



U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC AND SECURITY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Hearing on China's Narratives Regarding National Security Policy

Opening Statement of Commissioner Dennis C. Shea

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Washington, DC

Good morning, everyone. I would like to thank all of you, both our witnesses and our assembled guests in the public gallery, for joining us for today's hearing. Today's topic is one that is of critical importance to future American economic and national security: that of the messages that the Chinese government promotes about its national security goals, and what they may reveal about China's course as an emerging great power. China's rise over the past three decades – from an isolated and impoverished nation devastated by the Cultural Revolution, to one of the world's strongest industrial powers – has truly been an epochal event, and one that will shape U.S. foreign policy for decades to come.

This dramatic story has not yet fully played out, however, and many questions remain surrounding China's rise to great power status. It is not yet entirely clear how the Chinese state will choose to make use of its dramatically increased economic and diplomatic clout. It is also not clear what role China's rapidly modernizing and professionalizing armed forces will come to play in Chinese foreign policy. The Chinese government insists that the People's Liberation Army will only be used for defensive purposes, but year-on-year increases in its military budget, as well as a steady expansion of its capabilities for power projection, have generated cause for concern among many of China's neighbors in East Asia.

The Chinese government's response to such concerns has been a campaign of reassuring messages offered through leadership speeches, official documents, government spokespeople, and the state-controlled media. These narratives have tended to stress the same general theme: that China is a peaceful country interested primarily in its own domestic economic development, with no appetite for either foreign military adventures or confrontations with other powers. These messages have also stressed China's interest in making positive contributions to world security and the world economy, through measures such as overseas investment and greater participation in peacekeeping and counter-terrorism initiatives.

Such reassurances have been called into question, however, by deeds that don't always appear to match the governing narrative. The Chinese government's more aggressive efforts to assert sovereignty over disputed territories in the South China Sea and East China Sea – as well as its continued staunch backing of North Korea in the face of unprovoked attacks against South Korea – have seemed to counteract much of its official rhetoric. Furthermore, the emergence of more nationalistic voices within China, many of them linked to the military establishment provide a glimpse into viewpoints that stand starkly at odds with reassuring statements about peaceful and mutually beneficial economic development.

These apparent contradictions leave U.S. policymakers facing a number of questions: What does the future hold for China's national security policy? What will be the role of the PLA in securing China's interests abroad? And which of China's competing narratives will ultimately emerge as the true expression of China's course and intentions as a great power?

We look forward to the testimony of our distinguished witnesses today, as we seek to gain a greater understanding of these issues that will better enable us to fulfill our responsibilities as an advisory body to the Congress. I once more thank all of you for joining us here this morning – and with that, I'll turn the floor over to my colleague and co-chair for today's hearing, Commissioner Jeffrey Fiedler.