

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **CHINA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES REGARDING FOREIGN AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY**

### **Introduction**

Recent years have seen significant debate about what China's emergence as a great power means for the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup> As China's economy has grown, Chinese investments, diplomatic influence, and military presence have assumed ever more prominent international profiles. Furthermore, the emergence of a more complex field of foreign policy actors in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has brought diverse—and sometimes conflicting—institutional interests and voices into China's foreign and national security decision-making process.<sup>2</sup> (For further discussion of this topic, see chap. 3, sec. 2, of this Report, "Actors in China's Foreign Policy.")

Major questions have circulated regarding the future intentions of the Chinese state: Having achieved economic and diplomatic clout that might have seemed unimaginable a generation ago, what do China's leaders intend to do with it? And how will the steadily increasing capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) factor into future Chinese foreign policy, particularly given the PRC's growing economic interests abroad and its continuing territorial disputes with many of the countries on its periphery? In response to these questions, the Chinese government has declared itself to be focused, in the economic realm, on development and mutually beneficial trade; in the military sphere, on building an adequate self-defensive capacity and protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity, while striving to maintain peaceful relations with its neighbors; and in international affairs, on pursuing cooperative action on issues such as climate change, terrorism, and counterproliferation.<sup>3</sup>

Other observers have questioned such messages, however, in light of China's continued backing for North Korea and its aggressive efforts to assert sovereignty over disputed territories in regions such as the South China Sea and the border with India.<sup>4</sup> Such reassurances are also called into question by scholars who describe the influence on China's leaders of zero-sum thinking about international relations,<sup>5</sup> as well as by those who identify a legacy of deception either in China's traditional strategic culture<sup>6</sup> or in the practices of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>7</sup>

The Commission undertook efforts in 2011 to assess the nature of China's propaganda messages directed to international audi-

ences. This chapter will seek to offer greater insight into how China frames its role in the world and its relations with other countries, as well as the implications for U.S. policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **The Chinese Government's Formulation of Messages in Media and Public Diplomacy**

The CCP treats the control of propaganda/public diplomacy messages\* to foreign audiences as a fundamental tool of statecraft.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it is highly critical of what it calls the “Western media’s ideological assault on the rest of the world”<sup>9</sup> and sees itself as engaged in a “global war for public opinion.”<sup>10</sup> As an illustration of this outlook, Li Changchun, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and the CCP’s most senior official in charge of the government’s ideology and propaganda system,<sup>11</sup> stated in November 2008 that:

*Communication capacity determines influence. In the modern age ... whichever nation’s communication capacity is strongest, it is that nation whose culture and core values are able to spread far and wide, and that nation that has the most power to influence the world. ... Enhancing our communication capacity domestically and internationally is of direct consequence to our nation’s international influence and international position ... and of direct consequence to the function and role of our nation’s media within the international public opinion structure.<sup>12</sup>*

The processes by which leadership messages are formulated and then transmitted through China’s informational bureaucracy are opaque. At a minimum, these decisions involve the leaders of the CCP Central Committee’s Foreign Affairs/National Security Leading Small Group (chaired since 2002–2003 by CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao) and the Propaganda and Ideology Leading Small Group (chaired since 2003 by Politburo Member Li Changchun).<sup>13</sup> As described to the Commission this year by Ashley Esarey, an academic specialist on China’s propaganda system:

*By far the most powerful decision-making body in the propaganda system overall is the Central Leading Group on Propaganda. ... This secretive body hides the extent to which it controls information in China to blunt criticism of its actions. ... Efforts to promote foreign propaganda, in particular, are managed by the CCP Central Committee Foreign Propaganda Office [whose director] concurrently serves as the Deputy Director of the [CCP] Central Propaganda Department and Director of the State Council Infor-*

\*The Chinese term for “propaganda” does not necessarily carry a pejorative meaning, and the term is used extensively in Chinese discourse. See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Narratives Regarding National Security Policy*, written testimony of Ashley Esarey, March 10, 2011. As defined by another expert witness, Nicholas Cull, the term “public diplomacy” is “simply the process by which an international actor conducts foreign policy by engaging a foreign public.” See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Propaganda and Influence Operations, its Intelligence Activities that Target the United States, and its Resulting Impacts on US National Security*, written testimony of Nicholas Cull, April 30, 2009.

*mation Office. Day-to-day supervision of foreign propaganda is handled by the State Council Information Office, which pays attention to media coverage of salient issues in foreign affairs and interacts with foreign journalists in China.*<sup>14</sup>

In pursuit of a larger voice in international affairs, Chinese media officials have significantly increased resources for state-controlled foreign language media outlets.<sup>15</sup> In 2009, the *Global Times*, an official Chinese Communist Party newspaper, launched a new English edition; and in July 2010, the Xinhua News Agency launched a global 24-hour English-language television channel titled “CNC World.”<sup>16</sup> In May 2011, Xinhua moved its North American headquarters from an office in New York City’s borough of Queens to a much more prominent location on the top floor of a skyscraper in Manhattan’s Times Square.<sup>17</sup> In addition to expanding its international news outlets, in recent years the Chinese government has sponsored increased lobbying efforts directed at U.S. policymakers.<sup>18</sup>

The Chinese government has also attempted to reach out directly to public audiences in the United States through large-scale advertising campaigns. The Chinese government sponsored commercials hailing China’s cultural achievements that appeared on television networks and in Times Square during President Hu Jintao’s official visit to the United States in January 2011.<sup>19</sup> In August 2011, the Xinhua News Agency complemented the move of its New York bureau by signing a lease of at least six years for a 60 foot by 40 foot electronic billboard on the side of 2 Times Square.<sup>20</sup> The state-owned newspaper *China Daily* has paid for “advertorial” inserts in major newspapers such as the *Washington Post* (see image below) and the *New York Times*.<sup>21</sup> The *Washington Post* has also created the *China Watch* page on its website to present further news articles provided by *China Daily*.<sup>22</sup> These articles emphasize China’s desire for a “harmonious” world;<sup>23</sup> the benefits to Americans of Chinese economic policies; and the necessity for China to maintain CCP one-party rule.<sup>24</sup> Such advertising campaigns involve a significant outlay of resources: For example, the cost of a single instance of publishing an editorial advertising insert of the type placed by *China Daily* in the *Washington Post* is approximately \$300,000, not including additional fees for any related web content.<sup>25</sup>



Image: An example article from an "advertising supplement" insert (provided by the PRC state-owned newspaper *China Daily*) printed in the *Washington Post*. The cartoon accompanying the article personifies China as a friendly panda, expressing the PRC's desire for a "harmonious" international order. Source: *Washington Post*, March 25, 2011.

Despite such efforts, the Chinese government's attempt to find a more persuasive international voice may be hampered by its own misperceptions regarding foreign societies. Many Chinese officials believe that western governments direct the media in their countries to cast China in a negative light<sup>26</sup> as part of a vast campaign to contain China's emergence as a great power.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the CCP feels the need to push back with ambitious media and public diplomacy efforts against an imaginary U.S.-led international conspiracy (see box, below) is highly revealing—both of the CCP's national security worldview and of the challenges the CCP faces in successfully adapting its propaganda messages to international audiences.

### **The Chinese Communist Party and its View of the United States**

The CCP's formulation of foreign and national security narratives proceeds from the prism through which the party views the world. This outlook differs significantly from the win-win messages on international cooperation promoted by the PRC diplomatic corps and foreign language media. Domestic PRC media and internal party messages reflect a view of the outside world characterized by perceptions that China is surrounded by hostile actors. This produces a blinkered and distorted understanding of the international system as a whole and the United States in particular.

**The Chinese Communist Party and its  
View of the United States—Continued**

Despite widespread cynicism throughout Chinese society regarding Communist doctrine, Marxist social analysis is still a central element of CCP discourse,<sup>28</sup> to include traditional Marxist analysis on capitalism and imperialism: As stated in summer 2010 by an author in the *Global Times*, a newspaper controlled by the CCP Central Propaganda Department:<sup>29</sup>

*To understand the provocations made by America ... you must have a basic understanding of this country's nature and its global strategy. ... As seen from its history, America is constantly conducting war, searching for enemies, and in fact this is a normal condition of its social development. Without war, America cannot stimulate its economy. ... America is set upon a path of war from which it cannot turn back.*<sup>30</sup>

Senior PRC officials have also described the United States as an imperialist and militarist power, as when PRC Vice Premier and former Foreign Minister Qian Qichen stated in November 2004 that U.S. policy “advocates [that] the United States should rule over the whole world with overwhelming force, military force in particular.”<sup>31</sup> CCP analysis depicts the U.S. “hegemon”<sup>32</sup> as carrying out a “highly cohesive master plan designed to strengthen and expand its global domination ... this perception breeds a conspiratorial view, which in turn predisposes China to see ill intentions and sinister motives in every U.S. act.”<sup>33</sup> The United States is specifically accused of:

- Fomenting social unrest aimed at destabilizing Chinese society and overturning the government.<sup>34</sup> This narrative has been dominant since 1989, when CCP leaders blamed the Tiananmen protests on a U.S.-led plot by “hostile, reactionary foreign forces” intent on overthrowing China’s “socialist system”;<sup>35</sup>
- Intentionally bombing the PRC embassy annex in Belgrade in 1999 to intimidate and humiliate a rising China;<sup>36</sup>
- Linking U.S. overseas bases and military alliances into a “C-shaped ring of encirclement” (ranging from Japan and South Korea, down to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, and up to Afghanistan) directed at containing China;<sup>37</sup>
- Making calls for China to be a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system, with the intent to weaken China by trapping it in foreign entanglements;<sup>38</sup>
- Fostering the 2008 global financial crisis in an effort to hurt China’s economic growth;<sup>39</sup>
- Pressuring China to let the renminbi (RMB) appreciate as part of a “currency war” started by “American hegemony” against China’s economy;<sup>40</sup>

**The Chinese Communist Party and its  
View of the United States—Continued**

- Conducting “hegemonistic deeds of using human rights issues to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs” and employing this as “a political instrument to defame other nations’ image and seek [the United States’] own strategic interests;”<sup>41</sup>
- Using covert means to instigate ethnic unrest in regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang, with the goal of weakening China or even causing it to break apart;<sup>42</sup> and
- Orchestrating the award of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo as part of an effort to embarrass China.<sup>43</sup> The PRC state press described the awarding of the prize to Mr. Liu, an “incarcerated criminal,” as “a political tool that serves an anti-China purpose . . . the Nobel committee would like to see the country split by an ideological rift, or better yet, collapse like the Soviet Union.”<sup>44</sup>

The accusations made against the United States in official PRC discourse reveal a great deal about the anxieties and distorted worldview of Chinese political elites, and the PRC’s more assertive behavior in 2010 may be explained in part by a perceived need to push back forcefully against this imagined U.S.-led “conspiracy” directed against China.<sup>45</sup> However, the centrality of the U.S. role in the international system, and the importance of the U.S. market for Chinese-made goods, means that China’s leaders continue to treat relations with the United States as “one of the most dynamic and important bilateral relations in the world,”<sup>46</sup> despite their suspicious views of American power and intentions.<sup>47</sup>

**Chinese Messages and Policy Debates on Geopolitics in East Asia and China’s Emergence as a Great Power**

CCP propaganda officials set the parameters for debate on foreign policy issues inside China and also actively promote the party’s official narratives. Over the past two decades, China’s official propaganda messages to foreign audiences have emphasized four broad themes:

1. The primacy of “stability” for China while continuing the policies of social and economic “reform and opening up” under the continued political leadership of the CCP;
2. The primacy of economic development in China’s foreign policy goals, the mutually beneficial nature of China’s economic growth for other countries, and the attractiveness of China as a destination for investment;
3. The desire to maintain a stable and peaceful international environment in order to facilitate China’s domestic development;
4. The completely defensive nature of China’s military modernization, and China’s peaceful intentions toward neighboring countries.<sup>48</sup>

Although the slogans change over time, official PRC foreign policy narratives overlap with, and do not supersede, one another. Instead, they represent shifts in message emphasis rather than changes in actual policy.

### The Foreign Policy Guidelines of Deng Xiaoping

Deng Xiaoping's "24-Character Strategy" first emerged in 1990 in response both to the global backlash from the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and to the CCP's sense of alarm following the collapse of the communist states of Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup> The strategy provided basic principles on how China should protect its national interests while increasing its interactions with the world. The "24-Character Strategy" has been roughly translated as:

*Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.*<sup>50</sup>

Chinese officials and scholars have interpreted these policy guidelines to mean that China should avoid military rivalries; gradually grow China's comprehensive economic, military, and political strength; and minimize international responsibilities.<sup>51</sup> CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin continued this policy throughout the 1990s, making it a central tenet of Chinese foreign policy for more than ten years. The result was that China's strategic orientation "demonstrate[d] unusual consistency from the 1980s through the 2000s," with China's leaders "insisting on the importance of sticking to Deng Xiaoping's realist legacy."<sup>52</sup>

### Overview of Three Leading PRC Foreign Policy Narratives

China's Global Narratives	Leading Spokesman	Year	Synopsis
"Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" <sup>53</sup>	Zhou Enlai	1954	States should conduct relations with one another on an equal basis, with high regard for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
The "24-Character Strategy" <sup>54</sup>	Deng Xiaoping	1990	Keep focused on domestic economic growth while avoiding the burdens of international commitments and military competition. Stay alert for efforts to subvert China through "peaceful evolution," but do not challenge western countries.
"Peaceful Rise" <sup>55</sup> —shifts to— "Peaceful Development" <sup>56</sup>	Zheng Bijian  Hu Jintao	Nov. 2003  April 2004	Remain focused on economic growth above all other priorities while pursuing peaceful integration into the international system as a great power. As above, but with less emphasis on China's emergence as a great power and greater emphasis on how China's growth benefits other countries. China will undertake selected international roles while avoiding binding commitments or military competition with other powers.

### The Themes of “Peaceful Rise” vs. “Peaceful Development”

The “peaceful rise” theme was unveiled by Zheng Bijian (an influential foreign policy advisor to Hu Jintao) at the Boao Forum for Asia in November 2003.<sup>57</sup> Mr. Zheng described this as a “new strategic path [of] China’s peaceful rise through independently building socialism with Chinese characteristics, while participating in rather than detaching from economic globalization.”<sup>58</sup> This theme was also articulated to international audiences through an article by Mr. Zheng published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2005 titled “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great Power Status.”<sup>59</sup>

While the slogan of “peaceful rise” continued to circulate, by April 2004 the term had been replaced in official statements by the phrase “peaceful development,” which was confirmed as the official narrative with the release of a December 2005 government white paper titled “China’s Peaceful Development Road.”<sup>60</sup> In the white paper, the Chinese government outlined its new official foreign policy narrative as follows:

*To take the road of peaceful development is to unify domestic development with opening to the outside world, linking the development of China with that of the rest of the world, and combining the fundamental interests of the Chinese people with the common interests of all peoples throughout the world. China persists in its pursuit of harmony and development internally while pursuing peace and development externally; the two aspects, closely linked and organically united, are an integrated whole, and will help to build a harmonious world of sustained peace and common prosperity.<sup>61</sup>*

One academic expert has suggested that the change could be attributable to concerns that some neighboring countries or the United States might interpret the use of “rise” as too threatening a sign of hegemonic aspirations.<sup>62</sup> It is also possible that Hu Jintao may have wished for China’s foreign policy narrative to more closely parallel his overarching domestic propaganda theme of the “Scientific Outlook on Development.”<sup>63</sup> However, the reason for the change from “peaceful rise” to “peaceful development” is unknown.

#### China Studies Historical Great Powers

In debating how China should adapt to its growing economic, diplomatic, and military power, the leadership circles of the CCP have searched for answers in historical precedents, as when the Politburo undertook a “study session” in November 2003 to examine the development of major powers from the 15th to the 20th centuries.<sup>64</sup> This same theme was also on display in a major television documentary series produced on Chinese state television in 2006 titled “Rise of the Great Powers.” The documentaries catalogued the rise to great power status of Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia/the Soviet Union, and the United States.<sup>65</sup>

### **China Studies Historical Great Powers—Continued**

This interest in the emergence of great powers has been further influenced by traditional concepts of statecraft drawn from China's own Warring States Period (approximately 475–221 BCE), in which rising states frequently fell into conflict with dominant “hegemonic” states that sought to protect their position by striking out at the challengers.<sup>66</sup> Chinese leaders also reportedly have been alarmed by parallels comparing China's rise in the late 20th century with that of Imperial Germany in the late 19th/early 20th century and the attendant arms race and geopolitical competition that ensued between Germany and Great Britain—the dominant “hegemon” of the international system in the early 20th century.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, the PRC has embarked on an active propaganda/public diplomacy campaign to reassure audiences in other states—and most particularly policymakers in the United States, the “hegemon” of the current international order—that China has no intent either to threaten its neighbors or to upset the international system.<sup>68</sup> Singapore's “Minister Mentor” Lee Kuan Yew noted this informational campaign in an interview in October 2007, when he made reference to the “Rise of the Great Powers” television series. Mr. Lee stated that the Chinese government intended the series to be “a lesson to support their gradual opening up and their idea of how they can do it without conflict—the ‘peaceful rise.’ They have worked out this scheme, this theory, this doctrine to assure America and the world that they're going to play by the rules.”<sup>69</sup>

### **The Path of “Peaceful Development” in 2010–2011**

China adopted a much more assertive international profile in 2010, to include actions such as harassing U.S. survey vessels operating in international waters off the Chinese coast, aggressively pressing unrecognized territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, and supporting North Korea in the aftermath of unprovoked acts of aggression against South Korea.<sup>70</sup> This behavior has unnerved neighboring countries and undone much of China's goodwill diplomacy of the past decade.<sup>71</sup> Alongside these provocative actions, the messages emerging from China about its foreign and national security policy were also in a state of flux over the past year, as new policy directions were debated and a more diverse group of PRC foreign policy actors promoted their views.<sup>72</sup>

The themes of “peaceful development,” along with parallel messages on seeking a “harmonious” international environment,<sup>73</sup> continue to dominate official PRC foreign policy messages. These messages grew even more emphatic in late 2010 and early 2011, voiced in prominent fora by very senior PRC officials, a possible sign of public diplomacy damage control undertaken in reaction to the backlash that China faced over its aggressive behavior in 2010. In a speech to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on September 23, 2010, Premier Wen Jiabao stated that:

*China will stay firmly committed to peaceful development.  
You may ask what is the essence of peaceful development?*

*It is to foster a peaceful international environment for our development and at the same time contribute to world peace through our development. ... China's development will not harm anyone or pose a threat to anyone. There were powers who sought hegemony once they grew strong. China will never follow in their footsteps.*<sup>74</sup>

This was followed by a December 2010 article in the English-language *Beijing Review* by PRC State Councilor Dai Bingguo titled "Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development."<sup>75</sup> As described in testimony to the Commission by John Park of the U.S. Institute of Peace:

*With over 60 references to 'peace' and an explicit assurance that 'China has no culture or tradition of seeking expansion or hegemony' and that 'benevolence and harmony are at the heart of our political and cultural tradition, which values harmony, good-neighborliness and friendship with all' throughout its thousands of years of history, Dai's article appeared to be conspicuously overcompensating for the events and statements of a summer that seemed to confirm many countries' suspicions about the nature of China's rise.*<sup>76</sup>

In a similar vein, in January 2011, PRC Vice Premier and Politburo Standing Committee Member Li Keqiang, the likely successor to Wen Jiabao as state premier, published an op-ed in the *Financial Times* titled "The World Need Not Fear a Growing China." In the article, Mr. Li strongly asserted "China's pursuit of the path of peaceful development," its desire for "harmonious relations with our neighbours," and China's contributions to world economic growth.<sup>77</sup>

Prominent PRC academics have also been engaged in the PRC's redoubled efforts at strategic reassurance. Wang Jisi, dean of the School of International Studies at Beijing University, asserted in a February 2011 *Foreign Affairs* article that China would continue to adhere to nonconfrontational policies as it emerged as a major world power. He explained away China's more abrasive foreign policy actions in 2010, writing that:

*In recent years, China's power and influence relative to those of other great states have outgrown the expectations of even its own leaders. Based on the country's enhanced position, China's international behavior has become increasingly assertive. ... Last year, some Chinese commentators reportedly referred to the South China Sea and North Korea as ['core interests'], but these reckless statements, made with no official authorization, created a great deal of confusion. ... As long as no grave danger ... threatens the CCP leadership or China's unity, Beijing will remain preoccupied with the country's economic and social development, including in its foreign policy.*<sup>78</sup>

These more moderate views of Wang Jisi—which could reasonably be interpreted as the official message that China's leaders hope that international audiences will believe<sup>79</sup>—are directed in large part to policymakers and public opinion in the United States,

a result of the uncertainty and anxiety that CCP leaders feel about U.S. strategic intentions toward China.<sup>80</sup>

Although the general narrative framework of the PRC's foreign propaganda is unlikely to change in the near term, the emergence in 2012 of a new Central Committee and Politburo leadership following the Eighteenth Party Congress may produce new slogans, and possibly modified explanatory language, to reflect the public diplomacy priorities of the CCP's new leadership circle.

### **Should “Peaceful Development” Be Taken at Face Value?**

Some expert witnesses who testified before the Commission this year raised concerns that the PRC's official messages may be a deceptive cover for revisionist PRC foreign policy goals. Gilbert Rozman of Princeton University testified that “[t]here [has been] a calculated duality to Chinese writings. Has the Chinese narrative been intentionally deceptive? I think so . . . Having closely followed Chinese works [I believe] that positions taken in 2010 that are at variance with earlier positions are a result of prior concealment of China's attitudes.”<sup>81</sup> This opinion was also reflected in the testimony of Jacqueline Newmyer Deal of the Long Term Strategy Group, who told the Commission that:

*The Chinese government prioritizes manipulating information more than most Americans realize and perhaps more than any other major power. My analysis indicates that Chinese elites manage to deliver a range of messages tailored to American audiences that could have the effect of encouraging us to act, or in some cases refrain from acting, in ways that serve Chinese interests at the expense of U.S. interests or broader international norms.*<sup>82</sup>

The testimonies of Dr. Rozman and Dr. Newmyer Deal are supported by limited anecdotal evidence available from within the Chinese Communist Party itself. In early 2011, lecture notes taken at the CCP's Central Party School were leaked on the news website *China Digital Times*. According to the notes of this anonymous official, Central Party School lecturers told their students that the relationship between the CCP and “American imperialism” was one of “strategic adversaries” and that “the so-called cooperative partnership is deceptive.”<sup>83</sup>

If there is a disparity between what the Chinese government says to different audiences about China's rise as a great power, it is not surprising: The CCP informational bureaucracy has long held an “insider” and “outsider” view of access to information, as this pertains both to non-Chinese Communist Party members and to foreigners.<sup>84</sup> The CCP has a deeply ingrained institutional culture favoring secrecy<sup>85</sup> and a long history of proactively using information to promote the party's objectives while suppressing information deemed harmful to its interests.<sup>86</sup> China's leaders have selected the reassuring message of “peaceful development” as the public diplomacy narrative that they believe to be most advantageous to China's interests as well as the one that most accords with their self-image of China as “a force for stability and peace.”<sup>87</sup> However, the extent to which this optimistic narrative may diverge

from the CCP's actual view of international relations, and from China's longer-term policy goals, remains an open question.

### **The “Shanghai Spirit”**

In June 2011, on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Chinese media began to extol the institution's “Shanghai Spirit” as the embodiment of a new model of international relations. According to an article published in English by PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi:

*The SCO embodies ... the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ whose essence is mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diverse civilizations and seeking common development. It reflects the member states’ fresh perspectives on security, development, cooperation and civilization. An inspiration to the world, it is a major contribution to efforts to foster a new type of state-to-state relations and build a harmonious region.*<sup>88</sup>

Material published in Chinese is more revealing as to why the Chinese government holds up the SCO as its preferred model for an international organization. In thinly veiled code language referring to the threat allegedly posed by the United States and other western governments, the *People's Daily* has written that:

*The SCO supports the democratization of international relations, actively advancing the building of a new international order. In our world, although the Cold War is over, the paths of unilateralism and new interventionism are still prevalent; the ‘Superiority of Western Civilization,’ ‘Democratic Reform,’ and other such concepts still threaten the balanced and stable development of international politics.*<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to other institutions that “the PRC had little role in creating and had to join on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, Chinese officials have been able to shape the design and evolution of the SCO more than any other country ... allowing the Chinese to construct the SCO as an institution that reflects their preferred values.”<sup>90</sup> Such values include “full respect for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as upholding the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of all states;” and “democratic development with due regard for [members’] national realities as well as cultural historical features.”<sup>91</sup> They also include “democratizing international relations”—that is, excluding from participation the “hegemonic” United States and its allies, who have historically played a prominent role in international institutions. (For further discussion of the increasingly influential role of China in international organizations, see the March 2011 contracted research report, “The Evolving Role of China in International Institutions,” available on the Commission's website at [www.uscc.gov](http://www.uscc.gov)).

### **The Chinese Government's Messages Related to China's Military Modernization and Defense Policies**

In referring to China's military modernization and its national security policies, Chinese writings consistently assert China's peaceful military tradition and its rejection of "hegemony" and "power politics." Chinese messages often contrast the Chinese military tradition with that of the West, which they characterize as violent and expansionist.<sup>92</sup> Notably, since 2005 PRC messaging has made particular use of the story of the 15th century Ming Dynasty maritime explorer Zheng He, stressing the theme that China's naval expansion will be peaceful in nature and beneficial to surrounding countries.<sup>93</sup>

All of these themes have figured prominently in official PRC policy documents intended for foreign audiences. As stated in China's 2010 defense white paper:

*The pursuit of a national defense policy which is defensive in nature is determined by China's development path, its fundamental aims, its foreign policy, and its historical and cultural traditions. [China] promotes the building of a harmonious world enjoying lasting peace and common prosperity externally [and] maintains ... its belief in valuing peace above all else, advocating the settlement of disputes through peaceful means, prudence on the issue of war, and the strategy of 'attacking only after being attacked.' China will never seek hegemony, nor will it adopt the approach of military expansion now or in the future, no matter how its economy develops.<sup>94</sup>*

These messages have also been promoted in U.S.-China military-to-military exchanges. In May 2011, General Chen Bingde, the chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Staff Department and a member of the 17th CCP Central Committee,<sup>95</sup> led a 24-member delegation to the United States to restart high-level military exchanges that the PRC had halted following U.S. military sales to Taiwan in October 2008 and January 2010.<sup>96</sup>

In an address at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, General Chen offered statements consistent with the messages on foreign policy and national security issues that the Chinese government promotes to foreign audiences: Foremost, that China has a peaceful military tradition and poses no threat to its neighbors, and that it is focused on promoting a peaceful external environment to allow for its own domestic economic development. General Chen repeatedly stressed the capabilities gap between the Chinese and U.S. armed forces and that China has no intent to challenge U.S. military superiority or the U.S. position in the international system. He also stressed the prospects for security cooperation between the United States and China on transnational issues such as terrorism, piracy, and counterproliferation. However, General Chen attached conditions to closer military-to-military ties—in particular, the need for the United States to "respect" China's "core interests," especially in regard to Taiwan.<sup>97</sup> (For a fuller discussion of General Chen's visit and the issues surrounding it, see the USCC backgrounder "The Chinese People's Liberation Army Dele-

gation Visit to the United States, May 2011: A Summary of Key Actors and Issues,” available on the USCC website at [www.uscc.gov](http://www.uscc.gov).)

### What Constitutes a “Core Interest” of China?

The term “core interests” has been invoked by PRC officials and state media in reference to multiple policy areas, and the use of the term has increased dramatically from 2008 to the present.<sup>98</sup> The phrase has been used most commonly in regard to issues of national sovereignty but has also been invoked in relation to economic development, “social stability,” and territorial integrity.<sup>99</sup> According to one author writing in an authoritative CCP forum, “National core interests are a country’s paramount interests, related to the life or death of a country and its people. Therefore, in international contacts and negotiations one cannot yield, and there is no room for compromise.”<sup>100</sup>

At the close of the first round of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue in July 2009, PRC State Councilor Dai Bingguo described China’s “core interests” as follows:

*To ensure that our bilateral relationship will move forward on the track of long-term and sound development, a very important thing is that we need to support, respect, and understand each other, and to maintain our core interests. And for China, our concern is we must uphold our basic systems,\* our national security; and secondly, the sovereignty and territorial integrity; and thirdly, economic and social sustained development.*<sup>101</sup>

Despite such comments, Beijing has not made clear which issue areas merit classification as a “core interest.” In past years, the term was used primarily to denote sovereignty issues—particularly in regard to Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.<sup>102</sup> However, the term was used more expansively by PRC officials throughout 2010–2011. In May 2010, Mr. Dai told Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the South China Sea represented one of China’s “core interests”;<sup>103</sup> this was followed in July 2010 by a PRC Defense Ministry spokesman who stated that “China has indisputable sovereignty of the South [China] Sea.”<sup>104</sup> In the ensuing international controversy, PRC officials backed away from the explicit assertion that the region qualified as a “core interest” but did not withdraw the claim.<sup>105</sup>

\*The context of Mr. Dai’s remarks indicates that by “basic systems” he meant China’s current political order—i.e., the continued rule of the CCP. Jin Canrong, a professor at Renmin University, has written that Mr. Dai’s term “basic system” refers to China’s system of “multiparty cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China.” See *Global Times Online* (in English), “China Denies Taking Tough Stance on International Affairs,” March 8, 2010. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/chinaldiplomacy/2010-03/510467.html>.

### **What Constitutes a “Core Interest” of China?—Continued**

Additionally, PRC officials and media have become more vocal in protesting U.S. actions that “touch upon” China’s “core interests.” These include arms sales to Taiwan<sup>106</sup> as well as pressure to revalue the renminbi (RMB), which “would harm Chinese policymakers’ core interest of managing the economic wellbeing of the Chinese people.”<sup>107</sup> The term has also been invoked in reference to foreign criticism of China’s human rights practices, as when CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao referred in November 2006 to “Taiwan, Tibet, human rights and other major questions involving China’s state sovereignty and core interests.”<sup>108</sup>

Confusing messages regarding what qualifies as a “core interest” of China may reflect a lack of consensus among competing voices in the PRC foreign policy process. (For further discussion of this topic, see chap. 3, sec. 2, of this Report, “Actors in China’s Foreign Policy.”) However, it also reflects a growing assertiveness on the part of PRC foreign policy decisionmakers, who feel that China’s rise into the ranks of great powers gives it the necessary clout to reshape international practices to which it objects:

*[I]f a country’s identity changes as its power grows, it may cease to accept another party’s policies and behavior, although the country may have swallowed the bitter fruit in the past ... with the growth of China’s power and [the] Chinese people’s growing attention to foreign affairs, China cannot accept some behaviors such as arms sales to Taiwan, which has been done for decades. However ... the offensive taken by China is not a move of expansion. In fact, Beijing’s offensive strategy on arms sales to Taiwan is a small step of counterattack after its core national interest has been infringed repeatedly and for decades.<sup>109</sup>*

Such a sense of China’s increasing power, tied to a deep sense of grievance regarding China’s historical treatment at the hands of foreign powers,<sup>110</sup> suggests that PRC officials will prove increasingly expansive and assertive in how they choose to define the list of China’s “core interests.”<sup>111</sup>

### **China’s “Defensive” Military Tradition**

Authoritative PRC military commentators consistently declare that China maintains a purely defensive military orientation and that this is the continuation of a long historical legacy: “The Chinese nation has a time-honored tradition of loving peace. In the history of military development over thousands of years, it always pursued a defensive type of military strategy.”<sup>112</sup> However, some scholars of historical Chinese statecraft have identified a realpolitik readiness to use military force in the pursuit of state interests, thinly veiled beneath official rhetoric on peace and benevolence.<sup>113</sup> Andrew Scobell, senior political scientist at the RAND

Corporation, has described the result as a dualistic Chinese strategic culture that “paradoxically tends to dispose Chinese leaders to pursue offensive military operations as a primary alternative in pursuit of national goals, while rationalizing these actions as being purely defensive and last resort.”<sup>114</sup> One example of this thinking is PRC discourse on China’s 1979 invasion of Vietnam, which is invariably referred to as a “self-defensive counterattack” made in response to Vietnamese provocations.<sup>115</sup>

More recently, the PRC’s assertion of a peaceful, defensive military posture has also been questioned due to increasing Chinese aggressiveness in asserting sovereignty claims in areas such as the South China Sea,<sup>116</sup> as well as to its increasing development of capabilities for strike warfare.\* Many of China’s neighbors in East Asia are hedging against the possibility of China’s future intentions being less peaceful than its narratives would attest, as is revealed in the most recent Japanese and Australian defense white papers<sup>117</sup> and in summer 2011 exercises conducted between the U.S. Navy and naval vessels from the Philippines and Vietnam.<sup>118</sup> These same concerns have also been displayed in South Korea’s efforts to strengthen its security alliance with the United States following attacks from North Korea and the subsequent moves taken by the PRC to shield Pyongyang from any serious repercussions for its actions.<sup>119</sup>

### **Nationalist Rhetoric from the PLA Officer Corps**

The peaceful prospects of China’s military modernization have also been called into question by hawkish comments from senior PLA officers that clash with the official themes advocating peaceful economic development and international cooperation.<sup>120</sup> One of the most high-profile examples from the past year was provided by General Liu Yuan, the political commissar of the PLA General Logistics Department, and the son of former PRC head of state Liu Shaoqi.<sup>121</sup> General Liu has emerged as a prominent voice among the group of “princelings”—the children of high-ranking CCP officials—who extol the virtues of the party’s past.<sup>122</sup>

General Liu has accused unnamed CCP leaders of selling out the country to foreign interests<sup>123</sup> and has called upon party members to embrace revolutionary-era communist values, described as a return to “New Democracy.”<sup>124</sup> General Liu’s comments are evocative of the worrisome trend of a “Maoist revival” in some quarters of the CCP, with calls for assertive nationalism, a return to Marxist ideological orthodoxy, reinforced state control over the economy, and harsher repression of dissent.<sup>125</sup> General Liu has also praised war as a unifying and progressive force in Chinese history,<sup>126</sup> writing that “[t]he state is an apparatus for the use of force, forged for vio-

\* Strike warfare is defined as “operations to destroy or neutralize enemy targets . . . including attack against strategic and tactical targets such as manufacturing facilities and operating bases from which the enemy is capable of conducting or supporting air, surface, or subsurface operations against friendly forces.” See U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-04: Doctrine for Joint Maritime Operations (Air)* (Washington DC: July 1991), p. GL-5. [http://edocs.nps.edu/dodpubs/topic/jointpubs/JP3/JP3\\_04\\_910731.pdf](http://edocs.nps.edu/dodpubs/topic/jointpubs/JP3/JP3_04_910731.pdf). For a discussion of the PLA’s increasing capabilities for strike warfare operations, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2010 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010).

lence; history is written in massacres and blood sacrifices, and new civilizations and new cultures often have their origins in warfare.”<sup>127</sup>

General Liu’s extreme language is not an authoritative reflection of Chinese government policy. However, General Liu is a rising figure in the PLA and enjoys the favor of Xi Jinping, who is on track to assume the role of paramount CCP leader in 2012.<sup>128</sup> Mr. Xi is himself a princeling—the son of former PRC Vice Premier Xi Zhongcun—and has been described as a staunch supporter of promoting fellow princelings to senior government positions.<sup>129</sup> The two men are also believed to share an orthodox interpretation of Communist ideology.<sup>130</sup> Some expert observers of Chinese politics believe that Mr. Xi is laying the groundwork for General Liu to be appointed as a vice chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission at the 18th CCP Party Congress in autumn 2012.<sup>131</sup> If this were to prove true, it would make General Liu one of the two most senior officers in the PLA, as well as its highest-ranking political commissar<sup>132</sup>—thereby giving him a powerful platform for shaping both the military’s internal political indoctrination as well as the messages that the PLA promotes beyond the ranks.

General Liu also is not isolated in his views, as provocative nationalist commentary from PLA officers became more prominent throughout 2010 and 2011.<sup>133</sup> In one such example, in May 2010 a U.S. delegation in Beijing received an angry, three-minute lecture from Rear Admiral Guan Youfei, deputy director of the Foreign Affairs Office in the PRC Defense Ministry. Admiral Guan lambasted the United States for treating China as an enemy (as proven by arms sales to Taiwan); for being a bullying “hegemon” of the international system; and for plotting to encircle China with strategic alliances.<sup>134</sup> Such commentary from senior-ranking officers has generated concerns that nationalist impulses within the PLA may be driving more aggressive behavior in PRC foreign policy<sup>135</sup> or that elements of the PLA may be acting in a “roguish” fashion outside of full civilian control.<sup>136</sup> It has also contributed to concerns that political and personnel changes underway in the lead-up to the 18th CCP Party Congress in autumn 2012 could serve to boost the political influence of the PLA and amplify nationalist voices in the PRC’s foreign policy decision-making process.<sup>137</sup>

### **Track Two Exchanges and PRC Messages Regarding Military and National Security Policy**

There are many “track two” exchanges between U.S. and Chinese host institutions, which bring together scholars and former government officials to discuss diplomatic, security, and economic topics of concern to both countries.\* Additionally, a number of “track 1.5” exchanges have also appeared in recent years, which involve gov-

\*“Track two” diplomatic exchanges are those that take place between representatives of non-governmental groups (think tanks, academics, retired senior political figures, or military officers, etc.) who may nonetheless be in a position to relay the results to active policymakers or to otherwise influence government policy or public opinion in regard to particular issues in foreign relations. See Dalia Dassa Kaye, *Talking to the Enemy: Track Two Diplomacy in the Middle East and South Asia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007).

ernment officials conducting discussions in an unofficial capacity.\* Such exchanges have come to occupy a prominent place in U.S.-Chinese relations as conducted outside of formal government channels. For example, from 2002–2008 the Institute for U.S.-China Issues at the University of Oklahoma conducted annual meetings of “The Sino-American Security Dialogue” in partnership with Chinese academic institutions; this subsequently changed to the “US–China Diplomatic Dialogue” for mid-career U.S. and Chinese diplomats, which last met in summer 2011 in Anhui, China.<sup>138</sup>

Track two exchanges offer many potential benefits, to include greater mutual understanding and the opportunity for discussion of contentious topics outside of the restrictions of official diplomatic channels. However, the representatives of PRC friendship associations and think tanks are not independent actors: Virtually all are subordinate to a government ministry or Communist Party body,<sup>139</sup> and their personnel appointments are dependent upon CCP vetting and approval.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, such exchanges also offer opportunities for Chinese government–controlled front organizations to reinforce official propaganda messages and to conduct subtle perception management efforts under the guise of nominally independent person-to-person and scholarly exchanges.

The Commission’s examination of this issue revealed a prominent role for PRC intelligence entities in organizing and hosting track two exchanges. For example, one prominent Chinese sponsor of exchange trips and dialogues is the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), which is a front organization for the International Liaison Department of the PLA General Political Department.<sup>141</sup> The International Liaison Department performs dual roles of intelligence collection and conducting PRC propaganda and perception management † campaigns, particularly in the case of efforts focused on foreign military forces.<sup>142</sup>

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\*According to a definition provided by the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies, a Danish think tank, track 1.5 exchanges involve “informal dialogue and problem-solving formats with high ranking politicians and decision-makers. Involves Track 1 participants, but employs Track 2 approaches.” See Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies. “Glossary: Track 1.5,” <http://www.berghof-foundation.de/en/glossary/track-1.5>.

†The term “perception management” has been defined by the Department of Defense as follows: “Actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning as well as to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviors and official actions favorable to the originator’s objectives.” See U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: April 2001 [as amended through October 31, 2009]), p. 411.

<b>Selected CAIFC/CPD Track Two Exchanges with Government Officials and Think Tank Scholars in 2009–2010</b> <sup>143</sup>	
<p>In addition to activities that it sponsors directly, the Chinese Association for International Friendly Contact also operates its own associated think tank, the Center for Peace and Development (CPD).<sup>144</sup> Not counting the extensive number of programs run by other Chinese organizations, the CAIFC and CPD conduct a very active list of exchanges. A list of selected exchanges sponsored by CAIFC and/or CPD from the years 2009–2010 includes the following:</p>	
Dates	Participating Foreign Organization(s)/Person(s) and Issues Discussed (If Known)
June 27– July 9, 2010	A delegation from CAIFC meets in Washington, DC, with Members of Congress and representatives of the Asia Society and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, among others. They also meet in New York with faculty at Columbia University. Topics discussed reportedly focused on U.S and Chinese policy in Central Asia.
June 15, 2010	CAIFC hosts a visit to China by the governor of Hawaii and an accompanying delegation from the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce.
April 4–13, 2010	CAIFC sponsors a delegation of five former Members of Congress to visit China; in Beijing, they visit the National People’s Congress, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, and the People’s Bank of China.
November 25, 2009	CPD hosts a visiting delegation from Britain’s Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. Topics discussed reportedly included Chinese-European relations, Afghanistan, and the Iranian nuclear program.
October 16– 24, 2009	In the second round of meetings of the “Sanya Initiative,” <sup>145</sup> a delegation of retired Chinese generals visits the United States. They visit U.S. Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu; and subsequently travel to Washington, D.C., where they meet with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General James Cartwright, and members of the China Working Group caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives.
May 19, 2009	CAIFC representatives, including former Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, entertain a visiting delegation of senior-ranking retired Japanese military officers at the Diaoyutai Guest House in Beijing.
May 15, 2009	Hosted by CAIFC, a delegation from the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies visits the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the China Institute of International Studies, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of American Studies, and Qinghua University.
April 8–18, 2009	A delegation of CAIFC representatives travels to Washington State to meet with state political and business leaders and subsequently to Washington, DC, for discussions at The Brookings Institution and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Despite concerns raised by the sponsorship role of Chinese intelligence and Communist Party-controlled entities—and their role as conduits for propaganda messages targeted at foreign elites—many U.S. participants involved with track two exchanges have emphasized the value of dialogue with PRC state-controlled think tanks and other like bodies, noting that these discussions offer insights into the policy positions favored by the government parent organization.<sup>146</sup> In testimony before the Commission this year, Abraham

Denmark, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, defended track two exchanges with Chinese interlocutors as “an invaluable source of information,” as well as an avenue for building contacts and communication with Chinese foreign policy thinkers.<sup>147</sup> The Commission itself has met on multiple occasions for discussions with representatives of Chinese think tanks, to include those operated by intelligence entities. For example, in July 2010 members of the Commission met in Beijing with representatives of the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (operated by PLA military intelligence<sup>148</sup>) and the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (a branch of the Ministry of State Security, China’s leading civilian intelligence service<sup>149</sup>).

### **Implications for the United States**

The official foreign policy narrative of the Chinese government expresses its desire for a peaceful and “harmonious” international environment as well as for economic growth that benefits China and the rest of the world. If true, this offers hope for exchanges between the United States and China that could produce a mutually beneficial trade relationship, avoid military competition, and bring about cooperative efforts on pressing international issues such as piracy, counterproliferation, and global climate change.

However, multiple messages are emerging from China regarding its place in the world, and some of these messages conflict with the official ones. All governments seek to present their policy choices in the most favorable light and frequently may claim high-minded justifications for actions motivated by *realpolitik* interests. However, the case may be particularly serious in relation to China: Although China’s diplomats and informational bureaucracy speak to international audiences in terms of mutually beneficial cooperation, Chinese domestic discourse reveals a profound distrust of the United States and a focus on approaches that favor China’s state interests regardless of the effects on other countries.

This disparity in external and internal messages, as well as between China’s words and deeds as observed in 2010 and 2011, carries with it troubling implications. If China’s leaders are presenting reassuring messages to the outside world for public relations purposes while actually implementing a contrary set of revisionist and self-interested policies, this bodes ill for policy initiatives that proceed from *prima facie* acceptance of stated PRC intentions. It could also portend increased security competition in Asia: By themselves, reassuring Chinese statements about a “harmonious” international order will prove unconvincing to neighboring states alarmed by China’s military buildup and its aggressive behavior in disputed maritime territories.

### **Conclusions**

- The Chinese government places a high priority on the management of information as a tool of policy, to include the messages that it promotes to international audiences regarding its goals in foreign and national security policy. The central leadership of the Chinese Communist Party selects official foreign policy messages intended to support state policy goals. These messages are then

disseminated through diplomatic channels, state-controlled media, advertising, and “track two” exchanges.

- The Chinese government’s official narratives stress China’s desire for mutually beneficial “peaceful development” and for a “harmonious” international environment that will allow China to focus attention and resources on its economic and social development. China’s statements on its defense policies emphasize that they are entirely defensive in nature and that China will never pose a threat to any of its neighbors.
- There are notable differences between the optimistic character of China’s official messages on national security policy, which stress prospects for international cooperation, and the nature of its domestic discourse, which portrays the United States as a dangerous and predatory “hegemon” of the international system.
- The Chinese government frequently discusses important policy issues in terms of China’s “core interests,” accompanied by an insistence that other countries accept the PRC’s non-negotiable positions on these issues. However, conflicting statements from different parts of the Chinese government leave it unclear as to exactly which issues fall into the category of a “core interest.” In order to prevent misunderstandings with the United States and other countries that could have serious diplomatic consequences, Beijing should clarify which issues it sees as truly representing a “core interest.”
- The emergence of a more outspoken field of PRC foreign policy actors has produced messages that are sometimes at variance with official government narratives. This is particularly true of nationalist voices within the Chinese military.
- The Chinese government makes extensive use of front organizations. Congress and the American public often are not aware that nominally private civic organizations in China that purport to have educational, cultural, or professional purposes are frequently controlled by military, intelligence, or Communist Party organs. These front organizations are used to advance PRC state interests while disguising the guiding role of the government.