

China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping

Avery Goldstein

Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance

Xi Jinping emerged as the top leader of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2012. He took center stage on the heels of a perception that, since hosting the Olympics in 2008, China had become more assertive in its foreign policy.¹ In short order, Xi established a reputation as a leader who was even more willing than his immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao, to undertake bold action at home and abroad. This combination of a China that was increasingly assertive not only in its "near abroad," but around the world and a leader who was less reticent about acting on a vision for his country's expanding international role begs the question: Has Xi Jinping decisively broken with China's broadly cooperative approach to foreign policy that had been in place for most of the quarter century since the Cold War ended?

I address this question by examining China's grand strategy in the Xi Jinping era and suggest that Xi's approach, though distinctive, is not a fundamental departure from the grand strategy of his predecessors in the post-Cold

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1. See James J. Przystup and Phillip C. Saunders, "Asia Pacific," in R.D. Hooker Jr., ed., *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2016), pp. 171–201; Dan Blumenthal, "China: The Imperial Legacy," in Gary J. Schmitt, ed., *Rise of the Revisionists: Russia, China, and Iran* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2018), pp. 45–68; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (June–July 2018), pp. 7–64, doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470755; Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Stealth Superpower: How China Hid Its Global Ambitions," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (January–February 2019), pp. 31–39; Ashley J. Tellis, "Pursuing Global Reach: China's Not So Long March toward Preeminence," in Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia, 2019: China's Expanding Strategic Ambitions* (Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2019), pp. 3–46; and Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015). For a critique of Pillsbury's claims, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "Shaky Foundations: The 'Intellectual Architecture' of Trump's China Policy," *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April–May 2019), pp. 189–202, doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589096.

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War years—a strategy that aims to realize what since 2012 has been labeled the “Chinese dream” of “national rejuvenation.”² Since 1992, however, China’s leaders have adopted three different approaches to pursue this goal, reflecting changes in the country’s economic and military capabilities, the international context that Beijing faces, and the response to its foreign policy. In 1992, China adopted a stealthy and passive approach to rejuvenation identified with Deng Xiaoping’s admonition for China to “hide its capabilities and bide its time.”³ In 1996, China shifted to a more proactive approach, identified with the logic of “peaceful rise,” as it sought to reassure others that a stronger and wealthier China would not pose a threat to them.⁴ In 2012, after a half decade of strategic incoherence, during which China’s foreign policy behavior belied Beijing’s insistence that the leadership was still adhering to the peaceful rise approach, Xi recast China’s grand strategy of rejuvenation. His approach combines three elements. First, he has carried forward the earlier effort to reassure other states about the benign intentions of a rising China. Second, he has moved China from rhetoric to action in promoting reform of an international order that has facilitated China’s rise. This effort aims to revitalize that order and ensure that it better reflects the changing distribution of wealth and power among states in the twenty-first century. Third, in contrast with his predecessors, Xi has been less diffident and more consistent in displaying a determination to resolutely resist challenges to what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defines as the country’s core interests.

The article proceeds in four sections. The first section clarifies my use of the term “grand strategy” and then sketches the evolution of China’s grand strategy, especially the strategies of rejuvenation embraced since the early 1990s. The second examines the central features of Xi’s strategy in greater depth and presents evidence of each in China’s foreign policy since 2012. In so doing, I argue that Xi’s approach, though not a fundamental departure from the approaches of his predecessors, is a distinctive version of the grand strategy of rejuvenation that has been in place since 1992. The third critically evaluates the reaction by other countries to the implementation of Xi’s grand strategy combining reassurance, reform, and resistance. The conclusion considers the implications of Xi’s approach for China’s rise.

2. Zhao Yanan, “‘Chinese Dream’ Is Xi’s Vision,” *China Daily*, March 18, 2013, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013npc/2013-03/18/content_16315025.htm.

3. *Taoguang yanghui* captures the spirit of a twenty-four-character admonition credited to Deng Xiaoping. 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, doi.org/10.1142/S0219747211000136.

4. See Zheng Bijian, *China’s Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian, 1997–2005* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

The Evolution of China's Grand Strategy

Scholars disagree about how best to define “grand strategy.”⁵ I use the term to refer to the combination of political-diplomatic, economic, and military means that a state embraces to ensure its vital interests and pursue its goals—at minimum, its survival—in a potentially dangerous world. Grand strategy is, then, distinguished in part by its broad scope as an overarching vision about a regime’s top priorities and how they can be met by drawing on the various policy instruments at its disposal. A “strategy,” however, is not simply a collection of preferred policies; it is instead a vision informed by the recognition that the state’s policies must be implemented in an international context of interdependent choice, a setting where each state must anticipate the likely responses of others whose reactions can thwart or facilitate its efforts.⁶ Given the challenge of reconciling means and ends while also anticipating the reactions of others, one might expect that “grand strategy” must refer to a carefully crafted, detailed government plan. In some cases, it is true that one can identify clear statements that set forth the key elements of a country’s grand strategy. The U.S. government, for example, drafted an initial formalization of its Cold War grand strategy of containment in the document NSC (National Security Council)-68. China’s approach to its grand strategy during the Cold War was also well defined, mainly through the statements and writings of Mao Zedong. Often, however, a state’s grand strategy is not explicitly outlined. Sometimes it is only possible to identify a state’s grand strategy as it becomes evident over time that leaders’ foreign policy statements and choices reflect a distinct vision guiding them as they decide on the appropriateness of military, economic, or diplomatic initiatives.⁷

Scholars studying grand strategy also disagree about the influences that shape its origins and evolution—especially the relative importance of domes-

5. On the renewed debate about the concept, see Ionut C. Popescu, “Grand Strategy vs. Emergent Strategy in the Conduct of Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (April 2018), pp. 438–460, doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1288109; Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy,’” *Security Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January–March 2018), pp. 27–57, doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073; and Rebecca Friedman Lissner, “What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (November 2018), pp. 52–73, doi.org/10.26153/tsw/868.

6. Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 17–20. My definition of grand strategy is similar to, but broader than, Barry R. Posen’s classic statement in Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 7, 13.

7. See Popescu, “Grand Strategy vs. Emergent Strategy in the Conduct of Foreign Policy”; and Lissner, “What Is Grand Strategy?”

tic politics (competing interest groups and intellectual entrepreneurs) and international circumstances (relative power, the availability of useful allies, and the importance of each in an anarchic international system that encourages self-regarding behavior).⁸ My discussion of China's grand strategy places the main emphasis on the significance of international influences. Although these seem to have been of greatest importance for most of the history of the PRC, it is difficult to be sure about the role of domestic influences in shaping foreign policy because the extreme opacity of China's elite politics deprives analysts of essential evidence about deliberations. Confidence in claims about the role that individuals, coalitions, interests, or factions play in shaping China's foreign policy is undermined by the dearth of credible original documents comparable to the collections of declassified materials available for other countries. As such, cases where domestic interests have trumped international constraints are hard to identify. (Mao's insistence on pursuing an ideologically pure foreign policy for a few years during the 1960s, despite the risks it entailed for China's security, provides a significant, if rare, example.) But while the role of specific individuals and groups in shaping China's foreign policy remains speculative, the importance of two broad domestic influences relevant to China's grand strategy seems clear.

First, despite their differences, CCP leaders have long shared an ideological commitment to fulfilling the nationalist dream of rebuilding a prosperous and powerful China, a dream that had spawned revolutionary movements in early twentieth-century China and that became the basis for the party's victory in 1949.⁹ In foreign policy, the priority of nationalism over communist ideology has been revealed when the two have conflicted. On such occasions, ideational preferences have been subordinated to the necessity of ensuring China's independence and development (e.g., Mao's strategic pivot to the United States in 1969 and Deng's economic engagement with the capitalist world in 1978). Sec-

8. See Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 19–20; Steven E. Lobell, *The Challenge of Hegemony: Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Did the United States and the Allies Fail to Accommodate Japan in the 1920s and the 1930s?" in T.V. Paul, ed., *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 178–179.

9. The locus classicus of this claim is Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962). Recent scholarship, with access to new historical documents, has cast doubt on Johnson's facts and their implications for the CCP's victory. On the newer, competing views, see Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, "China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (March 2011), pp. 225–240, doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387.

ond, China's leaders since 1949 have also shared a strong institutional self-interest in preserving the CCP's leading role in an authoritarian polity that they deem necessary for realizing the nationalist goal to build a prosperous and powerful China. Agreement on this imperative has been repeatedly demonstrated by the CCP elite closing ranks when domestic crises have jeopardized the party's grip on power.¹⁰ Consequently, China's grand strategies from Mao to the present have all aimed to ensure not just the physical security of the country's population and territory, but also the regime's political security, safeguarding the one-party state headed by the CCP, a task that remains the regime's topmost vital, or "core," interest.¹¹

These two overarching domestic considerations have usually reinforced, rather than conflicted with, the most important international influences on China's grand strategy—changes in China's capabilities relative to other states and other states' reactions to China's international behavior. These influences shaped not only Beijing's Cold War strategy, which focused on the task of regime survival in the face of daunting foreign military threats, but also its shift to a post-Cold War strategy that has focused on realizing the more ambitious goal of national rejuvenation, as well as the modifications of this grand strategy.

As depicted in table 1, I argue that since 1949 China has had just two grand strategies (one focused primarily on coping with existential threats to the regime's survival, the other focused primarily on regaining China's standing as an advanced country and great power), but that it has embraced several different approaches to each. In making this argument, I draw a distinction between a change of grand strategy and a change in approach while a single grand strategy endures. This framing echoes that used by John Lewis Gaddis in his classic, *Strategies of Containment*.¹² Gaddis described the ways in which each administration from Harry Truman through Jimmy Carter differed, often in important ways, in its interpretation and practice of containment, even as it re-

10. The emphasis on internal party unity over policy preferences was evident during the crises provoked by the Hundred Flowers Movement (June 1957), the Great Leap Forward (August 1959), the Cultural Revolution (September 1969), and the Tiananmen Square demonstrations (June 1989).

11. See State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2019), pp. 6–7; Caitlin Campbell et al., "China's 'Core Interests' and the East China Sea" (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 2013), p. 3, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China's%20Core%20Interests%20and%20the%20East%20China%20Sea.pdf>; and Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior, Part One: On 'Core Interests,'" *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 34 (Winter 2011), pp. 1–25. See also Information Office of the State Council, "China's Peaceful Development" (Beijing: People's Republic of China, September 2011), http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm.

12. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Table 1. China's Grand Strategies, 1949–Present

Grand Strategies of Survival (1949–89) ^a Enduring Purpose—Cope with Existential Threats to the Regime	
Three Approaches	How Each Approach Serves the Strategy of Survival
Sino-Soviet alliance (Mao Zedong)	gain military backing/economic assistance
Sino-U.S. alignment (Mao)	gain military backing
Sino-U.S. alignment (Deng Xiaoping)	gain military backing/economic cooperation
Grand Strategies of Rejuvenation (1992–present) ^b Enduring Purpose—Regain Standing as an Advanced Country, Great Power	
Three Approaches	How Each Approach Serves the Strategy of Rejuvenation
hide and bide (Deng Xiaoping)	build wealth and power for China's rise (lay low and join existing order)
peaceful rise (Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao ^c)	reduce concerns about China's rise (reassure and adapt to existing order)
Chinese dream (Xi Jinping)	shape world for China's rise (reassure, reform existing order, and resist)

^aDuring the early to mid-1960s, Mao thought that foreign military threats no longer demanded top priority. He instead pursued a foreign policy that promoted his revolutionary socialist vision. When the danger of departing from China's grand strategy of survival was exposed by a sharply increased Soviet military threat in 1969, however, he subordinated preference to necessity and reverted to a strategy of survival.

^bFrom 1989 to 1992, the Chinese Communist Party focused on reasserting its grip on political power at home after suppressing popular protests in June 1989 and as it was alarmed by the collapse of communist regimes elsewhere.

^cDuring Hu Jintao's second five-year term, China's policies undercut rather than served the peaceful rise grand strategy.

mained the conceptual lodestone of U.S. grand strategy.¹³ The end of the Cold War transformed the international system, rendered the enduring U.S. grand strategy of containment irrelevant, and required a new approach that was more than just another variation on the old theme.¹⁴ The end of the Cold War had similarly dramatic implications for China.

13. Ibid. Gaddis closely compares and contrasts the distinctive approaches reflected in Eisenhower's "New Look," Kennedy's "flexible response," and Nixon's "détente."

14. See Patrick Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop," *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/us-strategy-plan-calls-for-insuring-no-rivals-develop.html>. For contributions to the ensuing debates about a new strategy, see Michael E. Brown et al., *America's Strategic Choices*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States'

CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL, 1949–89

To underscore the fundamental change in China's grand strategy that took place after the Cold War, it is useful to note the much different grand strategy on which the ruling CCP relied for most of its first four decades. Facing serious external military threats—first from the United States and later from the Soviet Union—China embraced a grand strategy that prioritized existential, or survival, concerns. Because it was relatively poor and weak compared with these adversaries, the overriding need to ensure regime survival constrained Beijing to seek support from others. And since the threat China faced was from a superpower adversary, only a superpower partner could provide an effective counter. In succession, China adopted three variations of its Cold War grand strategy of survival. The first entailed allying with the Soviet Union. The other two entailed alignment with the United States. Under Mao, alignment was limited to narrowly circumscribed strategic cooperation against the Soviet military threat. Under Deng Xiaoping, the alignment added broader engagement with the United States and the rest of the capitalist world to address the concern that economic stagnation that had resulted from self-isolation under Mao, and not just the Soviet military, posed a threat to the regime's viability.

With Sino-Soviet rapprochement in the spring of 1989 bringing the Cold War in Asia to an end, Beijing was no longer constrained to prioritize foreign military threats. The opportunity for a new grand strategy had arrived, but the end of the Cold War also coincided with a major domestic political challenge to the CCP that became its principal concern for nearly three years. In June 1989, the party confronted massive demonstrations demanding liberalizing political change. China's leaders responded with a brutal military crackdown and a period during which they focused on reasserting their grip on power. Not until 1992, when the regime returned to fully participating in international affairs, could it seize the opportunity of a transformed global landscape to shift its grand strategic priority from coping with foreign military threats to pursuing the long-standing goal of Chinese nationalists since the late nineteenth century: restoring the country to its rightful place as one of the world's most advanced countries and a respected great power on the world stage.¹⁵ Since

Unipolar Moment," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 7–41, doi.org/10.1162/isec.2006.31.2.7; Mac Thornberry and Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., "Preserving Primacy: A Defense Strategy for the New Administration," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 5 (September–October 2016), pp. 26–35; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012/13), pp. 7–51, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00107; and Stephen M. Walt, "The End of Hubris: And the New Age of American Restraint," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (May–June 2019), pp. 26–35.

15. See Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New

then, as noted above, Beijing has adopted three approaches to accomplish this task of rejuvenation.

Before discussing these strategies of rejuvenation, however, it is necessary to clarify the claim that China's concerns about dire foreign military threats were no longer the top priority for its grand strategy. It would be incorrect to say that Beijing no longer worried about the potentially serious military challenge others, especially the sole surviving superpower, the United States, could pose after 1990. Beijing's relations with Washington had sharply deteriorated in the wake of the 1989 crackdown, and China remained much weaker than the United States. Moreover, if the United States mounted a threat against China, the demise of the Soviet Union meant that Beijing no longer had the option of turning to another superpower as a counterweight. But by the 1990s, leaning on a powerful ally was no longer China's only realistic choice. China's improved, if still lagging, military capabilities were finally providing it with self-reliant options it did not have during the Cold War.

First, and most obviously, China could rely on asymmetric nuclear deterrence. By the 1990s, Beijing commanded a small, partially vulnerable nuclear arsenal sufficient to create the fear that an attack on China might trigger horrifying retaliatory punishment.¹⁶ This deterrent served as the ultimate security guarantee, but only against the most extreme and least likely foreign military challenges the regime faced. To discourage a range of more plausible challenges to China's vital interests in East Asia, Beijing relied on a second asymmetric strategy—conventional deterrence. In the 1990s, China was deploying more advanced air, naval, and missile forces that confronted even much stronger adversaries with the prospect of suffering significant losses of personnel and equipment if they chose to engage China in combat.¹⁷ More-

Era," speech at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, *Xinhuanet*, October 18, 2017, p. 11, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping%27s_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

16. See Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Avery Goldstein, "The End of the Beginning: China and the Consolidation of the Nuclear Revolution," in Michael D. Gordin and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Age of Hiroshima* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 221–242.

17. As Thomas J. Christensen put it, China could "pose problems without catching up." See Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 5–40, doi.org/10.1162/01622880151091880. In the twenty-first century, an increasingly capable China can pose even greater problems *while* catching up. On China's increasingly lethal weaponry, at first purchased mainly from Russia, see Avery Goldstein, "Great Expectations: Interpreting China's Arrival," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 36–73, doi.org/10.2307/2539357; and David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

over, the dissuasive effect of such conventional deterrence was augmented by the shadow of nuclear weapons, whose use could result from unanticipated escalation during military conflict with China.¹⁸

CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGIES OF REJUVENATION, 1992–PRESENT

Having a military that could deter serious threats to vital interests provided a new way to address the survival concerns that had shaped China's Cold War grand strategy. Yet, a regime that was turning its attention to the goal of national rejuvenation needed an approach that would enable China not just to survive, but to thrive under CCP leadership as it transformed the PRC from one of the world's most impressive developing countries into a first-rank great power.

DENG'S STRATEGY OF HIDING AND BIDDING, 1992–95. China's initial grand strategy after the Cold War was summed up in Deng Xiaoping's call for maintaining caution, restraint, and a low profile. The essence of this approach was captured in four characters—*taoguang yanghui*.¹⁹ Usually translated as “hide your capabilities and bide your time,” its logic was rooted in the belief that maintaining a low profile would lead others to accommodate, rather than oppose, a rising China's integration with the international economic order, which was essential if the regime was to increase the country's wealth and, eventually, its power. Why would other states be so accommodating? To Beijing, the answer was obvious: everyone understood that China was too far behind economically and militarily for it to pose much of a challenge, let alone a threat, to any major power's interests. Beijing's view was understandable. In 1992, China's gross domestic product was still only the world's tenth largest—a distant tenth, a mere 6.6 percent the size of the United States' GDP.²⁰ And despite the progress in modernization after Mao's death, China's military was far from a modern, combat-ready force.²¹ Under such circumstances, it was reasonable

18. Avery Goldstein, “First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 49–89, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00114; and Caitlin Talmadge, “Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States,” *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Spring 2017), pp. 50–92, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00274.

19. See Chen and Wang, “Lying Low No More?”; and M. Taylor Fravel, “Revising Deng's Foreign Policy,” *Diplomat*, January 17, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/01/revising-dengs-foreign-policy-2/>.

20. See “GDP by Country: Statistics from the World Bank, 1960–2016” (Washington, D.C.: Knoema, n.d.), <https://knoema.com/mhrzolg/gdp-by-country-statistics-from-the-world-bank-1960-2016>.

21. Dennis J. Blasko, a U.S. expert on the People's Liberation Army, rated it behind the Iraqi army that the United States had easily defeated in the 1990–91 Gulf War. See Blasko, “Better Late Than Never: Non-Equipment Aspects of PLA Ground Force Modernization,” in C. Dennison Lane, Mark Weisenbloom, and Dimon Liu, eds., *Chinese Military Modernization* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1996), p. 141.

to expect that other countries would focus on the absolute gains they could derive from trade with and investment in China, rather than on fanciful concerns that relative gains accruing to China might catalyze its rise to the position of an economic and military competitor.

Yet, within just a few years, as its economic growth accelerated, China began flexing its military muscles, sparking worries among its neighbors and, more importantly, in the United States. In 1994, Beijing began to assert its interests in ways that seemed inconsistent with the grand strategy outlined by Deng (a pattern that would resurface after 2008), triggering an international reaction that prompted China's leaders to change their approach to rejuvenation. On both occasions (the mid-1990s and the late 2000s), the CCP perceived a challenge to core interests that demanded a response, believing that failing to act would jeopardize its nationalist credentials. And on both occasions, while Beijing defined its actions as defensive, others saw them as offensive and a worrisome sign of aggressive intentions—reflecting the sort of reinforcing mutual concerns often depicted in the literature about security dilemmas.²²

By 1994, after several years during which the other major claimants in the Spratly Islands (especially the Philippines and Vietnam) had been occupying features and exploiting resources in ways that might strengthen their positions, China sensed that the others were gaining an advantage. Beijing decided to occupy and then, in 1995, to fortify Mischief Reef to forestall further erosion of its position—a step that particularly alarmed the Philippines, a U.S. ally.²³ More significantly, by 1995, China also perceived a growing challenge to its claim that Taiwan is a part of China. Beijing saw U.S. ties to the island (including arms sales) deepening, and it was concerned that the leading candidate for president in the March 1996 elections, Lee Teng-hui, was rebuffing renewed overtures for resuming cross-strait negotiations about Taiwan's status. Beijing's concerns about Lee were further heightened when President Bill Clinton's administration reneged on assurances that it had given to China and issued a visa that permitted Lee to visit his alma mater, Cornell University, where, in May 1995, he delivered a provocative speech about Taiwan's international role. The CCP had made China's sovereignty over Taiwan a salient do-

22. See, for example, John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (January 1950), pp. 157–180, doi.org/10.2307/2009187; and Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214, doi.org/10.2307/2009958.

23. See M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 296–297. See also Allen S. Whiting, "ASEAN Eyes China: The Security Dimension," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (April 1997), pp. 299–322, doi.org/10.2307/2645650; and Stanley E. Meyer, "Incident at Mischief Reef: Implications for the Philippines, China, and the United States" (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, January 1996).

mestic political issue ever since 1950, when the United States militarily intervened to protect the Kuomintang, which had retreated to the island. For decades (and in contrast to its once relatively obscure claims in the South China Sea), the CCP had loudly proclaimed that reunification was a core interest; the CCP could not forsake this objective without jeopardizing its nationalist bona fides. Despite its rather limited military capabilities to transform the status quo, and to head off a further weakening of its position, Beijing decided to signal that it was prepared to run serious risks of conflict if a drift toward Taiwan independence unfolded. Beginning in July 1995, China conducted a series of military exercises that included dramatic missile launches in the Taiwan Strait designed to send the message to voters in the island's 1996 presidential elections (and to the United States) that Beijing would not tolerate moves challenging its claim to Taiwan.²⁴ However much Beijing thought that its actions were justifiable to defend the status quo, that is not how they were interpreted in the region and, more importantly, in the United States, where they were deemed aggressive.²⁵

The steps that Beijing felt compelled to take during 1995–96 in response to the developing dangers it saw in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait provoked apprehension abroad about the risks that a more assertive China's increasing capabilities could pose. The ensuing reaction created a major problem for Beijing. The United States and its allies reoriented Cold War alliances from their old mission (countering Soviet power) to one tacitly preparing for the potential threat from a rising China.²⁶ If this shift presaged a sharp deterioration in the relatively benign environment in which China's leaders had planned to focus on modernization, it might require them to return to a grand strategy that prioritized coping with immediate security threats rather than investing in the protracted effort to build China into one of the world's leading economic and military powers. In short, by 1996, the basis for Deng's low-profile approach to the strategy of rejuvenation was collapsing, as others were already anticipating future increases in China's relative capabilities and acting on their awakened worries about the implications of a stronger China for their interests in the region.

THE JIANG-HU STRATEGY: PEACEFUL RISE, 1996–2008. Taking stock of China's troubling situation, the CCP leadership began to fashion policies that reflected

24. 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, doi.org/10.1162/016228800560462.

25. See especially Thomas J. Christensen, "The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Autumn 2002), pp. 7–21, doi.org/10.1162/016366002760252509.

26. Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, pp. 89–90, 102–111.

a new approach to the grand strategy of rejuvenation. The approach embraced by Deng's successor as preeminent leader, Jiang Zemin, was more proactive and visible. It was rooted in the recognition that although China might not yet be very wealthy or very strong, the tensions that emerged after 1994 had demonstrated that China was both wealthy enough and strong enough to alarm others. Consequently, Beijing needed to adopt policies and take actions that would counter claims of a "China threat" and instead nurture confidence that a more capable China would remain a responsible and cooperative international actor. It did so by embracing an approach to rejuvenation eventually labeled "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development."²⁷ Beijing's new policies aimed to demonstrate the benefits available to other states if they embraced, rather than attempted to block, China's rise: shared gains from trade and investment for economic partners and the stabilizing role Beijing could play during international economic crises; the contribution China could make in addressing prominent international concerns about nuclear proliferation, terrorism, the environment, and public health; and deepening multilateral cooperation between China and its East Asian neighbors.²⁸ The result of this turn in the grand strategy of rejuvenation was that CCP leaders would show that they were adapting to, rather than challenging, the existing international order. Doing so aimed to foster a peaceful, decades-long "period of strategic opportunity" during which China could rise without stoking the fears that had triggered resistance and pushback of the sort it encountered in the mid-1990s.²⁹

The new approach worked. Through more active participation in multilateral organizations and high-level diplomacy to establish bilateral partnerships with major powers around the world, China dampened nascent fears about its rise. But then, oddly, Beijing seemed to deviate from its new blueprint for the

27. China officially used the latter term because it avoided language that could be misconstrued as overly ambitious. See Evan S. Medeiros, "China Debates Its 'Peaceful Rise Strategy,'" *YaleGlobal Online*, June 22, 2004, <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/china-debates-its-peaceful-rise-strategy>; Zheng, *China's Peaceful Rise*; and Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, pp. 191–192.

28. Key Chinese measures included (1) abstaining from the competitive currency devaluations that aggravated the 1997 Asian financial crisis; (2) joining, and eventually hosting, multilateral efforts to prevent North Korea from developing and deploying nuclear weapons; (3) negotiating a free-trade agreement with ASEAN that offered especially generous terms to China's smaller neighbors that included Beijing implementing the agreement's provisions even before the agreement came into effect; and (4) finally resolving disagreements with the United States and others about the terms for China's long-delayed accession to the World Trade Organization, including steps that required painful adjustments in China's domestic economy.

29. "Strategic Opportunities: This Is the Fourth Opportunity in Modern History," *Wen Wei Po*, March 13, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service—China, WNC, doc. no. 0hbwldy0201wth. See also Ren Zhongping, "Zaigan yige ershi nian! Lun woguo gaige fazhan de guanjian shiqi" [Work hard for another twenty years! On a critical period in our country's reform and development], *Renmin Ribao*, July 12, 2004.

strategy of rejuvenation. After 2008, observers discerned a change in China's behavior in East Asia that was inconsistent with its emphasis since the mid-1990s on fostering cooperation. Most notably, China again began more actively to challenge neighbors with which it had maritime territorial disputes in the East China and South China Seas.

What explains China's ostensible departure from its emphasis on reassuring others about its peaceful rise? Some observers have speculated that leaders in Beijing saw an international balance of power shifting in China's favor more rapidly than expected, tempting it to seize an early opportunity to advance its interests. China's economic growth had dramatically accelerated after the country more fully integrated with the global economy during the first decade of the twenty-first century. At the same time, its increasing investments in military modernization were yielding significantly improved capabilities. Meanwhile, the United States was economically and militarily overburdened by its protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and, after 2007, was struggling with the effects of the Great Recession.³⁰

Beijing rejected the idea that it was newly assertive and insisted that it still adhered to the strategy of peaceful rise.³¹ China's protests notwithstanding, as in the mid-1990s, neighboring countries and the United States considered its actions disturbingly aggressive. In contrast with the mid-1990s, however, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, China's greater economic and military clout empowered Beijing to take more dramatic action in defense of its claims, and its more forceful measures provoked even greater alarm. Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam all cast a warier eye on China. Each responded by seeking to bolster ties with the United States. The Barack Obama administration was receptive and, through its announced

30. See Bonnie S. Glaser and Lyle Morris, "Chinese Perceptions of U.S. Decline and Power," *China Brief*, Vol. 9, No. 14 (July 2009), pp. 1–6; and Cui Liru, "Toward a Multipolar Pattern: Challenges in a Transitional Stage," *China U.S. Focus*, April 14, 2014, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/toward-a-multipolar-pattern-challenges-in-a-transitional-stage>. See also "GDP (current US\$)—China" (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, n.d.), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>; and Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2015).

31. For a review of the evidence, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 7–48, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00115. See also 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; Andrew Scobell and Scott W. Harold, "An 'Assertive' China? Insights from Interviews," *Asian Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May 2013), pp. 111–131, doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2013.795549; International Crisis Group, "Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)," *Asia Report No. 223* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 2012); and International Crisis Group, "Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses," *Asia Report No. 229* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 2012).

“strategic rebalance” or “pivot,” began to emphasize the importance of the Asia-Pacific for U.S. interests and reiterated the United States’ determination to preserve the leading economic and security role the country had long played in the region.³² The concern about a threat from a powerful China was based on thinking not about a future possibility, but about a current reality. Consequently, actions that China saw as defensive measures to uphold long-standing vital interests triggered an even sharper reaction from its neighbors and the United States, driving a more acute security dilemma than the incipient one that had plagued regional relations between 1994 and 1996. The vigorous response to China’s actions again prompted leaders in Beijing to rethink and modify their grand strategy of rejuvenation.

As in the mid-1990s, during the last years under Jiang’s successor, Hu Jintao, the CCP faced the danger that key regional actors, which were vital partners for ongoing economic development, would unite with the world’s sole superpower in a coalition to counter what they saw as the emerging threat from a rising China.³³ To be sure, the ever improving nuclear and conventional deterrents on which a richer and more powerful China could lean to ensure its security against foreign military threats limited the severity of the danger Beijing faced. But if that was the good news for the leaders who would come to power with Xi Jinping in 2012, the bad news was that rejuvenation, not just regime survival, was the benchmark of strategic success that the CCP had set for itself since the early 1990s. To more effectively pursue that goal, Xi would refocus the regime on this central task and put his own stamp on China’s post-Cold War grand strategy.

XI JINPING’S STRATEGY: REASSURE, REFORM, AND RESIST (2013–). Xi’s approach to the grand strategy of rejuvenation rested on the following assessment. China was already strong enough that other countries were going to pay close attention to its actions. Consequently, it could not go back to Deng’s low-profile approach of “hiding capabilities and biding time.”³⁴ Nor could China

32. See Hillary Rodham Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, pp. 56–63; and Avery Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia,” in David Shambaugh, ed., *Tangled Titans: The United States and China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), pp. 263–291.

33. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin’s Regular Press Conference” (Washington, D.C.: Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States, November 17, 2011), <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t879769.htm>; and Chris Buckley, “China Looks Across Asia and Sees New Threats,” Reuters, November 10, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-asia/analysis-china-looks-across-asia-and-sees-new-threats-idUSTRE7A91CY20111110>.

34. In a vivid metaphor, the *People’s Daily* noted that China had become too big and consequential to avoid attention, “just as it would be impossible for an elephant to hide behind a sapling.” See Ren Ping, “Meiguo tiaoshi maoyizhan de shizhi shi shenme?” [What is the essence of the trade war America provoked?], *Renminwang*, August 10, 2018, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0809/>

simply adhere to the Jiang-Hu peaceful-rise approach. Events from 2009 to 2012 had made it much more difficult, if not impossible, to convince others that China's intentions would remain benign as the country grew wealthier and more powerful.

Xi instead signaled a different, even more activist approach to rejuvenation, one in which a more capable China faces up to the challenges of coping with a less forgiving security environment.³⁵ Xi's approach does not completely forsake the effort to reassure potential rivals and adversaries that was the centerpiece of China's foreign policy from 1996 to 2008, but it anticipates that others will be skeptical and that cooperation will sometimes prove unworkable. When reassurance fails and cooperation is not possible, his approach calls for drawing on China's increasing wealth and power to ensure the country's interests.³⁶ The approach also envisions China not simply adapting to, but instead more actively shaping, the world in which it is rising.

Xi's modification of the strategy of rejuvenation is defined by its distinctive combination of three efforts, each with roots in the approaches undertaken by his post-Deng predecessors. First, China continues to reassure other countries. When possible, it seeks both to nurture their confidence that, even as China's economic and military power continues to grow, it will not pose a threat, and to convince them that China's rise presents an opportunity for mutual benefit. In this respect, Xi's strategy attempts to salvage the key feature of China's approach from 1996 to 2008.³⁷

Second, a richer and more powerful China presses for reform of the international system. It seeks to modify that system so that it better reflects the current

c1002-30220096.html. On earlier debate under Jiang and Hu about the continued relevance of Deng's "hide and bide" dictum, see Yan Xuetong, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (June 2014), pp. 153–184, doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pou027.

35. Zhang Qingmin, "Lijie shibada yilai de Zhongguo waijiao" [Understanding China's diplomacy since the eighteenth Party Congress], *Waijiao Guancha* [Foreign affairs observer], April 17, 2014, <http://www.faobserver.com/Newsinfo.aspx?id=9875>; "Xi Jinping: Jianchi zongti guojia anquanguan, zou Zhongguo tese guojia anquan daolu" [Xi Jinping: Stick to a comprehensive national security concept, take the road of national security with Chinese characteristics], *Xinhuanet*, April 15, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-04/15/c_1110253910.htm; Damien Ma, "The Year the Training Wheels Came Off China," *Foreign Policy*, December 31, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/31/the-year-the-training-wheels-came-off-china-economy-reforms-gdp/>; and Zheng Wang, "China's Alternative Diplomacy," *Diplomat*, January 30, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/chinas-alternative-diplomacy/>.

36. See "Zhongguo zhanlüe dingli conghe er lai?" [Where does China get its strategic composition?], *Xinhuanet*, May 1, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-05/01/c_126453330.htm#715159-renren-1-53841-b3881c6395e54281d116813742f1643c.

37. See also Jian Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?" *Global Change, Peace & Security*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (February 2015), pp. 5–19, doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2015.993958.

realities and challenges of a world quite different from the one that prevailed when its institutions were established under the leadership of a preponderant United States in the second half of the twentieth century. As it promotes reforms, Beijing emphasizes that it does not seek to overthrow the existing global order, but instead to make changes necessary to preserve a system from which it and others have benefited and hope to continue benefiting. Although this reformist impulse predates Xi, it had largely been a rhetorical flourish in discussions about global governance. Under Xi, it has become a central feature of China's foreign policy.³⁸

Third, China relies on its growing power to more resolutely resist challenges to core interests as the CCP has defined them. Resisting threats to interests that the CCP has repeatedly portrayed as vital reflects, in part, the usual determination of every government to defend a country's security against foreign threats. But in this case, it also reflects a distinctive concern—the need to demonstrate to a more demanding Chinese public and relevant party elites that the current CCP leaders are up to the task of tapping China's now greater capabilities to ensure that the country is treated as a respected power in the international system. Although this consideration also played a role in China's foreign policy during the Jiang and especially the Hu administrations, Xi has acted on its imperatives more openly, consistently, and with a vigor absent under his predecessors.³⁹

Xi's Grand Strategy of Rejuvenation

This section examines China's significant foreign policy initiatives that have reflected each of the three elements of Xi's approach to the strategy of rejuvenation.

38. Ibid., p. 15. See also Guo Jiping, "Shi bu wo dai; zhizheng zhaoxi" [Time and tide wait for no man; seize the moment], *Renmin Ribao*, December 31, 2019, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1231/c1003-31529205.html>. On previous Chinese calls for reform of the international order, see Bonnie S. Glaser and Benjamin Dooley, "China's 11th Ambassadorial Conference Signals Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy," *China Brief*, Vol. 9, No. 22 (November 2009), pp. 1–7; Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views on Global Governance since 2008–9: Not Much New," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 49 (March 2016), pp. 1–13; James F. Paradise, "China's Quest for Global Economic Governance Reform," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 2019), pp. 471–493, doi.org/10.1007/s11366-019-09610-5; and James F. Paradise, "The Role of 'Parallel Institutions' in China's Growing Participation in Global Economic Governance," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 2016), pp. 149–175, doi.org/10.1007/s11366-016-9401-7. On the distinctiveness of Xi's approach, see Liza Tobin, "Xi's Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies," *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (November 2018), pp. 154–166, doi.org/10.26153/tsw/863.

39. See Rush Doshi, "Hu's to Blame for China's Foreign Assertiveness?" *Brookings*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hus-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>; and Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," p. 9.

REASSURANCE: LEGACY OF PEACEFUL RISE

Once he assumed the top posts as leader of the party, military, and state in 2012–13, Xi refashioned China's foreign policy. He began with a diplomatic barrage designed to mitigate the negative reaction that China's international behavior had been provoking, especially in East Asia and the United States, during Hu's last years in office.⁴⁰

First, Xi tried to allay the growing concern in the United States that a rising China would challenge it as the world's dominant power, driving the kind of intense struggle that had plagued power transitions in the past.⁴¹ To this end, at a quickly arranged informal summit meeting in June 2013, Xi sought to persuade President Obama and his advisers that the two countries should forge a "new type great power relationship" of mutual respect and reassurance that would enable them to avoid falling into the "Thucydides trap."⁴²

Second, at an October 2013 meeting in Indonesia and at a work conference in Beijing, Xi delivered major speeches on "peripheral diplomacy," which called for an improvement in China's handling of its relations with regional neighbors to dispel their misgivings about China's rise.⁴³ He followed this in November 2014 with an address to an important Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs that struck a similarly reassuring and conciliatory tone.⁴⁴ In December 2014, Vice-Premier Wang Yang carried forward this theme when he delivered remarks in Chicago that sought to reassure the international community, in general, and the United States, in particular, that China

40. See Zhang, "Lijie shibada yilai de zhongguo waijiao."

41. On the importance of power transitions and on their relevance China's rise, see A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Ronald L. Tammen, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000); Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Jack S. Levy, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 11–33.

42. On "the trap," see Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017). For contrasting perspectives, see Kori Schake, "The Summer of Misreading Thucydides," *Atlantic*, July 18, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/amp/article/533859/>; Arthur Waldron, "There Is No Thucydides Trap," *SupChina*, June 12, 2017, <https://supchina.com/2017/06/12/no-thucydides-trap/>; and Lawrence Freedman, "Review of *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*" *PRISM*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (September 2017), pp. 175–178, www.jstor.org/stable/26470508.

43. Carl Thayer, "China's New Regional Security Treaty with ASEAN," *Diplomat*, October 16, 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/10/chinas-new-regional-security-treaty-with-asean/>; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Xi Jinping: Let the Sense of Community of Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighbouring Countries" (Beijing: People's Republic of China, October 25, 2013), http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml.

44. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing" (Beijing: People's Republic of China, November 29, 2014), http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

had no intention of challenging American leadership or threatening the international economic institutions that U.S. leadership had fostered since the middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁵

Third, also in October 2013, Xi launched the initiative to found the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Jin Liqun, China's point man in this project who became the bank's first president, was careful to emphasize that the AIIB would not challenge but rather supplement and cooperate with existing multilateral development institutions such as the Asian Development Bank.⁴⁶ Presenting China's effort as an answer to the decade-old call from the United States for Beijing to become a "responsible stakeholder," Jin's reassurances proved persuasive to many, though not the United States. Over the next two years, the AIIB recruited a wide array of countries, including close U.S. allies, that decided to sign on as founding members despite Washington's advice they not join.

Fourth, under Xi's leadership Beijing embraced a position on climate change that bolstered the perception of China as a responsible actor willing to cooperate with others on addressing this challenge for global governance. The effort culminated in the September 2016 meetings of the Group of Twenty in Hangzhou, where Presidents Xi and Obama announced that they had resolved their remaining differences and that both countries would enter the Paris agreement on climate change. The meeting capped a shift in China's stance evident since at least 2015. Beijing's more forthcoming posture, though also motivated by growing domestic discontent with the country's toxic air quality, was crucial for international efforts to secure the agreement of other large polluters (especially India) that worried that tightened environmental regulations would adversely affect economic development.⁴⁷ Notably, China's reassuring

45. Wang Yang, "Zhong mei jingji huoban zhilu yuezou yuekuanguang—Wang Yang Fuzongli zai zhong mei shangye guanxi luntanshang de zhuzhi yanjiang" [The path of China-U.S. economic partnership grows ever wider: Vice-Premier Wang Yang's keynote speech at the forum on China-U.S. business relations] (Beijing: Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China, December 22, 2014), <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ae/ai/201412/20141200840915.shtml>; "Xi Seeks New Outlook on Foreign Affairs," *China.org.cn*, November 30, 2014, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2014-11/30/content_34188844.htm; and Dingding Chen, "Relax, China Won't Challenge U.S. Hegemony," *Diplomat*, January 14, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/relax-china-wont-challenge-us-hegemony/>. See also Ellen L. Frost, "In Asia, U.S. Economic Leadership Is Under Attack," *National Interest*, January 8, 2015, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/asia-us-economic-leadership-under-attack-11994>.

46. See Natalie Lichtenstein, *A Comparative Guide to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

47. Carol E. Lee and William Mauldin, "U.S., China Agree on Implementing Paris Climate-Change Pact," *Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-china-agree-on-implementing-paris-climate-change-pact-1472896645>; and Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015), pp. 138–150, 279–287.

cooperation under Xi contrasted with its widely criticized obstructionism at the Copenhagen climate change meetings in 2009, which had been viewed as a manifestation of Beijing's narrowly self-interested assertiveness during Hu's final years in office.⁴⁸

Yet, Xi's various efforts to restore China's reputation as a responsible actor did not eliminate international concerns, especially those of its neighbors and the United States, that had been festering since 2009. Those who believed that their confidence in China's reassuring posture from 1996 to 2008 had been exposed as naïve were more skeptical the second time around. The limited payoff for China was reflected most clearly in the U.S. reaction. American skepticism led the Obama administration to eschew Xi's 2013 proposal to define bilateral ties as a "new type great power relationship" and to shun the AIIB.⁴⁹ Even the reputational payoff from China's cooperation on climate change had its limits, as skeptics awaited results while noting that China was not yet significantly reducing the country's heavy reliance on coal.

REFORM: RESHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

In contrast with China's emphasis through 2008 on simply joining and adapting to the existing international order, under Xi, Beijing has pushed for its reform. This effort was part of an explicit move away from Deng's admonition to keep a low profile that had only been tacitly abandoned under Jiang and Hu. And unlike his predecessors' modest efforts to increase China's voice within existing international institutions (such as voting shares in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to reflect China's increased economic heft), Xi sought a leading role for China in reshaping them.⁵⁰

The reformist emphasis that Xi added to the grand strategy of rejuvenation

48. Office of the Press Secretary, "U.S.-China Joint Presidential Statement on Climate Change" (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 25, 2015), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/us-china-joint-presidential-statement-climate-change>; Yanzhong Huang, "China's New Rhetoric at COP21," *Council on Foreign Relations* blog, December 3, 2015, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/yanzhong-huang-chinas-new-rhetoric-cop21>; and Marina Kaneti, "China's Climate Diplomacy 2.0," *Diplomat*, January 2, 2020, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/01/chinas-climate-diplomacy-2-0/>.

49. Qi Hao, "China Debates the 'New Type of Great Power Relations,'" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter 2015), pp. 349–370, doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pov012; Dingding Chen, "Defining a 'New Type of Major Power Relations,'" *Diplomat*, November 8, 2014, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2014/11/defining-a-new-type-of-major-power-relations/>; and Cheng Li and Lucy Xu, "Chinese Enthusiasm and American Cynicism over the 'New Type of Great Power Relations,'" December 4, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/chinese-enthusiasm-and-american-cynicism-over-the-new-type-of-great-power-relations/>.

50. See "IMF Reforms Clear Last Hurdle with U.S. Adoption," *BBC News*, December 19, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-35141683>; and Daniel Moss, "At World Bank, China Moves to the Grown-Up Table," *Bloomberg*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-05-06/at-world-bank-china-moves-to-the-grown-up-table>.

became a regular theme in his speeches before domestic and international audiences.⁵¹ In Beijing, chairing a work conference on national security, Xi underscored the meaning and significance of his reform agenda. Unlike the period of hiding and biding during which China had merely sought to adapt to the existing international order, he indicated that the time had come for China not only to participate more in international affairs and play a constructive role in the international system from which it had benefited, but also to guide its evolution: "Reforming and improving the current international system do not mean completely replacing it, but rather advancing it in a direction that is more just and reasonable."⁵² Xi's message was that China is neither a passive status quo power satisfied simply to join the current international order, nor a disruptive revisionist power out to destroy or overthrow it. It is instead a reformist power seeking changes to improve a global order he believes is worth saving—an order that will continue to facilitate China's rejuvenation.⁵³

Xi's advocacy for reform of the global order achieved its greatest international visibility with his January 17, 2017, speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, when he became the first of China's leaders to attend this well-publicized annual gathering. The speech emphasized China's support for the fundamentals of an open economic order and asserted that Beijing was prepared to meet the challenges of contributing to the shared prosperity that order made possible. Xi also noted, however, that globalization had

51. See "Xi Stresses Urgency of Reforming Global Governance," *Xinhua*, October 13, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-10/13/c_134710464.htm.

52. "Xi Jinping shouti 'liangge yindao' you shenyi" [The profound meaning of Xi Jinping for the first time mentioning the "two guides"], *Chinanews.com*, February 20, 2017, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2017/02-20/8154814.shtml>; and Graham Webster, "China's 'New World Order'? What Xi Jinping Actually Said About Guiding International Affairs," *Transpacifica.net*, February 23, 2017, <http://transpacifica.net/2017/02/chinas-new-world-order-what-xi-jinping-actually-said-about-guiding-international-affairs/>.

53. Xi reiterated this approach in his address at the 19th Congress of the CCP in October 2017, at the 13th National People's Congress in March 2018, and three more times at major international gatherings in 2018: the Boao Forum in April, the BRICS forum in July, and the China International Import Expo in November. See Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," p. 54; Speech delivered by President Xi at the NPC closing meeting, *China Daily*, March 22, 2018, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2018-03/22/content_35894512.htm; "Transcript: President Xi Addresses the 2018 Boao Forum For Asia in Hainan," *U.S.-China Perception Monitor*, April 11, 2018, <https://www.uscnpm.org/blog/2018/04/11/transcript-president-xi-addresses-2018-boao-forum-asia-hainan/>; Xi Jinping, "Full Text of Chinese President's Speech at BRICS Business Forum in South Africa," *Xinhua*, July 26, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-07/26/c_129920686.htm; and "Full Text: Keynote Speech by President Xi Jinping at Opening Ceremony of 1st China International Import Expo," *Xinhuanet*, November 5, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/05/c_137583815.htm. See also Scott L. Kastner, Margaret M. Pearson, and Chad Rector, "Invest, Hold Up, or Accept? China in Multilateral Governance," *Security Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 142–179, doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1134193; and Guo, "Shi bu wo dai; zhizheng zhaoxi."

resulted in problems (mainly the uneven distribution of benefits within and across countries) that reforms needed to address if support for economic openness was to be preserved.⁵⁴

The impact of Xi's speech was magnified by events preceding it. The election of Donald Trump as president in the United States, along with a rising tide of nationalist political movements in Europe, had exacerbated doubts about the durability of Western support for international economic cooperation, raised the specter of a drift away from multilateral trade agreements, and deepened fears about the risk of a global shift to protectionist trade and investment policies.⁵⁵ Given the troubles apparently besetting the rules-based order the West had founded, a Chinese leader with a revisionist agenda might have seized the opportunity to sound the death knell of the old order and offered his own alternative vision to replace it. Instead, consistent with a grand strategy that adopted a reformist rather than revisionist agenda, Xi reiterated China's support for strengthening the existing order by addressing its shortcomings.⁵⁶

The timing of Xi's speech proved fortuitous; its language was warmly received by those nervous about the fate of the open international economic order. That said, some observers pointed out the many ways China's own policies fell short (e.g., discriminatory treatment of foreign firms in the domestic market, weak protection for intellectual property rights, and technology transfers required as the price of doing business).⁵⁷ Others noted Beijing's steadfast refusal to embrace what most Western advocates of openness saw as essential elements of the liberal international order that went beyond rules governing free trade and investment opportunities—especially protection of citizens' political and legal rights.⁵⁸

Xi's selective embrace of the international order was telling. Unlike its ele-

54. Xi Jinping, "Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth," keynote speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, *CGTN America*, January 17, 2017, <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

55. Davos 2017 convened in the wake of Britain's decision to exit the European Union and confirmation that the United States would walk away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

56. See also He Yafei, "Reglobalization Heralds an Emerging New World Order," *China-U.S. Focus*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/reglobalization-heralds-an-emerging-new-world-order>.

57. See, for example, Elizabeth Economy, "Beijing Is No Champion of Globalization: The Myth of Chinese Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, January 22, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-01-22/beijing-no-champion-globalization>.

58. See Michael J. Mazarr, Timothy R. Heath, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *China and the International Order* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2018). For three critical perspectives on the concept of international order, see Charles L. Glaser, "A Flawed Framework: Why the Liberal International Order Concept Is Misguided," *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Spring 2019), pp. 51–87, doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00343; John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Spring 2019), pp. 7–50, doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342; and Alastair Iain Johnston, "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Com-

ments that served the grand strategy of rejuvenation by facilitating China's economic development, its liberal political principles represented potential threats to the regime's grip on power at home, a core interest whose importance was reflected in a second part of Xi's agenda for reform of the international order. Under Xi, China has pushed for changes in the amorphous and evolving rules governing cyberspace, where de facto acceptance of a remarkably unfettered open order had prevailed but where a raft of abuses by private, official, and criminal actors were raising concerns. Along with other authoritarian regimes, China has promoted a guiding principle of "internet sovereignty," which emphasizes the right of each state to establish its own rules governing content, data storage, and the flows of information that are permitted to cross borders.⁵⁹

A third, and arguably the substantively most significant, part of Xi's effort to promote reform of the international order, was the Belt and Road Initiative (the BRI), first previewed in a speech delivered on September 7, 2013.⁶⁰ Unlike the AIIB, whose governance patterned itself on existing approaches to multi-lateral development finance, the BRI was a unilateral Chinese undertaking backed by a state-owned investment vehicle, the China Silk Road Fund, and loans from the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China. Also unlike the AIIB, which emphasized its intention to follow the best practices established by the existing international agencies it emulated, the BRI did not pledge to abide by the strict rules on conditionality for assistance that

pliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations," *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Fall 2019), pp. 9–60, doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00360.

59. See Adam Segal, "Chinese Cyber Diplomacy in a New Era of Uncertainty," Aegis Paper Series No. 1703 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, June 2017); and Adam Segal, "When China Rules the Web: Technology in Service of the State," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 5 (September–October 2018), pp. 10–18. On the political importance for the CCP, see "Xi Jinping: Ba woguo cong wangluo daguo jianshe chengwei wangluo qianguo" [Xi Jinping: Let's build our big internet country into a strong internet country], *Xinhuanet*, February 27, 2014 http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-02/27/c_119538788.htm; and Rogier Creemers, "Central Leading Group for Internet Security and Informatization Established," *China Copyright and Media* blog, March 1, 2014, <http://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/03/01/central-leading-group-for-internet-security-and-informatization-established/>.

60. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries" (Beijing: People's Republic of China, September 7, 2013), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjthshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml. This speech announced the Silk Road Economic Belt. Later, the Maritime Silk Road was added, giving the project its original English-language moniker, "One Belt, One Road." Subsequently, it would be rebranded in English as the Belt and Road Initiative. See National Development and Reform Commission, "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (Beijing: People's Republic of China, March 28, 2015), http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html; and An Baijie, "'Belt and Road' Incorporated into CPC Constitution," *Belt and Road Portal*, October 25, 2017, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/31395.htm>.

multilateral development banks had adopted in the late twentieth century—safeguards against corruption, respect for labor rights, and consideration of environmental consequences in recipient countries.⁶¹ Instead, to address the infrastructure needed in large parts of the developing world inadequately served by existing international institutions, China's BRI would emphasize narrow economic purposes—building communication and transportation networks that would knit together economic activity across a geographic region extending from Southeast Asia through Central Asia to Africa and Europe.⁶²

Beijing presented the initiative as a program to benefit countries and regions that had been left behind by globalization, and whose prospects for development assistance under current arrangements seemed bleak. Consistent with a reform agenda, Beijing also emphasized that the BRI, though a Chinese initiative, was intended not to challenge the existing order but to improve it, and that it welcomed cooperation with other countries and institutions already part of that order (including the AIIB, the BRICS New Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation).⁶³

Skeptics have argued that the BRI is less strategically significant or innovative than suggested by the attention Xi and the CCP have lavished on it. They note that (1) the BRI may be nothing more than an outlet for Chinese companies faced with problems of excess capacity because of declining domestic demand for large-scale infrastructure projects; (2) many BRI investments are not new projects, but instead an expansion of China's already bigger international economic footprint that emerged after Jiang's call at the turn of the century for China's businesses to "go out"; (3) before Xi succeeded Hu, there were already suggestions that China should "march westward" (the main geographic direction of the BRI) to evade friction with the United States and its allies in maritime East Asia;⁶⁴ and (4) many BRI projects were initiated by enterprising local

61. See Stefan Koeberle et al., eds., *Conditionality Revisited: Concepts, Experiences, and Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PROJECTS/Resources/40940-1114615847489/Conditionalityrevisedpublication.pdf>. See also Xiaojun Li, "China Is Offering 'No Strings Attached Aid' to Africa. Here's What That Means," *Washington Post*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/27/china-is-offering-no-strings-attached-aid-to-africa-heres-what-that-means/>.

62. See the website at the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Reconnecting Asia research project: <https://reconnectingasia.csis.org/>.

63. Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," speech at Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, May 14, 2017), http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1465819.shtml.

64. See Wang Jisi, "Wang Jisi: 'Xijin,' Zhongguo diyuan zhanlüe de zaipingheng" [Wang Jisi: 'Go west,' China's geostrategic rebalance], *Huanqiuwang*, October 17, 2012, <http://opinion.huanqiu>

officials and businesses pursuing their self-interest rather than serving a larger national purpose.⁶⁵ The validity of each of these points notwithstanding, as with other aspects of Xi's approach to the strategy of rejuvenation, the BRI is distinguished by the attempt to draw together and, if possible, harness ongoing and new projects in the service of a clear agenda—in this case, China's efforts to promote needed reforms of the global economic order in ways that also serve the grand strategy of rejuvenation by facilitating economic growth at home.

RESISTANCE: DEFENDING CORE INTERESTS

Xi's strategy of rejuvenation is also distinguished by its determination to more resolutely resist challenges to what Beijing defines as its core interests. All Chinese leaders have defended the PRC's vital interests when challenged (especially on the sensitive matter of Taiwan's future). Xi, however, has not only been less diffident in staking out China's positions on core interests; he has also devoted more attention and resources to ensuring that China has the capabilities to defend them.

First, under Xi China has accelerated the pace at which it has been modernizing its military forces. In part, China's renewed focus on this task is a response to circumstances of its own making—the alarmed reaction to China's increased assertiveness after 2008. The United States' 2011 rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and closer coordination with its partners and allies raised the benchmark for the adequacy of China's military modernization program. Xi has shown his determination to address this challenge in at least five ways: (1) investing in more modern equipment for all branches of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) along with improvements in training; (2) reorganizing China's seven geographically defined military regions into five theater commands defined by likely contingencies in East Asia; (3) increasing the prominence of the navy in the military leadership, consistent with a focus on preparing for defense of China's disputed maritime claims and its growing commercial presence around the world;⁶⁶ (4) elevating the status of the

.com/opinion_world/2012-10/3193760.html. See also Doshi, "Hu's to Blame for China's Foreign Assertiveness?"

65. See especially Min Ye, "Fragmentation and Mobilization: Domestic Politics of the Belt and Road in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 28, No. 119 (September 2019), pp. 696–711, doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1580428; and Lee Jones and Jinghan Zeng, "Understanding China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Beyond 'Grand Strategy' to a State Transformation Analysis," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 8 (August 2019), pp. 1415–1439, doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046.

66. See Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "China's Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms," *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 82 (3rd Quarter 2016), pp. 68–75; and Phillip C.

PLA's Second Artillery to that of a separate military service—the PLA Rocket Forces—reflecting the importance attached to the deterrent, defensive, and offensive missions assigned to China's larger and more diverse missile forces;⁶⁷ and (5) creating a new military branch at the theater-command level, the PLA Strategic Support Force—to better prepare for military missions in domains that reflect innovative technologies, especially the military applications of electronics, space, and cyber capabilities.⁶⁸

These daunting plans for military modernization will take years to fully carry out, but the strategic direction and the goal are clear. Moreover, in contrast with the restrained rhetoric of his predecessors, Xi has openly declared that the transformation of China's military necessary to ensure the country's interests will be “basically completed” by 2035, and that a rejuvenated China will become a “world-class” military power by the middle of the twenty-first century.⁶⁹

Second, and related, under Xi China has further hardened, rather than softened, its approach to asserting sovereignty claims and maritime rights. This has included the declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea and the undertaking of more regularized patrols challenging Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands.⁷⁰ Most dramatically, however, under Xi China has accelerated efforts to assert and protect its contested sovereignty claims to land features and their associated maritime rights in the South China Sea.⁷¹ Both before and after Xi's September 2016 visit to Washington,

Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019).

67. Michael S. Chase, *PLA Rocket Force Modernization and China's Military Reforms* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2018).

68. Kevin L. Pollpeter, Michael S. Chase, and Eric Heginbotham, *The Creation of the PLA Strategic Support Force and Its Implications for Chinese Military Space Operations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2017).

69. Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” See also Li Jiayao, “PLA's 91st Anniversary: Xi Jinping's Call for a Strong Army,” *CGTN*, July 31, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-07/31/content_9237734.htm.

70. See Kimberly Hsu, “Air Defense Identification Zone Intended to Provide China Greater Flexibility to Enforce East China Sea Claims” (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 14, 2014), <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%20ADIZ%20Staff%20Report.pdf>; Eric Heginbotham, “China's ADIZ in the East China Sea,” *Lawfare* blog, August 24, 2014, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/foreign-policy-essay-chinas-adiz-east-china-sea>; M. Taylor Fravel and Alastair Iain Johnston, “Chinese Signaling in the East China Sea?” *Monkey Cage* blog, *Washington Post*, April 12, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/04/12/chinese-signaling-in-the-east-china-sea/>; and M. Taylor Fravel, “Explaining China's Escalation over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands,” *Global Summitry*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 2016), pp. 24–37, doi.org/10.1093/global/guw010.

71. Jun Mai and Sarah Zheng, “Xi Personally Behind Island-Building in the South China Sea,” *South China Morning Post*, July 29, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2104547/xi-personally-behind-island-building-south-china-sea>. The roots of this recent effort reach back at least to Hu Jintao's second term. See Andrew Chubb, “Chinese Popular Nationalism and PRC Policy in the South China Sea,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Australia,

during which he publicly stated that China would not militarize the islands, China pushed ahead with massive operations to dredge, build on, and fortify artificial islands atop reefs and low-tide elevations that it controlled in the Spratlys.⁷² Beijing rejected criticisms that its actions posed a threat to freedom of navigation and instead insisted that they were defensive measures to resist challenges to sovereignty claims that the CCP routinely told the Chinese people were an indisputable inheritance from their ancestors.⁷³

Consistent with this posture of resolute resistance in defense of core interests, Beijing also refused to participate in the International Tribunal proceedings under the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea to adjudicate its South China Sea dispute with the Philippines. The ruling announced in July 2016 was as adverse for China as it could have been. The panel decided that most of China's assertion of maritime rights in the South China Sea, including those based on its territorial claims, were unsustainable under the Law of the Sea convention, to which China is a party.⁷⁴ Notably, however, when the Philippines' newly elected president, Rodrigo Duterte, backed away from challenging China and indicated that he wanted to improve ties with Beijing rather than press Manila's legal victory, Xi seized the opening to pivot from resistance to reassurance, cultivate closer economic relations between the two countries, and step up languishing efforts to negotiate a binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea with China's ASEAN neighbors.⁷⁵

2016, especially pp. 235, 289–290, https://api.research-repository.uwa.edu.au/portalfiles/portal/15600509/THESIS_DOCTOR_OF_PHILOSOPHY_CHUBB_Andrew_2016.PDF.

72. Ankit Panda, "It's Official: Xi Jinping Breaks His Non-Militarization Pledge in the Spratlys," *Diplomat*, December 16, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/its-official-xi-jinping-breaks-his-non-militarization-pledge-in-the-spratlys/>.

73. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Wang Yi: China Has Firm Faith and Sufficient Capability to Safeguard Its Legitimate Rights and Interests on the Nansha Islands" (Beijing: People's Republic of China, June 27, 2015), http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1277611.shtml. See also Emily Feng, "China Defence Chief Criticises 'Dangerous' U.S. Stance," *Financial Times*, October 25, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/09b064dc-d815-11e8-a854-33d6f82e62f8>; "Meijian jinru zhongguo nanshai daojiao linjin haiyu—zhongguo waijiaobu huiying" [American warship enters waters adjacent to South China Sea islands—response from China's foreign ministry], *Xinhuanet*, March 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/24/c_1122584650.htm; and Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Steven Lee Myers, "China Won't Yield 'Even One Inch' of South China Sea, Xi Tells Mattis," *New York Times*, June 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/world/asia/mattis-xi-china-sea.html>.

74. For an overview of the tribunal's ruling that undermined China's claims to extensive maritime rights, see Jacques deLisle, "The South China Sea Arbitration Decision: China Fought the Law, and the Law Won . . . Or Did It?" (Philadelphia, Pa.: Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 22, 2016), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/07/south-china-sea-arbitration-decision-china-fought-law-law-won/>; Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Parting the South China Sea: How to Uphold the Rule of Law," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 5 (September–October 2016), pp. 76–82; and Robert D. Williams, "Tribunal Issues Landmark Ruling in South China Sea Arbitration," *Lawfare* blog, July 12, 2016, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/tribunal-issues-landmark-ruling-south-china-sea-arbitration>.

75. See Carl Thayer, "A Closer Look at the ASEAN-China Single Draft South China Sea Code of Conduct," *Diplomat*, August 3, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/a-closer-look-at-the-asean-china-single-draft-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/>.

A third manifestation of Xi's toughened response when Beijing saw a challenge to its core interests was China's reaction to the agreement between South Korea and the United States to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in South Korea.⁷⁶ Beijing rejected Seoul's and Washington's explanation that THAAD was only a response to the threat from North Korea's improving ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. Instead, Beijing focused on what it claimed was the ability of THAAD's radar to provide the United States with intelligence, targeting, and tracking information about China's own nuclear and missile capabilities. Most analysts thought that Beijing's concerns were exaggerated, inaccurate, or contrived. Beijing, however, insisted that the system would increase the vulnerability of China's relatively small nuclear arsenal to preemptive attack by the United States.⁷⁷ China's ability to dissuade its most formidable adversary by threatening to inflict unacceptable nuclear retaliatory punishment serves as the ultimate guarantee of China's national security. Beijing responded to this perceived challenge by pressing Seoul to reverse its decision to host the system. In what amounted to the tacit imposition of economic sanctions, South Korea's massive business operations in and exports to China were squeezed. Although China failed to reverse the THAAD decision, it had delivered a strong message about its resolve, perhaps with an eye to shaping the choices of policymakers in Seoul and elsewhere the next time Beijing indicates that the wrong choice would endanger its core interests.⁷⁸

76. See Ethan Meick and Nargiza Salidjanova, "China's Response to U.S.-South Korean Missile Defense System Deployment and Its Implications" (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, July 26, 2017), https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Report_China%27s%20Response%20to%20THAAD%20Deployment%20and%20its%20Implications.pdf.

77. See State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, p. 4; Li Bin, "The Security Dilemma and THAAD Deployment in the ROK" (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 3, 2016), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/08/03/security-dilemma-and-thaad-deployment-in-rok-pub-64279>; and Ankit Panda, "THAAD and China's Nuclear Second-Strike Capability," *Diplomat*, March 8, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/thaad-and-chinas-nuclear-second-strike-capability/>. On the vulnerability of China's nuclear arsenal to U.S. counterforce strikes, see Charles L. Glaser and Steve Fetter, "Should the United States Reject MAD? Damage Limitation and U.S. Nuclear Strategy toward China," *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Summer 2016), pp. 49–98, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00248.

78. Bonnie S. Glaser, Daniel G. Sofio, and David A. Parker, "The Good, the THAAD, and the Ugly: China's Campaign against Deployment, and What to Do About It," *Foreign Affairs*, February 15, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-15/good-thaad-and-ugly>; Bonnie S. Glaser and Lisa Collins, "China's Rapprochement with South Korea: Who Won the THAAD Dispute?" *Foreign Affairs*, November 7, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-07/chinas-rapprochement-south-korea>; and Darren J. Lim and Victor A. Ferguson, "Chinese Economic Coercion during the THAAD Dispute," *Asan Forum*, December 28, 2019, <http://www.theasanforum.org/chinese-economic-coercion-during-the-thaad-dispute/#a66>.

Finally, Xi's emphasis on resolute resistance has been apparent in China's hardening stance on the Taiwan issue. Although technically not viewed by Beijing as part of its foreign policy, cross-strait relations have been a grand strategic concern for the CCP ever since 1949, both because they affect relations with the United States and because the party has identified restoring sovereignty over Taiwan as an essential part of the effort to recover territory that China lost during the "century of humiliation."

Cross-strait relations sharply deteriorated when Tsai Ing-wen won the island's 2016 presidential election. Beijing has long seen candidates from the Democratic Progressive Party, such as Tsai, as favoring political independence for Taiwan. Prior to 2016, cross-strait ties had become more relaxed under her Kuomintang predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou, who had deepened economic engagement with the mainland. But after Tsai's victory, China quickly indicated that ties would be strained unless she endorsed the CCP's version of a consensus on the one-China principle allegedly reached in 1992 between representatives from the mainland and Taiwan. Tsai's statements failed to satisfy Beijing's demand for an explicit endorsement, and Beijing saw this as a challenge to a core interest. As in the South Korean case, China tapped its substantial economic leverage to punish Taiwan (especially its tourist sector).⁷⁹ It also resumed diplomatic efforts to get the few countries still recognizing the Republic of China government on Taiwan to switch recognition to the PRC. And when Trump was elected president later in 2016 and suggested that his administration might reconsider the United States' own long-standing one-China policy, China ramped up warnings about its readiness to use all available means to resist any actions that might reduce the prospects for Taiwan's eventual unification with the PRC.⁸⁰ Beijing was reminding both Taipei and Washington that it was determined, and more able than ever, to resolutely resist any challenge to one of the brightest red lines that define China's core interests—a determination that strengthened when Tsai was reelected in January 2020.⁸¹

79. Tom Hancock and Nian Liu, "China Suspends Individual Tourist Permits to Taiwan before Election," *Financial Times*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/6ba14934-b35e-11e9-8cb2-799a3a8cf37b>.

80. See Richard C. Bush, "U.S. Policy toward Taiwan" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, July 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/u-s-policy-toward-taiwan-bush/>; Richard C. Bush, "A One-China Policy Primer" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, March 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-one-china-policy-primer/>; and Jie Dalei, "Is the Taiwan Strait Heading toward Another Crisis?" (Beijing: Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, October 30, 2018), <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2018/10/30/is-taiwan-strait-heading-toward-another-crisis-pub-77584>.

81. On this stance, as well as China's emphasis on reassurance and reform in its foreign policy, see Wang Yi, "Braving Waves and Sailing Forward with Resolve," speech at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations in Beijing, December 13, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1724306.shtml.

The International Reaction to Xi's Strategy

The prospects for Xi Jinping's approach to China's grand strategy of rejuvenation will depend not only on skillfully integrating its three key elements—reassurance, reform, and resistance—but also on the response that the approach elicits from other states and the way China copes with those responses. As ever, strategy is the realm of interdependent choice. The challenges for Xi's strategy look daunting, and after just a few years, there is already reason to question its viability as an approach to realize the goal of rejuvenation.⁸² Some of the difficulties that it is encountering are a result of the way in which China under Xi has articulated and implemented the strategy's distinctive new elements—promoting reform of the international order and resolutely resisting challenges to what the CCP defines as the country's core interests.

WORDS MATTER: RAISING EXPECTATIONS, PROMPTING CONCERNS

The rhetoric that accompanied Xi's trumpeting of "the Chinese dream" and "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" in 2012 at first seemed like little more than inspirational language to mobilize the party and people.⁸³ But in its repetition and in its elaboration, the rhetoric grew increasingly ambitious in its stated aims and grandiose in its style. This trend culminated in Xi's speeches at the 19th CCP Congress, in October 2017, and the 13th National People's Congress, in March 2018. Xi set forth benchmarks to gauge the success or failure of the regime's strategy, clarifying the CCP's commitment to fundamentally modernize the country by 2035 and to fulfill the dream of rejuvenation by 2050 with a Chinese economy and military that would rank among the world's leaders.⁸⁴

Such rhetoric has increased the challenges facing Xi and his strategy in two ways. First, it has raised domestic political expectations (among the party elite and the Chinese people) about the results that the regime must deliver and has done so in a very public way. Xi and the CCP now own a definition of, and a timetable for, rejuvenation from which it will be difficult to back away. Even before Xi, Beijing faced a domestic audience with heightened expectations about a rising China's bright future as a truly modern country and revitalized

82. See also Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," pp. 17–19.

83. David Cohen, "Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream," *Diplomat*, December 7, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/12/xi-jinpings-chinese-dream/>.

84. See Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." See also Xi, speech at the first session of the 13th National People's Congress.

great power. These expectations have been further stoked by Xi's rhetorical flourishes. Xi has raised the bar for evaluating his accomplishments and for evaluating the performance of a regime that banks on continuing to enjoy domestic support based on its record of success and accomplishment in the post-Mao era.⁸⁵

Second, Xi's openly declared benchmarks for rejuvenation also aggravated foreign concerns about a rising China that had been festering in the years immediately before Xi took charge—in particular, the concern that China intended to challenge U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. Additionally, because a richer and more powerful China loomed larger on the international landscape, Xi's rhetoric garnered more attention than ever. His proclaimed goals in 2017 came on the heels of his "Made in China 2025" initiative, announced in May 2015, which pledged massive government investment to transform the country into a global leader in high-technology sectors, further alarming those already worried about the implications of Beijing's industrial policy with which others were finding it difficult to compete.⁸⁶ Xi's subsequent depiction of his broader strategic vision for rejuvenation by mid-century married these economic and technological issues with persistent security concerns about China's rise.

The effect on Washington was most important. Xi's bold rhetoric accelerated a shift that began during President Obama's second term away from the erstwhile bipartisan U.S. consensus favoring constructive engagement with China to what was rapidly becoming the newly dominant view that China was mounting a fundamental challenge to U.S. interests in Asia and perhaps to the United States' global leadership.⁸⁷ Although Xi's speeches did not assert such

85. On what has been labeled "performance legitimacy," see Yuchao Zhu, "'Performance Legitimacy' and China's Political Adaptation Strategy," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 123–140, doi.org/10.1007/s11366-011-9140-8; Baogang Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 8, No. 1–2 (September 2003), pp. 1–25, doi.org/10.1007/BF02876947; and Bruce Gilley, "Legitimacy and Institutional Change: The Case of China," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (March 2008), pp. 259–284, doi.org/10.1177/0010414007308020. In polities where confidence in institutionalized procedures is robust, policy failures may result in a change in the ruling party or individual leaders, but the regime would endure. In China's one-party system, however, major policy failures risk discrediting the regime itself, because they touch the heart of its claim to legitimacy.

86. On the plan and its identification with Xi Jinping, see Max J. Zenglein and Anna Holzmann, "Evolving Made in China 2025: China's Industrial Policy in the Quest for Global Tech Leadership" (Berlin: Mercator Institute for China Studies, July 2019).

87. See John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?" *National Interest*, October 25, 2014, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>; David M. Lampton, "A Tipping Point in U.S.-China Relations Is Upon Us," speech at the Carter Center and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences over May 6–7, 2015, *U.S.-China Perception Monitor*, May 11, 2015, http://www.uscnpm.com/model_item.html?action=view&table=article&id=15789; Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations,"

blatantly revisionist aspirations, his depiction of a rising China's determination to catch up with the United States fed into a narrative about international ambitions greater than those previously ascribed to Beijing.⁸⁸

U.S. concerns gained greater currency with the election of Trump as president. He brought to the White House a team that flatly rejected the traditional approach for dealing with China and instead forged policies that explicitly aimed to prevent China from narrowing the still substantial gap with the United States in economic wealth, technological prowess, and military power.⁸⁹ U.S. economic policy under President Trump evolved from a limited focus on concerns about trade deficits and China's compliance with rules and norms advanced in multilateral institutions, to an expanded focus on concerns that included the security implications of technological competition and vulnerable supply chains.⁹⁰ The Trump administration also drafted a new

Foreign Affairs, Vol. 97, No. 2 (March–April 2018), pp. 60–70; Wang Jisi et al., “Did America Get China Wrong? The Engagement Debate,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 4 (July–August 2018), pp. 183–195; Friedberg, “Competing with China;” Jonathan D. Pollack and Jeffrey A. Bader, “Looking before We Leap: Weighing the Risks of U.S.-China Disengagement” (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, July 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FP_20190716_us_china_pollack_bader.pdf; and Evan S. Medeiros, “The Changing Fundamentals of U.S.-China Relations,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Fall 2019), pp. 93–119, doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1666355.

88. See Kevin Rudd, “U.S.-China 21, the Future of U.S.-China Relations under Xi Jinping: Toward a New Framework of Constructive Realism for a Common Purpose” (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, April 2015).

89. On the narrowing gap, see Øystein Tunsjø, *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics: China, the United States, and Geostuctural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). For a contrasting view, see Michael Beckley, “China’s Century? Why America’s Edge Will Endure,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Winter 2011/12), pp. 41–78, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00066; and Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World’s Sole Superpower* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018).

90. These security implications were manifest in allegations about China’s forced or illicit acquisition of U.S. technology and sweeping policies to prevent China’s leading telecommunications companies (most famously, Huawei) from playing a role in critical infrastructure in the United States and urging American allies and partners to follow suit. See Dennis C. Blair and Jon M. Huntsman, “Update to the IP Commission Report—The Theft of American Intellectual Property: Reassessment of the Challenge and United States Policy” (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, February 2017), http://www.ipcommission.org/report/IP_Commission_Report_Update_2017.pdf; and James Andrew Lewis, “Emerging Technologies and Managing the Risk of Tech Transfer to China” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2019). See also “How China’s Economic Aggression Threatens the Technologies and Intellectual Property of the United States and the World” (Washington, D.C.: White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, June 2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-China-Technology-Report-6.18.18-PDF.pdf>; Interagency Task Force in Fulfillment of Executive Order 13806, “Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, September 2018), <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Oct/05/2002048904/-1/-1/1/-ASSESSING-AND-STRENGTHENING-THE-MANUFACTURING-AND-DEFENSE-INDUSTRIAL-BASE-AND-SUPPLY-CHAIN-RESILIENCY.PDF>; and Adam Segal, “The Right Way to Deal with Huawei: The United States Needs to Compete With Chinese Firms, Not Just Ban Them,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-07-11/right-way-deal>.

National Security Strategy and a new National Defense Strategy that explicitly identified China (listed along with but before Russia) as a revisionist state posing a threat to U.S. prosperity and security. Both documents included unprecedented language that omitted the more mixed assessments of bilateral relations that had been typical for previous administrations.⁹¹

The negative reaction in the United States to Xi's vision for China's rejuvenation was not just a result of his rhetorical style. Substance also mattered, and China's actions compounded the challenges facing Xi's strategy.

ACTIONS MATTER, TOO: DEEPENING SKEPTICISM AND SUSPICION

Under Xi's leadership, continued attempts to reassure other states that a rising China would emerge as a constructive and responsible great power were generally well received. Nevertheless, his more determined efforts to promote reform of the international order, and especially his defense of China's actions to resist challenges to core interests, have been met with skepticism or proven counterproductive. The former has failed to convincingly drive home the intended message—that China seeks only to steer a reformist middle course between accepting the status quo and mounting a revisionist challenge. The latter has failed to convince others that China seeks only to defend vital interests rather than aggressively press for an advantage as its capabilities grow.

Despite the reformist intentions Xi proclaimed at Davos in January 2017, the centerpiece of China's contribution to that effort, the Belt and Road Initiative, has come under increasing fire since its inception. Critics have argued that its implementation demonstrates that the BRI is a narrowly self-interested program to benefit China economically and to increase China's political leverage over recipients of its investments. Most notably, when the Sri Lankan government was unable to meet its loan obligations to Chinese investors developing the port of Hambantota, it cut a deal to give them a controlling share in the

huawei. Washington's efforts to persuade some of its allies to join it in excluding Huawei have encountered resistance. See Philippe Le Corre, "Macron Goes to China: For Europe or for France?" (Brussels: Carnegie Europe, October 31, 2019), <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/80242>; and Patrick Wintour, "UK Government Postpones Huawei 5G Decision," *Guardian*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/nov/01/uk-government-postpones-huawei-5g-decision>.

91. U.S. strategic assessments prior to 2017 reflected concerns about China's growing power and the need for the United States and its partners to respond, but indicated that the United States hoped to welcome the rise of a responsible power. The National Security Strategy documents published in 2017 and 2018 express no such hope. See *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, December 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; and *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, D.C.: White House, 2018), <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

port operations for ninety-nine years. Media coverage breezily (and inaccurately) portrayed this deal as giving the port itself to China and perhaps opening the door to its use as a base for the Chinese navy.⁹² Hambantota became the poster child for what was labeled “debt-trap diplomacy,” a term coined by Indian analyst Brahma Chellaney in 2017 and then reinforced in 2018 in U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s speech about China’s infrastructure investments in Africa.⁹³ U.S. officials have since repeated this characterization as a warning to others that BRI projects were an attempt by China to entice them to take on debts for unrealistic projects and then to use their indebtedness to extract concessions that could compromise their sovereignty. Where China’s vast array of BRI investments ran into trouble, these were depicted as examples fitting a pattern that revealed the hidden risks facing those who chose to incur the debt that accompanied the projects.

Analysts who examined the evidence more systematically, however, did not find support for the broad charge that China was engaged in a strategy of debt-trap diplomacy.⁹⁴ Why then the alarmist reaction to Xi’s Belt and Road

92. Maria Abi-Habib, “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough up a Port,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>. For contrasting perspectives, see Natalie Klein, “A String of Fake Pearls? The Question of Chinese Port Access in the Indian Ocean,” *Diplomat*, October 25, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/a-string-of-fake-pearls-the-question-of-chinese-port-access-in-the-indian-ocean/>; Umesh Moramudali, “The Hambantota Port Deal: Myths and Realities,” *Diplomat*, January 1, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/the-hambantota-port-deal-myths-and-realities/>; John Lee, “China’s Trojan Ports” (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, November 29, 2018), <https://www.hudson.org/research/14717-china-s-trojan-ports>; and Deborah Brautigam, “Misdiagnosing the Chinese Infrastructure Push,” *American Interest*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/04/04/misdiagnosing-the-chinese-infrastructure-push/>.

93. Brahma Chellaney, “China’s Debt-Trap Diplomacy” (New York: Project Syndicate, January 23, 2017), <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-one-belt-one-road-loans-debt-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-01>; Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, “U.S.-Africa Relations: A New Framework,” speech at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia (Washington, D.C.: White House, March 6, 2018), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-africa-relations-a-new-framework/>. For a contrasting perspective, see Matt Ferchen and Anarkalee Perera, “Why Unsustainable Chinese Infrastructure Deals Are a Two-Way Street” (Beijing: Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, July 23, 2019), <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2019/07/23/why-unsustainable-chinese-infrastructure-deals-are-two-way-street-pub-79548>.

94. See Deborah Brautigam, “A Critical Look at Chinese ‘Debt-Trap Diplomacy’: The Rise of a Meme,” *Area Development and Policy*, published ahead of print, December 6, 2019, doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2019.1689828; Agatha Kratz, Allen Feng, and Logan Wright, “New Data on the ‘Debt Trap’ Question” (New York: Rhodium Group, April 29, 2019), <https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/>; Matt Ferchen, “China, Venezuela, and the Illusion of Debt-Trap Diplomacy” (Beijing: Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy, August 16, 2018), <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2018/08/16/chinavenezuela-and-illusionof-debt-trap-diplomacy-pub-77089>; and Alicia García-Herrero and Jianwei Xu, “China’s Investment in Africa: What the Data Really Says, and the Implications for Europe,” *Bruegel Global Economics & Governance* blog, July 22, 2019, <https://bruegel.org/2019/07/chinas-investment-in-africa-what-the-data-really-says-and-the-implications-for-europe/>. See also Umesh Moramudali, “The Hambantota Port Deal”; David H. Shinn, “China’s Just Another Great Power in Africa,” *East Asia Forum*, May 17, 2018, <https://>

Initiative? A major reason is that the terms of China's BRI deals have been distinctively opaque. As a result, those who suspected the worst could reasonably argue that the absence of evidence (of debt traps) is not evidence of their absence. Suspicion, regardless of its empirical warrant, was hard to dispel as long as the details of Beijing's agreements remained so opaque; transparency in itself would not have prevented China from continuing to give top priority to the economic need for its BRI investments while setting aside the conditional-ity requirements that countries in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development have embraced since the late 1990s.⁹⁵ Consequently, opacity made it difficult, if not impossible, for Beijing to convincingly counter the charge that the BRI aims to serve the geopolitical ambitions of a revisionist power rather than being part of China's effort to reform the international economic order so that countries and regions that have been left behind could benefit from globalization.

Perhaps recognizing the need to more effectively parry sweeping foreign criticism of the BRI, beginning in 2018 China responded by publicly acknowledging problems and shortcomings in the way it had been implemented and pledged to take steps to improve its performance.⁹⁶ It remains to be seen if

www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/05/17/chinas-just-another-great-power-in-africa/; Arve Ofstad and Elling Tjønneland, "Zambia's Looming Debt Crisis—Is China to Blame?" CMI Insight No. 1 (Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, June 2019), <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6866-zambias-looming-debt-crisis-is-china-to-blame>; and Richard Bluhm et al., "Connective Financing: Chinese Infrastructure Projects and the Diffusion of Economic Activity in Developing Countries," Working Paper No. 64 (Williamsburg, Va.: AidData, William & Mary, September 2018).

95. The lack of transparency not only shapes foreign reaction to the BRI, but also facilitates corruption that undermines the benefits of the projects both for China and for the recipient countries. See Ann-Sofie Isaksson and Andreas Kotsadam, "Chinese Aid and Local Corruption," *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 159 (March 2018), pp. 146–159, doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.01.002; and Brautigam, "Misdiagnosing the Chinese Infrastructure Push." Bad deals shaped by corrupt actors have now led a growing number of recipients to renegotiate their terms, often when leaders who had been critical of the original BRI projects come to power.

96. See Xi Jinping, "Full Text of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Speech at Opening Ceremony of 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit," *China Daily*, September 4, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201809/04/WS5b8d5c25a310add14f389592.html>. See also Janet Eom, Deborah Brautigam, and Lina Benabdallah, "The Path Ahead: The 7th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation," Briefing Paper Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: China Africa Research Initiative, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2018); Yun Sun, "China's 2018 Financial Commitments to Africa: Adjustment and Recalibration" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, September 5, 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/09/05/chinas-2018-financial-commitments-to-africa-adjustment-and-recalibration/>; Oxford China Africa Consultancy, "China's Debt Relief along the Belt and Road—What's the Story?" (Beijing: Development Reimagined, April 25, 2019), <https://developmentreimagined.com/2019/04/25/chinas-debt-relief-along-the-belt-and-road-whats-the-story/>; "Joint Press Release of the Third '1+6' Roundtable," *Xinhua*, November 6, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/06/c_137586731.htm; Matthew P. Goodman and Jonathan E. Hillman, "Critical Questions: China's Second Belt and Road Forum" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 24, 2019), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-second-belt-and-road-forum>; and Jane Nakano, "Greening or Greenwashing the Belt and Road Ini-

Beijing's new rhetoric will now guide BRI policy and whether improvement in its implementation will dispel the alarm it triggered among those who see it as evidence that China is a revisionist state challenging the global order rather than an advocate for its reform. Beijing's response to the covid-19 pandemic has now added to the challenges China already faced in adjusting its BRI, and, more broadly, it has raised new concerns about the scope of China's ambitions for changing the international order.⁹⁷

Xi's determination that China would tap its growing capabilities to more resolutely resist challenges to what the CCP defines as core interests would, even with the most prudent management, be in tension with efforts to reassure others that a rising China will remain a responsible actor and that it seeks to reform rather than upend the existing international order. Highly publicized displays of modernizing military power, some personally supervised by Xi, may stir national pride at home; abroad, they have been viewed with alarm.⁹⁸ Additionally, actions taken to push back more forcefully against perceived challenges to China's core interests may seem reasonable at home; abroad, they have been viewed as at best unreasonable overreactions and at worst evidence of China's aggressive intentions. Thus, Beijing's economic sanctions on South Korea in response to the hypothetical risks that the THAAD system's radar might pose for China damaged its standing among the Korean public. Beijing's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea and preparations for military deployments on them, together with coercive gray-zone naval tactics challenging other claimants' economic activities, have cast doubt on China's professed intention to pursue a regional diplomatic agreement to cooperatively manage the conduct of rival claimants. Moreover, China's intercepts of U.S. military forces asserting freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea have been widely criticized as either unjustified (because of the weakness of China's position under international law) or as dangerous (because they have entailed exercises in needless brinkmanship). Although

tiative?" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 1, 2019), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/greening-or-greenwashing-belt-and-road-initiative>.

97. See Daniel Russel, "The Coronavirus Will Not Be Fatal for China's Belt and Road Initiative but It Will Strike a Heavy Blow," *South China Morning Post*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3075624/coronavirus-will-not-be-fatal-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-it>; and Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, "The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-03-18/coronavirus-could-reshape-global-order>.

98. For examples, see Chris Buckley, "China Shows Off Military Might as Xi Jinping Tries to Cement Power," *New York Times*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/30/world/asia/china-military-parade-xi-jinping.html>; and Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Massive 70th Anniversary Military (Missile) Parade: Here's My Take," *China Analysis from Original Sources* blog, October 1, 2019, <http://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/10/chinas-massive-70th-anniversary-military-missile-parade-heres-my-take/>.

Beijing sees its actions as simply the sorts of legitimate responses a sovereign state is entitled to take in defense of its vital interests, these actions have consequences. Among the consequences has been the growing perception that the more resolute approach that Xi's China is taking to defend its core interests infringes on the legitimate interests of others and goes beyond what one would expect from a country without revisionist ambitions.⁹⁹

Conclusion

The style and implementation of Xi Jinping's distinctive approach to the grand strategy of rejuvenation has aggravated international concerns about China's rise that first emerged in the mid-1990s, and that resurfaced during the last years under Hu Jintao. Since then, a growing array of issues—from the aforementioned debt-trap diplomacy, to China's growing military footprint in maritime East Asia, to charges of Chinese influence and interference in other countries' domestic politics, society, and academic life—have been fit within an overarching narrative about a comprehensive China challenge that justifies a comprehensive response.¹⁰⁰ This reaction has not been limited to the United States. It has also been evident in Australia, Canada, and the European Union, leading them to reevaluate their China policies.¹⁰¹

99. On tension in the delicate balance between “the dual needs of more forcefully pursuing China's interests and rights (*weiquan*) whilst maintaining the regional stability (*weiwen*) that serves China's broader strategic interests,” see Zhang, “China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping,” p. 16; and Przystup and Saunders, “Asia Pacific,” pp. 176–177. On purely defensive reasons for a strong military, see Anthony H. Cordesman, “China's New 2019 Defense White Paper: An Open Strategic Challenge to the United States, but One Which Does Not Have to Lead to Conflict,” working draft (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 24, 2019), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-new-2019-defense-white-paper>.

100. See Michal Kranz, “The Director of the FBI Says the Whole of Chinese Society Is a Threat to the US—and That Americans Must Step up to Defend Themselves,” *Business Insider*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-threat-to-america-fbi-director-warns-2018-2>; “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy toward China” (Washington, D.C.: White House, October 4, 2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>; and “Attorney General Jeff Sessions Announces New Initiative to Combat Chinese Economic Espionage” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, November 1, 2018), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-announces-new-initiative-combat-chinese-economic-espionage>. For a contrasting perspective, see Fareed Zakaria, “The New China Scare: Why America Shouldn't Panic about Its Latest Challenger,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (January–February 2020), pp. 52–69.

101. Bates Gill, “Bounded Engagement: Charting a New Era in Australia-China Relations,” *Financial Review*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.afr.com/world/asia/bounded-engagement-charting-a-new-era-in-australiachina-relations-20190312-h1c9vf>; Natasha Kassam, “After the Australian Election: The China Test,” *Interpreter* blog, Lowy Institute, May 7, 2019, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/after-australian-election-china-test>; and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “EU-China: A Strategic Outlook” (Strasbourg, France: European Commission, March 12, 2019), <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

Given the reaction, Xi's approach to China's grand strategy does not appear to have restored the favorable international circumstances for the country's rejuvenation that prevailed during most of the first two post-Cold War decades, when China had initially emphasized keeping a low profile and then taken steps to reassure those worried about its rise. On the contrary, Xi's approach, especially his emphasis on reforming the existing international order and unabashedly tapping China's greater economic and military clout in support of self-defined core interests, has fostered a more challenging setting for achieving the country's rejuvenation.

As a result, China now faces higher hurdles to continuing its deep economic engagement with the most advanced countries in the global economy. Rather than successfully rallying support for reforms that would sustain the open international economic order that has been essential to the country's modernization, Xi's foreign policy has encouraged key economic partners to reconsider their engagement with China. Perhaps most important, it has led the United States to move toward what has been labeled "decoupling" as economic frictions are compounded by growing U.S. security concerns about China's involvement in critical infrastructure.¹⁰² The covid-19 pandemic could accelerate the process of decoupling, as it has further deepened U.S. concerns about its dependence on supply chains in which China plays a key role. Decoupling may portend a world of at least partially separate economic blocs. If so, China could be excluded from the most advanced sectors in many of the most advanced countries.¹⁰³ Under this scenario, China would be constrained to adopt a more self-reliant approach for building a technologically advanced economy and have to adjust to new patterns of international trade and investment by deepening its engagement with a more limited and less affluent array of states. Because modern military power increasingly requires exploiting leading-edge technologies, such an outcome would risk putting China at a competitive disadvantage that adversely affects its national security.

102. See Daniel H. Rosen, "A Post-Engagement U.S.-China Relationship?" (New York: Rhodium Group, January 19, 2018), <https://rhg.com/research/post-engagement-us-china-relationship/>; Matthew P. Goodman, Dylan Gerstel, and Pearl Risberg, "Beyond the Brink: Escalation and Conflict in U.S.-China Economic Relations" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2019), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/190925_Goodman_BeyondBrink_WEB.pdf; Charles W. Boustany Jr. and Aaron L. Friedberg, "Partial Disengagement: A New U.S. Strategy for Economic Competition with China," NBR Special Report No. 82 (Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, November 2019); and Edward Luce, "The New Era of U.S.-China Decoupling," *Financial Times*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/019b1856-03c0-11e9-99df-6183d3002ee1>.

103. See "Remarks by Henry M. Paulson, Jr., on the United States and China at a Crossroads," press release (Chicago: Paulson Institute, November 6, 2018), <http://www.paulsoninstitute.org/news/2018/11/06/statement-by-henry-m-paulson-jr-on-the-united-states-and-china-at-a-crossroads/>.

China could probably adjust to such a challenge. It has already built a strong foundation for growth and can rely on an authoritarian political system that makes it possible to direct massive resources to research and development.¹⁰⁴ Investment in indigenous innovation may eventually enable the regime to overcome the new hurdles it could face, including the prospect of much more limited access for China's students and scholars at leading research institutions in the United States and perhaps Europe, which are paying greater attention to the implications of unrestricted access for their economic and military security. This more difficult and uncertain path, however, suggests that Xi's version of China's grand strategy of rejuvenation is making it harder, not easier, to realize its self-proclaimed goal. Yet, Xi and his colleagues give no indication that they are planning to make major changes in their approach and devise a more promising strategic blueprint for rejuvenation.¹⁰⁵ Xi may be too closely and publicly identified with the current approach to make such changes. If so, the end to constitutionally mandated term limits for president enacted in March 2018 may mean that China will continue to struggle with the new challenges Xi's strategy of rejuvenation has been creating for years to come.

104. Indeed, the effort has already begun. See China Power Team, "Is China a Global Leader in Research and Development?" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, updated March 26, 2019), <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-research-and-development-rnd/>; Dennis Normile, "China Narrows U.S. Lead in R&D Spending," *Science*, October 19, 2018, p. 276, doi.org/10.1126/science.362.6412.276; "China's Spending on R&D Rises to 2.18 PCT of GDP," *Xinhua*, March 3, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/03/c_137865068.htm; and Joy Dantong Ma, "China's AI Talent Base Is Growing, and then Leaving" (Chicago: MacroPolo, Paulson Institute, July 30, 2019), <https://macropolo.org/chinas-ai-talent-base-is-growing-and-then-leaving/>. As with data about the increases in patent filings from China, these numbers are a coarse indicator rather than a direct measure of the usefulness of innovations.

105. See Christopher K. Johnson, "Xi Jinping's Trade Conundrum: Why the Chinese Leader Isn't About to Back Down," *Foreign Affairs*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-06-20/xi-jinpings-trade-conundrum>; and Alexandra Stevenson, "China Faces New 'Long March' as Trade War Intensifies, Xi Jinping Says," *New York Times*, May 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/world/asia/xi-jinping-china-trade.html>. For a contrasting perspective, see Richard McGregor, *Xi Jinping: The Backlash*, A Lowy Institute Paper (Sydney, Australia: Penguin, 2019); and Geoff Raby, "Xi Jinping: Much More Than Just One Man," *Interpreter* blog, Lowy Institute, July 16, 2019, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/xi-jinping-much-more-just-one-man>.