security,* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 87-123.

14 See Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, pp. 153-55; 186-193.

U.S. worried that China's approach was proving so successful that it might supplant the United States as the central player in the Asia Pacific.[15]

### 3.3 Security and China's "Assertiveness"

Despite China's remarkable foreign policy success and despite the substantial improvement in the regime's external and internal security, beginning in 2008 it seemed to many that Beijing changed its approach. Although China rejected this judgment and reiterated its adherence to a strategy of "peaceful development," observers increasingly cited China's behavior in East Asia as evidence that Beijing was eschewing its previous emphasis on fostering cooperation and was instead adopting a more assertive posture. While some analysts questioned the empirical basis for this claim, references to China's "new assertiveness" quickly became a common refrain and by 2009 the meme had taken hold.[16] Those who discerned a new turn in China's foreign policy suggested that CCP leaders may have decided in 2008 that they faced a much less challenging external security environment than the one they had anticipated just a decade earlier. In this view, China's rapid economic expansion as it more fully integrated with the global economy after 2000 and its steady military modernization were paying dividends just as the United States and its allies were suffering the effects of the Great Recession and as America was determined to reduce the extraordinary military and economic burdens it had shouldered during protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[17] Sensing a relative shift of power in China's favor, Beijing allegedly believed that it had an unexpectedly early opportunity to advance its international interests, especially in East Asia. China's newfound prominence in international trade and investment at a time when there were few other economic bright spots around the globe might create foreign policy leverage that Beijing could exploit to manage the risk of a sharp reaction as it shifted to a harder line in managing its regional disputes.

Beijing countered such claims about a new assertiveness by arguing that they

15 See, for example, Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

16 See "Stirring up the South China Sea (I)," *Asia Report*, No. 223 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 23, 2012), http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.pdf; and "Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses," *Asia Report*, No. 229 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 24, 2012), http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/229-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-ii-regional-responses; Michael D. Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Assertive Behavior, Part Two: The Maritime Periphery," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 35 (Summer 2011), pp. 1-34; Goldstein, "Chinese Naval Strategy in the South China Sea"; M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (December 2011), pp. 292-319. Andrew Scobell and Scott W. Harold, "An 'Assertive' China? Insights from Interviews," *Asian Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May 2013), pp. 111-131. For a view that questions the novelty of China's actions, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Autumn 2013), pp. 7-48; Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu, and Alastair Iain Johnston, "Debating China's Assertiveness," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Winter2013/2014), pp. 176-183. For a view that emphasized the need for China to do a better job explaining its position, see Zhu Chenghu, "South China Sea disputes, China could do more," *Huanqiushibao* [Global Times], July 1, 2011( 朱成虎:《南海争端：中国可以做得更多》，环球时报，2011 年 7 月 1 日 ), http://opinion.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-07/1792964.html.

17 See Bonnie S. Glaser and Lyle Morris, "Chinese Perceptions of U.S. Decline and Power," *China Brief*, Vol. 9, No. 14 (July 9 2009), pp. 1-6; also Cui Liru, "Toward a Multipolar Pattern: Challenges in a Transitional Stage," *China US Focus*, April 14, 2014, http://www.chinausfocus.com/print/?id=37088.

relied on mere speculation about its motives and on a misinterpretation of events in the region. It insisted that increased tensions on the Korean peninsula and in the East and South China Seas after 2008 had resulted from provocative steps others had taken and to which China had simply responded in line with its longstanding policies. Nevertheless, China's actions were widely interpreted as a sign that Beijing believed it was less tightly constrained by the risk of pushback from neighbors who needed good economic relations with China and whose recession-plagued, war-weary American ally seemed unlikely to relish of a new round of overseas challenges. If this was indeed China's calculation, it was misguided. China's actions quickly revived foreign concerns about its growing capabilities and ultimate intentions that had first emerged in the mid-1990s, undoing much of the previous decade's success in defusing external security challenges and enhancing conditions conducive to peaceful development that bolstered the CCP's internal security.

Renewed doubts about the intentions of an increasingly capable China led South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam to bolster their security ties with the United States. The Obama administration responded by stressing the importance of the region for American interests and its determination to preserve the leading economic and security role the U.S. had long played in the Western Pacific.[18] In short, China's actions in 2008-2012 seemed to be recreating the danger that key regional actors and the world's sole superpower would be united in a coalition against China. Indeed, the most common Chinese interpretation of the Obama administration's widely publicized decision to rebalance American strategic attention to the Asia-Pacific was that its purpose was to contain China, despite repeated assurance from Washington that this was not its rationale.[19] Reflecting substantial continuity with the policy of the Bush administration, the Obama administration insisted that the U.S. welcomed the rise of a strong, prosperous, and responsible China. American criticism of Beijing's actions after 2008, however, suggested doubts about whether Washington still believed that China was likely to become a responsible stakeholder and, thus, doubts about whether China's rise was still so welcome by Washington.

China's interlinked external and internal security concerns have also been reflected in the challenges it faces managing the consequences of North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Because it threatens the peaceful external environment in East Asia essential for

18 See Hillary Rodham Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, No. 189 (November 2011), pp. 56-63; Avery Goldstein, "U.S.-China Interactions in Asia," in David Shambaugh, ed., *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, Lanham MD: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, 2012, pp. 263-291.

19 For the initial Chinese government response, see "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on November 17, 2011," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t879769.htm. For gradually escalating Chinese criticism of the move, see Chris Buckley, "China Looks Across Asia and Sees New Threats," *Reuters*, November 10, 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/10/us-china-asia-idU.S.TRE7A91CY20111110; Keith B. Richburg, "U.S. pivot to Asia makes China nervous," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/us-pivot-to-asia-makes-china-nervous/2011/11/15/gIQAsQpVRN_story.html?; "Chinese Spokesman Rebukes U.S.-Australian Military Alliance," *Xinhua*, November 30, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-11/30/c_131280105.htm.

China's development, Beijing opposes North Korea's nuclear weapons program.[20] China also worries that strong pressure on Pyongyang could generate new internal security problems for China. Tough sanctions could result in larger numbers of Koreans seeking refuge from economic privation by crossing into China's neighboring northeastern provinces, joining the tens of thousands who have already fled there since the 1990s. China would then have to choose between accommodating this influx and shouldering the burden of managing a refugee community or blocking the exodus and incurring international criticism for its insensitivity to a humanitarian crisis.

Yet another domestic security consideration also complicates Beijing's strategy towards the peninsula. Because South Korea has become a vital economic partner, sustaining good relations with Seoul is a key consideration for leaders in Beijing attentive to the importance of China's continued economic development for ensuring domestic tranquility. But Beijing's interest in relations South Korea can conflict with its concerns about pushing North Korea too hard. In 2009, for example, Beijing twice refused to clearly support international condemnation of North Korea after it attacked South Korean military forces. This resulted in damage to China's reputation in Seoul and among the Korean people.[21]

As with Korea, the risks that accompany China's re-intensifying disputes in the East China Sea and in the South China Sea during the last years under Hu Jintao reflects a link between external security problems and internal security concerns. On the one hand these persistent conflicts recreate the specter of American backed challenges to Chinese security. On the other hand, they also raise the risk of damage to the economic foundations of the regime's internal security because Japan and the ASEAN states have played important roles in China's economic success, especially in the 21st century. Tensions over territorial sovereignty and associated maritime rights at a minimum make these vital economic partners more wary of their growing interdependence with China and have already prompted consideration of ways to reduce it, even if economic fundamentals make dramatic change in the near term unlikely.[22] Nevertheless, such

20 A nuclear-armed North Korea provides the United States and its East Asian allies with a reason to move forward with missile defenses that have the potential to degrade effectiveness of China's ballistic missiles. It also risks providing an incentive for other states in the region to pursue offsetting nuclear deterrents of their own.

21 See Michael Yahuda, "Public Opinion and Regionalism in Northeast Asia," *The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation*, Commentary (C10-7), November 3, 2010, http://mansfieldfdn.org/backup/polls/pdf/Yahuda_commentary.pdf; cf. Jeremy Chan, "The Incredible Shrinking Crisis: The Sinking of the Cheonan and Sino-Korean Relations," *SAIS U.S.-Korea Yearbook 2010*, published by the U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS 2011, www.uskoreainstitute.org, pp. 19-33.

22 Such rethinking was most notably triggered by a reduction of China's rare earth exports that coincided with Sino-Japanese tensions over the arrest of a fishing boat captain near disputed islands in the East China Sea. See Keith Bradsher, "Amid Tension, China Blocks Vital Exports to Japan," *New York Times*, September 22, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/business/global/23rare.html?pagewanted=all; But see also Hiroaki Kuwajima, "Keeping Politics out of the Japan-China Economic Relationship," The Carnegie–Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, February 28, 2014, http://carnegietsinghua.org/2014/02/28/keeping-politics-out-of-japan%20china-economic-relationship/h243; Michael Schuman, "China and Japan May Not Like Each Other, but They Need Each Other," *Time*, December 1, 2013, http://world.time.com/2013/12/01/china-and-japan-may-not-like-each-other-but-they-need-each-other/; Louella Desiderio, "Phl to Continue Trade with China Despite Tension," *The Philippine Star*, April 12, 2014, http://www.philstar.com/business/2014/04/12/1311525/phl-continue-trade-china-despite-tension.

skittishness among important regional partners contrasts with the more amicable relations that prevailed earlier in the decade when China-ASEAN and China-Japan trade and investment boomed. If political recalculations undermine relations with China's neighbors, Beijing's policies that aim to ensure its external interests in defending sovereign claims risk adversely affecting one of the regime's keys to ensuring internal security – continued economic prosperity at home. This challenge is further complicated for the CCP insofar as ensuring internal security also requires preserving the regime's nationalist credentials, making it more difficult for Beijing to avoid the economic risks of confrontation by negotiating compromises over sovereignty disputes.[23]

In sum, developments at the end of the 21st century's first decade meant that the new leaders around Xi Jinping who took charge in China during 2012-2013 inherited a less favorable, more complex external security situation than the one their predecessors had inherited in 2002-2003. Moreover, renewed concerns about China's external security were linked with and layered on top of new domestic concerns about the sustainability of the country's modernization drive essential for internal stability. The CCP's new leaders recognized that continued economic success was going to require painful policy adjustments.[24] Moreover, this urgent need for an economic rebalancing was accompanied by an urgent need to address rapidly spreading popular dissatisfaction among many Chinese who, despite rising incomes, had grown angry about health and safety threats to their quality of life.[25]

### 3.4 Security and China's Great Power Strategy

Even as President Xi indicated a determination to ensure domestic stability by tackling China's many pressing internal problems, he also signaled a determination to address its accumulating external problems in East Asia and the adverse effect these were having on relations with the U.S. In June 2013, Xi used a quickly arranged informal summit meeting with President Obama to propose that the United States and China establish a "new type of great power relationship." In October 2013, he delivered

23 Zhang Qingmin, "Understanding China's Diplomacy since the Eighteenth Party Congress," *Foreign Affairs Observer*, April 17, 2014 (张清敏:《理解十八大以来的中国外交》，外交观察网，2014 年 4 月 17 日), http://www.faobserver.com/Newsinfo.aspx?id=9875.

24 These reforms were expected to be especially challenging as a result of the lingering effects of stimulus policies Beijing adopted in 2008 to buffer China from the effects of the global recession. The redirection of resources to state-owned sectors of the economy even after the crisis passed cast doubt on the regime's commitment to completing the task of building a market-based economy. See William H. Overholt, "Reassessing China: Awaiting Xi Jinping," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring 2012), pp. 121-137; Nicholas Lardy and Nicholas Borst, "A Blueprint for Rebalancing the Chinese Economy," *Policy Brief: No. PB13-02*, February, 2013, http://www.piie.com/publications/pb/pb13-2.pdf.

25 See "Environmental Concerns on the Rise in China: Survey Report," *Pew Research: Global Attitudes Project*, September 19, 2013, http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/09/19/environmental-concerns-on-the-rise-in-china/; "State Council: Agricultural Product Safety Will Be Included in Assessment of County and Township Governments," *Renminwang*, December 11, 2013(《国务院：将农产品质量安全纳入县、乡级政府绩效考核》，人民网，2013 年 12 月 11 日), http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/1211/c1001-23808574.html; Benjamin van Rooij and Alex Wang, "China's Pollution Challenge," *New York Times*, May 19, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/20/opinion/chinas-pollution-challenge.html.

a major speech suggesting the need for a revival of the more cooperative approach Beijing had previously adopted in its relations with ASEAN states.[26] His approach, however, has also suggested that he accepts the view that China no longer needs to be so concerned about the ability of others to block its economic and military growth – an overriding concern during the decade after the mid-1990s. Xi and his colleagues surely recognize the ongoing challenge of managing China's rise and coping with the concerns this generates. But in two respects it seems that they believe that China and the world have changed in ways that make the approach adopted earlier in the post-Cold War era unrealistic. First, China's international role has reached a level of visibility that makes it impractical to plan on keeping a low profile (as Deng recommended in the early post-Cold War period). Second, Beijing can no longer bank on dispelling others' concerns about the potential risks a more capable China might represent (the approach aimed at reassuring others about China's benign intentions adopted by Deng's successors). In short, Xi cannot turn back the clock. By 2012, especially in the wake of perceptions that China was behaving more assertively after 2008, the time had passed when Beijing could persuade others that its growing capabilities would not threaten their interests.

Even though China's leaders still invoke the rhetoric of peaceful rise that worked while China seemed to be a country in the early stages of a transition to becoming a great power, Xi's approach suggests that he is embracing a stance that might better be termed a "great power strategy with Chinese characteristics."[27] This approach accepts that Beijing must now face up to the challenges of coping with a security environment in which little can be done to keep others from warily eyeing and worrying about the possible implications of China's rise. It takes for granted that others will hedge their bets against an uncertain future and accepts that Beijing can only try to better manage the internal and external risks that are an inevitable byproduct of a more capable China playing a larger international role.[28] To reduce the scope of the security challenge it faces, Beijing still seeks to reassure others whenever that is possible.[29] But if others remain skeptical and cooperation proves unworkable, this approach anticipates that an increasingly powerful China will be able to take the steps it decides are necessary to

26 "Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at Work Conference on Peripheral Diplomacy," *Xinhua*, October 25, 2013 (《习近平在周边外交工作座谈会上发表重要讲话》，新华网，2013 年 10 月 25 日), http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-10/25/c_117878897.htm. See also Carl Thayer, "China's New Regional Security Treaty with ASEAN," *The Diplomat*, October 16, 2013, http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/chinas-new-regional-security-treaty-with-asean/.

27 Zhang Qingmin, "Understanding China's Diplomacy since the Eighteenth Party Congress."

28 See "Xi Jinping: Stick to a Comprehensive National Security Concept, Take the Road of National Security with Chinese Characteristics," *Xinhua*, April 15, 2014 (《习近平：坚持总体国家安全观 走中国特色国家安全道路》，新华网，2014 年 4 月 15 日), http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-04/15/c_1110253910.htm. On some of the difficulties China faces, see Jeffrey Reeves, "China's Unraveling Engagement Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2013), pp. 139–149; Howard W. French, "Into Africa: China's Wild Rush," *New York Times*, May 16, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/17/opinion/into-africa-chinas-wild-rush.html?smid=tw-share&_r=0; R. Evan Ellis, "Latin America Divided over How to Engage with China," *South China Morning Post*, July 23, 2013, http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1289053/latin-america-divided-over-how-engage-china; Thomas Fuller, "Resentment of China Spreading in Myanmar," *New York Times*, May 19, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/20/world/asia/anti-china-resentment-flares-over-myanmar-mine.html?ref=asia. Zhang Qingmin, "Understanding China's Diplomacy since the Eighteenth Party Congress."

29 See "Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at Work Conference on Peripheral Diplomacy."

ensure its interests.[30]

Xi and those around him face a more substantial challenge in devising responses to a complex array of problems at home and abroad that pose risks for the regime's security and that reflect the costs as well as benefits of China's growing capabilities. Rapid economic development and more extensive integration with the global economy have produced remarkable benefits that undergird internal stability but also pose new challenges for China's leaders. China's success has intensified international pressure for Beijing to undertake painful reforms that would create a "more level playing field." In particular, economic partners call for further revaluation of the Chinese currency and an end to government subsidies that give Chinese manufacturers an advantage in international trade, and also call for a reduction in regulations on investments in China that make it more difficult for foreigners to do business there. Although China's leaders have indicated a willingness to respond to these external pressures, they recognize that making the changes risks angering domestic interests who have benefited from prevailing economic practices – yet another link between the leaders' external and internal concerns. Measures aimed at mollifying foreign critics in order to sustain engagement are likely to add to the costs Beijing's already planned economic reforms will impose on the large number of Chinese working in internationally competitive sectors.

Another domestic security concern of growing significance for a China that is more globally engaged is a new version of the CCP's old worry about the effect of foreign political influences that could undermine the stability of one-party rule that the regime prizes.[31] When Mao worried about the "silver coated bullets of the bourgeoisie" and then "Soviet revisionism," his decision to adopt a self-reliant development strategy made it relatively simple for the CCP to maintain tight controls on interaction with the outside world. With Deng ending China's isolation after 1978 the challenge became tougher, if still manageable, as the regime struggled during the 1980s and 1990s to cope with unwanted "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois-liberalism" that entered China along with desired trade and investment and that was hard to contain as China's mass media became more decentralized and commercial. Managing the tradeoff between openness and a loss of control became dramatically more difficult in the 21st century, however, when access to information via computer technologies became essential for the functioning of a globally competitive economy.

The architecture of new media associated with the diffusion of internet and mobile phone service increased the accessibility of the Chinese people to foreign sources of

30 For an especially strong assertion of China's ability to deal with resistance it might face, see "Where Does China Get Its Strategic Composure?" *Xinhua*, May 1, 2014 (《中国战略定力从何而来》, 新华网, 2014 年 5 月 1 日), http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-05/01/c_126453330.htm#715159-renren-1-53841-b3881c6395e54281d116813742f1643c.

31 See "Xi Jinping: Stick to a Comprehensive National Security Concept, Take the Road of National Security with Chinese Characteristics." On the longstanding concern about foreign influences, see also Zheng Wang, "How U.S. Ambassadors Influence China (but Not Americans)," *The Diplomat*, February 27, 2014, http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/how-u-s-ambassadors-influence-china-but-not-americans/.

information and the speed with which such information circulated. Moreover, in what is now broadly referred to as the challenge of cybersecurity, new threats have been added to the old fears about instability resulting from the penetration of politically subversive ideas. International cybercriminals can now target the financial system and threaten economic stability; foreign governments can employ cyberweapons and target classified information and the military's command and control jeopardizing the regime's ability to cope with external threats. Recognizing the scale and scope of these new challenges, Xi Jinping followed up his November 2013 announcement of a National Security Commission with a February 2014 announcement that he was also heading an Internet Security and Informatization Leading Small Group that would deal with the new challenges of cybersecurity – including interlinked threats and home and abroad.[32] But as with many of the other security issues they face, China's leaders today confront a tension between their interest in limiting the unwanted effects of connectivity in the cyber realm and their interest in enjoying its economic benefits essential for sustaining the modernization program at the heart of the CCP's strategy for maintaining internal stability.[33]

A more internationally active China's expanding economic and military capabilities also create new challenges abroad. China's success in acting on the admonition after 2000 to "go out" (*zou chuqu*) and pursue trade and investment around the world, has rapidly expanded the country's economic footprint – especially in Africa and Latin America. With an elevated economic profile, however, has come predictable political pushback from local and foreign competitors who worry about the economic and political implications of China's growing role.[34] And while China's ongoing military modernization is providing Beijing with more options if diplomatic efforts to resolve the country's regional territorial and maritime disputes fail, the price has been renewed concern among China's neighbors and the US that is prompting them to upgrade their own capabilities and security ties in ways that trouble Beijing.

China's new military capabilities have also empowered Beijing to play a larger role in international humanitarian rescue and relief efforts as well as missions to ensure the safety of the growing number of Chinese nationals working in dangerous and difficult locations outside the homeland. At first blush the ability to undertake "missions other

32 "Xi Jinping: Let's Build Our Big Internet Country into a Strong Internet Country," *Xinhua*, February 27, 2014 (《习近平：把我国从网络大国建设成为网络强国》，新华网，2014 年 2 月 27 日), http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-02/27/c_119538788.htm; "Central Leading Group for Internet Security and Informatization Established," *China Copyright and Media*, March 1, 2014, http://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/03/01/central-leading-group-for-internet-security-and-informatization-established/.

33 See also Edward Wong, "Chinese Official Urges Russia and Central Asian Allies to Control Internet," *New York Times*, April 18, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/19/world/asia/chinese-official-urges-russia-and-central-asian-allies-to-control-internet.html?ref=asia&_r=0.

34 See Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (1st paperback ed.), Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011; Wayne Arnold and Drew Hinshaw, "China Takes Wary Steps into New Africa Deals," *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2014, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303647204579545813194873656#printMode. French, "Into Africa: China's Wild Rush."

than war" (MOOTW) might seem to represent a benefit from military modernization without any offsetting cost.[35] But it poses novel challenges for Beijing insofar as it had raised domestic and foreign expectations about the range of tasks that China's military should be prepared to take on.[36]

Finally, China's more active international role that has come with its expanding economic and military capabilities and that has resulted in internal and external challenges placing unprecedented demands on China's leaders also has implications for the decision-making process to address security issues. Today's more complex challenges make it impractical to adopt the old approach of relying heavily on the choices of a single individual, the approach used in the era of Mao and Deng. In any case, over the past twenty-five years China's leadership has become decidedly more collective; no leader has had the personal clout of the CCP's revolutionary veterans.[37] Such collective leadership has facilitated delegating responsibilities in ways that are sensible for a modern country. Yet, collective leadership can also be problematic. If it results in delegation without effective coordination, collective leadership runs the risk of indecision or incoherence in crafting and implementing policy. Indeed, some have pointed to the drawbacks of collective leadership as an important part of the reason for sluggishness in China's national security decision making during crises and for international incidents triggered by actors operating without close supervision or clear, consistent direction from Beijing.[38]

In principle, creating new institutions can facilitate stronger centralized leadership to strike a better balance between delegation and coordination. Xi's role presiding over the newly created National Security Commission is designed to avoid the problems of indecision and incoherence that plague collective leadership at a time when one-man leadership is neither desirable nor practical. Heading the NSC, Xi is expected to combine personal oversight of key questions in security policy with delegation of the details to trusted colleagues. Yet, striking the right balance between leadership and delegation is easier to describe than to accomplish. Whether this institutional

35 M. Taylor Fravel, "Economic Growth, Regime Insecurity, and Military Strategy: Explaining the Rise of Noncombat Operations in China," in Avery Goldstein and Edward D. Mansfield, eds., *The Nexus of Economics, Security, and International Relations in East Asia*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012, pp. 177-210; "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces," Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, *Xinhua*, April, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm.

36 See Bruce Einhorn, "After Stingy Aid to Typhoon Victims, China Tries Damage Control," *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, November 20, 2013, http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-11-20/after-stingy-aid-to-typhoon-haiyan-victims-china-tries-damage-control; Kirk Semple and Eric Schmitt, "China's Actions in Hunt for Jet Are Seen as Hurting as Much as Helping," April 14, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/15/world/asia/chinas-efforts-in-hunt-for-plane-are-seen-as-hurting-more-than-helping.html.

37 See, for example, Angang Hu, *China's Collective Presidency*, Berlin: Springer, 2014; Yufan Hao, "Domestic Chinese Influences on U.S.-China Relations," in David L. Shambaugh, ed., *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013, pp. 125-148.

38 Thomas J. Christensen, "More Actors, Less Coordination? New Challenges for the Leaders of a Rising China," in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *China's Foreign Policy: Who Makes It, and How Is It Made?* Seoul, Republic of Korea: Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2012, pp. 19-35; Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China*, Solna, Sweden: SIPRI Policy Paper No. 26, 2010; Zhang Qingmin, "Understanding China's Diplomacy since the Eighteenth Party Congress."

redesign in China's national security decision-making process will have the intended result awaits the test of experience as Xi faces up to the interconnected and ever more complex external and internal security challenges that China now faces.

## Conclusion

This essay examined the evolution of China's security challenges and the strategies its leaders have adopted to deal with them. The larger picture in more than six decades since the PRC was founded in 1949 reflects a clear trend. Initially, China's leaders focused on relatively straightforward external threats to the country posed by the daunting military capabilities of their superpower adversaries and relied on a national security policy process dominated by a strong leader. Over time, especially after the Cold War, the security concerns for China's leaders expanded to include a wider array of more complex and less direct, foreign and domestic challenges.[39] And the policy process has increasingly been managed by a collective leadership grappling with new links between external and internal security concerns as well as the growing difficulty of effectively coordinating policy.

Thus, there are clearly distinctive new features in the security issues today's leaders face. Some, however, are new manifestations of longstanding concerns, especially insofar as China's leaders continue to see important links between external and internal security. Novel challenges at home and abroad are in part a consequence of successful modernization over the past three decades that has transformed China from a poor, developing country with a largely obsolete military into one of the globe's leading economic players possessing military capabilities commensurate with an emerging great power. But this success has also yielded myriad problems that are sure to test the ability of China's leaders to respond with strategic choices that ameliorate rather than aggravate their interconnected domestic and international security concerns.

**Reviewers:** Patrick Burton and WANG Wenhua

39 Zhang Qingmin, "Understanding China's Diplomacy since the Eighteenth Party Congress."