

## Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer “Striving For Achievement”

Mikael Weissmann<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** During the last four decades, China has moved from being an isolated country separated from the international community to having become one of the world’s major powers. It is vital to understand what is guiding Chinese foreign policy, why this is so, and not least what kind of power China is and will be in the future. This article analyses the vital elements and thinking that guides Chinese foreign policy, its priorities and decision making process. It is found that China’s foreign policy is embedded in domestic issues. The foremost foreign policy objective is domestic political stability, which in turn is a necessity for the survival of one-party rule. Both are dependent on a combination of two key factors: continuing domestic economic growth and nationalism. The foreign policy is also closely linked to the Chinese self-perception, both its self-superiority/self-inferiority dualism and its multitude of confusing (overlapping) identities about what China is and should be. A key turning year is 2008 when the “global” financial crisis severely affected the United States and Europe at a time of Chinese economic success, which gave China confidence to pursue a more active and aggressive/assertive stance on the international stage. It is concluded that China under Xi Jinping will not be a *status quo* power accepting the world as it is, but nor are we to expect China to become a *revisionist* power aiming to remodel the global order. China is what can best be described as a responsible reformer “striving for achievements”.

### Introduction <sup>2</sup>

During the last four decades, China has moved from being an isolated country separated from the international community, having become one of the world’s major powers and being on its way to becoming the biggest economy in the world. Being at the epicentre of a global power shift from “the West” to “the East”, and from “the North” to “the South”, there has been a lot of attention given to its external affairs, including its foreign policy goals and behaviour. To accurately understand China’s external affairs, there is a need to grasp the bigger picture, to be able to understand what is guiding the Chinese foreign policy, why this is so, and how the Chinese foreign policy decision making works. Without accurately grasping the larger foreign policy dynamics behind China’s policy, it is simply not possible to accurately understand and

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr Mikael Weissmann is a Researcher at the Swedish Defence Research Agency and a Senior Lecturer at the Swedish Defence University. Email: mikaelweissmann@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> The research for this article was undertaken as part of a project on Russia – China relations at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). This was a collaborative effort by the agency’s Asia programme and project on Russian Foreign, Defence and Security Policy (RUFSS). A version of the text has been published in the report *China and Russia - A Study on cooperation, competition and distrust* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2015). The views expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not represent the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI).

in the continuation predict either its overall policy or its behaviour in specific cases, be it towards Russia, Europe, South East Asia, or how it handles the events in Ukraine or Syria. Nor is it possible to understand what kind of power China is today and will be in the future.

This article will try to grasp the larger foreign policy dynamics, trying to understand what is driving China's foreign policy and what kind of power China is and will be, and why this is so. It will analyse the vital elements that is guiding Chinese foreign policy and foreign policy thinking, its foreign policy priorities and decision making process. Focus will be on the period since 2000, with a certain emphasis on capturing the major developments that have happened since the election of Xi Jinping.

The article is divided into five parts. First, it will examine vital elements in Chinese foreign policy thinking, which sets up the framework for understanding Chinese foreign policy itself. This section reviews where China comes from and analyses how it perceives itself and what its position and role in the world is and ought to be. In section two, Chinese foreign policy priorities are outlined and its practical foreign policy is discussed. In section three, the processes behind the Chinese foreign policy are reviewed, outlining the actors behind Chinese foreign policy decision making traditionally as well as under Xi Jinping. Section four analyses the developments in foreign policy during the 21st century, outlining what type of power China is and will be. Finally, conclusions will be drawn, arguing that China is neither a *status quo* power accepting the world as it is, nor a *revisionist* power aiming to remodel the global order. Rather it has become what can best be described as a responsible reformer "striving for achievements".

### **Vital Elements in Chinese Foreign Policy Thinking**

Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 the Communist Party of China (CCP) has sought to regain the respect and dignity of being a great nation that has been lost after what the Chinese perceive as a "century of humiliation" when external powers dominated the region. However, despite three decades of development, China still shows a dual identity of self-superiority and self-inferiority – which can also be seen in its foreign policy. On the one hand, China has the mentality of being superior, being the "Middle Kingdom" with the natural right of ruling the world. At the same time, China feels very insecure and weak, and under pressure from threats from within as well as from the outside.

Chinese foreign policy thinking is closely linked to Chinese self-perception. At the core is the perception of identity - the way in which Chinese scholars, academics and policy makers are thinking about China itself. Since China lost its centrality in Asia, from being the centre of power to whom others paid tribute, to becoming a semi-colonial country in the mid-19th century, the question of Chinese national identity and in what direction it should evolve has been a constant theme – who am I? How should I evolve? (Zhu, 2010: 19) This has created debates about what kind of power China is to be and what international role it should seek.

Looking beyond the self-superiority/self-inferiority dualism, China's rise has gone hand in hand with a confusing multitude of overlapping ideas about what China is and should be. Simultaneously China is a developing state, a (re-)emerging power and a global power (Wei and Fu, 2011). To this should be added its role as a regional power (Breslin, 2009, 2013). These multiple personalities in turn affect the different ways in which China builds partnerships and alliances. As a developing country it shares experiences and concerns with other less developed states. Since the Cold War era China has seen itself as a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement and a champion of Third World interests. As an emerging power it seeks alliances and partnership with other dissatisfied large powers, most clearly seen in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India, South Africa). As a global power, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of the G20, China is in “direct institutional contact with the established powers as one of a small number of other states that wield, and share, both global power and global responsibility” (Breslin, 2013: 617). Though the concept of G2 (China and the United States) is resisted in China itself, it is also by some seen as a quasi-superpower second in the global system only to the United States – a position creating expectations (Breslin, 2013: 617). Lastly, it is clear that China is already a regional power, closely watched and a key focus point for its regional neighbour's foreign policy strategy and security concerns. Not surprisingly, an extensive debate has evolved about foreign policy strategy.

Over time there has been a trend where China gradually has leaned towards trying to become an insider rather than outsider in the international community. Some of this includes internalising the task to create an image of China as a “responsible great power”, or “responsible stakeholder” if using the western term, that neither threatens the interest of others, nor challenge the existing global order, while facilitating for continued regional and global economic prosperity. However, at the same time China does provide an alternative to the existing liberal international order (Breslin, 2009: 822). Reiterating that, in contrast to the United States and the West, it has no normative agenda, not seeking to impose values and

policies putting an utmost respect on state sovereignty China offers “a democratic international order” as an alternative to the “unipolar hegemony of the Pax Americana” (Breslin, 2009: 825). This alternative is based on multilateralism with emphasis on the role of the United Nations as a global security guarantor, a commitment to the settling of disputes by consultation and dialogue as opposed to force and to global economic development with emphasis on the responsibility of the developed world to help developing states, and a “spirit of inclusiveness” where “all civilizations coexist harmoniously and accommodate each other” (Ding, 2008: 197).

### **Priorities in Chinese Foreign Policy**

Often China’s foreign policy is expressed in terms of different principles and slogans, such as the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, “Peaceful Rise/Development”, and “Harmonious World”. These in turn have formed the basis of foreign policy practices. This said, it is important to note that implicit but very important goals of the regime are also taken into account when forming foreign policy, something deliberated on more extensively further below.

Underpinning Chinese foreign policy for the last 60 years are the so called “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” (United Nations, 2014: 70). These are 1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, 2) mutual non-aggression, 3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, 4) equality and mutual benefit, and 5) peaceful co-existence. In practical terms these principles have facilitated a foreign policy focusing on “good-neighbourly relations”, aimed at preventing external instability to negatively affect internal frictions within China, and a strict interpretation of non-interference in internal affairs most importantly concerning Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang.

But when looking beyond principles, what are in fact China’s foreign policy objectives? Officially they are defined as 1) domestic political stability; 2) sovereign security, territorial integrity and national unification; and 3) China’s sustainable economic and social development (Jakobson, 2013: 4). This is the outcome of a policy founded on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and driven by a number of “core interests”. The main drivers behind the core interests are, to cite Timothy R. Heat (2012: 64), concerns “about externally derived threats to China’s development and threats to China’s access to overseas resources and goods upon which its economy is increasingly dependent”.

The first three core interests are straight forward, being “National Sovereignty”, “National Security” and “Territorial Integrity”. However, China does tend to use a more strict interpretation of the three than other countries. It is simply not showing the same flexibility in interpretation as many other countries, as can be seen in for example Russia’s interpretation of territorial integrity and national sovereignty (most recently in Ukraine) (Carlsson, Oxenstierna & Weissmann, 2015). The fourth core interest, “National Unification”, is uniquely Chinese, it being a country where separation is seen as temporary while awaiting a return to the natural state of a unified China. The emphasis here is of course on the “renegade province” Taiwan. The belief in the unification of China has grown stronger, as Hong Kong and Macao have been returned; only Taiwan is missing. The last two core interests concern domestic issues, which, as already discussed, also drive foreign policy. They are “China’s Political System and Social Stability” and “The Basic Safeguard of Interests for Sustained Economic and Social Development”.

These core interests are not set in stone, nor are they in practice as clear as they seem in the official documents. When looking behind the big headlines about core interests, the picture gets messy as what is to be perceived as a core interests is disputed and debated within China. For example, it has been argued that sea lanes of communications are a core interest, which if accepted would have impact on how to develop China’s naval capabilities as well as whether the United States naval superiority in East Asia should be accepted. It has also been argued that the Middle East is part of China’s core interest, as energy from the area is essential to ensure long term economic development in China.

“Core interest”, as argued by Timothy R. Heath (2012), is a concept that the Chinese leaders are likely to continue to expand and refine. Such moves have already been seen; 2011 being the first time a government white paper explicitly listed China’s “political system” and “national reunification” among core interests, though Chinese officials have mentioned them in other contexts. The 2011 Peaceful Development White Paper was also the first to refine the concept of “developmental interests”, specifying that China seeks to “safeguard” the “sustainability” of this kind of interests, as opposed to merely securing the resources themselves.

### **Foreign Policy in Practice**

China has been keen to learn from the experiences of previous great powers and the legacy of its own glorious past. In the foreign policy context China is trying to reach out to other countries, emphasising the mutual benefits from doing things together. This way it tries to be

different from the Western security governance practices of “do as I say, not as I do” (Kavalski, 2012: 6). China here puts particular emphasis on its own experiences of modernisation, as a successful late-developing country, being a possible model for others (Spakowski, 2009: 489-90). Of course this is viewed in a positive way in many places, particularly in the global South and in non-liberal and non-democratic states or countries with a colonial past.

Chinese foreign policy is embedded in domestic issues. In fact, the foremost foreign policy objective in China is to ensure domestic political stability. The ultimate goal is to ensure the survival of one-party rule and the socialist system, which in turn is dependent on political stability. Domestic political stability and the regime survival are both dependent on a combination of two factors: continuing domestic economic growth and nationalism. Nationalism here has replaced political ideology to legitimise authoritarian one-party rule, as the latter has lost much of its credibility as a way to legitimise the state of affairs.

There is a direct link between economic growth and nationalism, where economic growth works as a way to satisfy nationalist sentiments rather than pursue overly aggressive nationalist policies in for example the South China Sea or against Taiwan – without growth, Beijing would have to elaborate on contingencies such as occupying new islands in the South China Sea, or even launch an invasion of Taiwan-held offshore islands, such as Mazu or Jinmen, to keep its domestic audience content. Thus, nationalism is useful, but dangerous. If not kept under control, China risks being drawn into direct conflict with its neighbours. This in turn would undermine economic growth. In short, it is a delicate balancing act.

### **Decision Making in Foreign Policy**

To understand foreign policy, it is necessary to understand the underlying decision making process, including the actors involved. In official foreign policy making, three actors stand out: the Communist Party of China, the State Council and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) (for a good overview of these three actors see e.g. Jakobson & Knox, 2010: 4-16). The former two have separate decision making structures, though overlaps exist in function, authority and personnel. The party does have supreme authority. In addition to the party and government structures under the state council, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) always has and continues to play an important role in foreign policy making on security issues and other areas related to military affairs. However, foreign policy making goes beyond official structures, and a number of factors besides official structure need to be taken into account.

One of the better and up-to date conceptualisations of Chinese foreign policy decision making has been presented by David Shambaugh (2013: 61-72), who conceptualised the foreign policy process as consisting of five concentric circles – 1) senior leaders, 2) ministries, 3) intelligence organs, 4) localities and corporations, and 5) society. Of the five circles, it is only the inner two that actually make foreign policy *decisions*. The other three only *influence* these decisions.<sup>3</sup> The senior leadership includes the top leadership and the institutions with whom they interact. It should be noted that here foreign policy is only a small part of their work. It has been estimated that international affairs take up a mere 10-15 per cent of the Politburo leaders' time. The second sphere includes a range of ministries and ministerial level agencies, of which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the most important. This said, it should be emphasised that many Chinese academics and people related to the foreign ministry always emphasise how weak the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is, noting that there is a need to coordinate with a lot of other actors and that the Ministry of Commerce is a dominant actor. It is also noteworthy that the State Councillor responsible for foreign affairs, Yang Jiechi, is not even a member of the Politburo.

The third sphere includes a range of intelligence organs, including institutes such as China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS), Central Party School Institute of Strategic Studies and key universities such as Peking, Renmin, Tsinghua, Fudan, and China Foreign Affairs University. They contribute with information, advice and intelligence to ministerial-level agencies. Sometimes they are also attached to such ministries, as in the case of CICIR which is attached to the State Council and CIIS to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Localities and corporations consist of China's large state-owned enterprises with operations abroad, as well as provincial and municipal level governments that make autonomous decisions on a range of topics and issues. Fifth and last, individuals in society, including individuals such as members of think-tanks expressing their views in the media and bloggers active on micro-media (*weibo*) and the internet all try to influence foreign policy.

It should be emphasised that the knowledge of the exact practice of the Chinese Foreign Policy decision making process, often even its motivations, is limited. This said, some valuable research has been undertaken (See e.g. Rozman, 2013; Barnett, 1985; Jakobson & Knox, 2010; Lampton, 2001). However, even in more transparent countries, it can be unclear why in fact the processes leading to major decisions were initiated. This is even more so in

---

<sup>3</sup> The exception is corporations that make business decisions with actual impact abroad and have effects on foreign policy, though these are not actual foreign policy decisions.

China, where the governance process is very informal compared to the West – less so in foreign policy, but still important in particular in economic policy and issues related to economic reform (Harris, 2014: 26-27). Politics in China “should be thought of as an endless web of bureaucratic and political constituencies that compete and bargain for position and resources within a vertically organized Leninist system” (Shambaugh, 2002: 36). It is also in this vertical system that, “unlike in democracies, political competition is waged ... within the CCP and government departments – rather than being open to the public.” (Harris, 2014: 26) Within this system personal power and relationships (*guanxi*), between individuals and towards a patron, are critical (Harris, 2014). Exactly as argued by Jakobson and Knox (2010: 15–17), the policy making process is consensus-driven and highly dependent on informal channels and allegiances.

### **Foreign Policy Decision Making under Xi Jinping**

Xi Jinping has been responsible for major changes in the Chinese decision making process, including foreign policy. Xi’s leadership seems to be more centralized in the general secretary himself, a style very different from the “collective leadership” that the party has followed since Deng Xiaoping’s leadership in the late 1970s. Rather than adhering to collective decision making, Xi has taken all power in his own hand, including the power over the Armed Forces.<sup>4</sup> In this context, it should be noted that he is leading a, under Chinese circumstances, most unbalanced Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), the top policy-making body in China, where six out of the seven seats are filled with officials belonging to his party faction. These six are all officials linked to the former CCP general secretary (1989-2002) Jiang Zemin who dominated the leadership transition despite having left all offices eight years ago and now being 88 years old (Dotson, 2014: 14–19). In contrast, Hu Jintao, the outgoing general secretary (2002-2012), was only able to secure one seat for his followers (Dotson, 2014).

During Xi Jinping’s leadership the role of the military and its influence in the foreign policy making process has increased.<sup>5</sup> There are two reasons for this: Xi’s experience from the military and the fact that more military issues have reached the top level of the agenda. His military experience also creates a strong informal link between the military and the PBSC, where the man in charge is the only one with a military background. External pressure, not

---

<sup>4</sup> This view was supported in an interview with academics in Beijing, China, Oct. 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Chinese academic, Beijing, China, Oct. 2014.



least the conflict with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and in the South China Sea but also cyber-attacks, facilitates the military influence by putting military issues at the top of the agenda. Thus, there is more space for the military in a political situation where the person in charge has a personal interest in and high ambitions for the military.

### **Chinese Foreign Policy in the 21st Century**

China is best understood as a partial power, being on the one hand a member of the UN Security Council and the G-20, a key actor on international summits etc., while on the other hand remaining reactive and passive in these venues (Shambaugh, 2013: 45). However, China's diplomacy has remained very risk averse and been guided by narrow national interest. China has sought the lowest-common denominator and, as far as possible, it has stuck to the least controversial position, having a preference not to make the first move but wait on others to show their positions before deciding on its own. There are a number of exceptions to this principle when it comes to perceived narrow national interests. That is first and foremost Taiwan and other issues that may interfere with China's sovereignty (Tibet, Xinjiang and maritime territorial claims in the South and East China Seas), but also issues relating to human rights. Here China has instead been both very active and extremely vigilant.

China's engagement with the international community can be traced back to late 1990s when China began to look outwards. At the forefront of this drive to modernise its foreign policy, once again being an active part in the international community can be characterised as a pursuit of "comprehensive power", acknowledging that a global power needs multidimensional strength. During the following decade, China's engagement with the international community boomed. This engagement included all spheres, ranging from economic and socio-cultural, to the military sphere. China's "go out", "go global" strategy aimed at encouraging Chinese firms and other localities and organisations to expand abroad, a strategy that took up speed in the mid-2000s. The PLA did start to engage internationally, including conducting several hundred exchanges each year.

Underlying China's foreign policy since 2000 is China's "new security concept" (NSC) (Bergsten, 2008, especially chapters 10 & 5). Announced at the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1997, the NSC is a form of grand strategy pronouncing the overarching principles to guide foreign policy. It was a direct response to the expansion of NATO and the United States' attempts to strengthen its alliances and security cooperation in the world. It sets out to elaborate on China's aspirations in the new post-Cold War order. Besides acknowledging the adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, it emphasises mutually beneficial

economic cooperation, confidence building and the establishment of “strategic partnerships” not directed at a third country.

The new security concept sets the stage for what has become the foremost emphasis of Chinese foreign policy: China’s “peaceful rise”.<sup>6</sup> The aim with this concept was to reassure the international community, in particularly neighbouring countries, that China was a benign country and not a revisionist state that sought hegemony. Emphasis was put on arguing that China’s rise is not a zero-sum game, but a mutual win situation. The phrase was later reframed as “peaceful development” as the debate took a turn that Beijing did not like; the word “rise” was in focus in the debate rather than, as China would have preferred, “peaceful”. This was part of a wider debate on whether China was a threat or not.

Since 2000, China has maintained stable relations with the United States and other major powers, while at the same time strengthening its relations with its neighbours in Asia as well as on its periphery. These moves were extremely successful, with China building excellent ties – or at least better - with most of its Asian neighbours and peripheral countries. China did also expand its perspective, giving attention also to Africa, Latin America and Europe. This was not to last...

A key year for Chinese foreign policy is 2008. At the time, it had already become a major player on the regional and global stage, having been one of the world’s fastest growing economies and a major contributor to world economic growth for several years. At this point, the “global” financial crisis was severely affecting the United States and the West, while leaving China relatively unharmed. The crisis affecting the United States and Europe at a time of Chinese economic success facilitated a renewed Chinese confidence to take a more active and aggressive/combatative stance on the international and regional stage. This more assertive stance has been accelerated by nationalistic pressure. Consequently, since 2009 the “assertive China discourse” has become a widespread narrative in the debate on Chinese foreign policy in the West (there has been a considerable debate about whether Chinese foreign policy in fact has become more assertive. See Jerdén, 2014; Johnston, 2013; Scobell & Harold, 2013). Furthermore, in the case of Europe, the crisis has completed a mental shift in China. Put simply, since the crisis, Europe has in the mind of the Chinese lost its last credibility to compete about being the number two power behind the US.

---

<sup>6</sup> In 2005, President Hu Jintao introduced another concept, “Harmonious world”. However, this undefined slogan meant to demonstrate the Chinese commitment to global peace and stability, and the goal of a more just and equal international system has not been a success.

Since 2011 China has made attempts to regain the regional and international trust. China's more assertive behaviour has destroyed most of two decades of trust-building, with China having strived to convince both its regional neighbours and the international community that it is not a threat, but a peacefully rising and responsible power. Arguably the most illustrative example here is China's approach towards the South China Sea dispute and its South East Asian neighbours. Since the early 1990s a lot of trust has been tediously built by political efforts and economic investments to build good and peaceful relations, which were largely destroyed as a result of China's more assertive policies (Weissmann, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015). Not surprisingly, the move by Beijing in late 2007 to consolidate its jurisdictional claims followed by a more active and assertive pursuit of its claims in 2009-2010, including the imposing of unilateral fishing bans, seizing of Vietnamese fishing boats and equipment, and the harassment of US ships intruding beyond the 12-mile territorial limit, was not good for its the image as a peacefully developing country that it wants to project.<sup>7</sup> To regain lost trust is a difficult endeavour as it will take time to get back to the mid-2000 situation - if at all possible. This is particularly true as Beijing's rhetoric has not been matched by its actions, such as its military build-up including its pursuit to become a maritime power by continuing to pursue its claims in the South and East China Seas. In addition, relations with the United States was strained by the Chinese active opposition to the US renewed interest in, and military rebalancing to, Asia.

However, attempts to counteract the "assertive China discourse" has not been helped by the development of a parallel narrative in China, arguing that China has moved from a "keeping a low profile" strategy to adopting one of "striving for achievements" (Qin, 2014). This has been part of a heated debate between two foreign policy strategies, whether China should pursue "the strategy of keeping a low profile" focusing on economic gains as it did under Deng Xiaoping, or "striving for achievements" putting emphasis on the strengthening of political support as the way to be successful in the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Yan, 2014; Qin, 2014). Proponents of the latter argue that "striving for achievements" strategy has made major progress after the election of Xi Jinping in 2012 (Yan, 2014). However, even if accepting that Xi leans towards striving for achievements as the evidence so far indicates, it is most unlikely going to be a complete departure from the old Chinese foreign policy strategy (Qin, 2014).

---

<sup>7</sup> In late 2007, China passed a new legislation which consolidated its jurisdictional claims by creating a county-level city in Hainan, Sansha, to govern the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

### **Chinese Foreign Policy since 2013 under the Leadership of Xi Jinping**

When looking beyond underlying principles, it is clear that the new Xi Jinping's administration is pursuing a more active foreign policy. The main aim of the new foreign policy is "to achieve modernization, create a benevolent and peaceful external environment, and take steps that allow it to develop its domestic economy" (Zhao, 2013). To achieve these aims China seeks to maintain its peaceful relations with other states, both nearby and globally. This includes a need to manage conflicts with neighbours over territorial and maritime issues. It is also important to counteract United States' decision to refocus its foreign policy putting more emphasis on Asia. A key element is to secure natural resources, including, but not exclusively, oil and gas, with the purpose to build a momentum for domestic development. The overarching goal is to ensure prosperity in China, to open up "new paths for the nation's rejuvenation, and create conditions that benefit the Chinese people" (Zhao, 2013).

At least so far, it seems like foreign policy will not be one of Xi Jinping's top priorities as domestic pressure will need to be his main focus. After three decades of "reform and opening up" it is clear that China is approaching more difficult times as it has to manage pressing domestic challenges, including slowing economic growth, shifting social structures and socio-economic unrest caused by increasing socioeconomic inequalities. Thus it can be expected that the foreign policy path will be even more guided and driven by domestic concerns than it used to be; be it to satisfy nationalistic demands, energy needs or the need for economic growth.

When looking at Xi Jinping's foreign policy a number of priorities have been standing out. First of all, there has been emphasis on the need to maintain a stable international environment, in particular with regard to the United States. President Xi Jinping has here, during a trip to the United States in February 2012, proposed the idea of "a new type of relationship between major countries in the 21st century" that in its vagueness has been generally endorsed in Washington. The underlying premises are that a major conflict between the United States and China is not inevitable, and that a conflict would be catastrophic for both sides, with even non-cooperation being extremely costly (Lampton, 2013). Thus Xi argues for "mutual understanding and strategic trust," "respecting each other's 'core interests,'" "mutually beneficial cooperation," and "enhancing cooperation and coordination in international affairs and on global issues." (Xi, 2012)

As a response to the United States' rebalancing Xi is also giving to developing China's relations with "old friends", that is countries that have stood by China in the past or are to

whom China is indebted (Aoyama 2014). These approaches have not always been welcome or successful, but they have at least sent a message to Washington about what China thinks of the rebalancing to Asia (Aoyama 2014).

Beijing's focus on the emerging developing world and emerging powers is also partially part of this strategy. China has been trying to widen its impact in the emerging developing world, trying to increase its presence and influence in Central Asia, South Asia, Latin America and Africa. It is also trying to develop its cooperation with other emerging major states, such as India, Mexico, South Africa and Russia. This includes a range of new initiatives, such as the "Silk Road Economic Belt", aimed at establishing a transport corridor from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, and a "Maritime Silk Road" from China to India, Africa and the Mediterranean, as well as the creation of an "Asian Infrastructure Bank" (AIIB), which has been seen as a "World bank" for Asia, and a "New Development Bank" (NDB), known as the BRICS Bank, which in turn can be viewed as a competitor to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Not all of these will come through - some, like the "Silk Road Economic Belt", should be seen more as ideas/visions than actual plans.<sup>8</sup> In short, in its counteracting of the US, it seeks all avenues it can find.

## Conclusion

Major developments have been seen in Chinese foreign policy during the last one and a half decades, with Xi Jinping's more active foreign policy being but the last example. It is clear that China under Xi Jinping will not be a *status quo* power accepting the world as it is, nor are we to expect China to become a *revisionist* power aiming to remodel the global order. Even if accepting that Xi leans towards "striving for achievements" as the evidence so far indicates, it is still most unlikely that there will be a complete departure from the old Chinese foreign policy strategy of "keeping a low profile". In 2010 Shaun Breslin referred to China as a "dissatisfied responsible great power" (Breslin, 2010). This is still the case, though by now China has moved beyond merely being dissatisfied to becoming what can best be described as a responsible reformer "striving for achievements".

---

<sup>8</sup> In addition to being best described as an idea or presented by Xi Jinping, thus giving room for a lot of flexibility in the (possible) implementation, in the case of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" it should be noted that despite the name, the Chinese emphasis is on Central Asia where the Silk Road belt is aimed at helping to ensure stability in the Chinese border area (Carlsson, Oxenstierna & Weissmann, 2015).

## Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge feedback on the text from in particular Prof. Shaun Breslin of Warwick University, UK, who has given invaluable comments as an external reviewer of the FOI report. I also want to acknowledge feedback from John Rydqvist, Carolina Vendil Pallin, Jerker Hellström, Björn Jerden, Sofia Ledberg, Märta Carlsson, and Susanne Qxenstierna.

## References

- Aoyama, Rumi. 2014. "China's Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping." The Tokyo Foundation. May 15. Available at <http://www.tokyofoundation.org/en/articles/2014/chinas-foreign-policy-under-xi-jinping> [Accessed on February 6, 2015]
- Barnett, A Doak. 1985. *The Making of Foreign Policy in China: Structure and Process*. SAIS Papers in International Affairs. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Bergsten, C. Fred. 2008. *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- Breslin, Shaun. 2009. "Understanding China's Regional Rise: Interpretations, Identities and Implications." *International Affairs*. 85(4): 817-835.
- Breslin, Shaun. 2010. "China's Emerging global Role: Dissatisfied Responsible Great Power." *Politics*. 30: 52-62.
- Breslin, Shaun. 2013. "China and the Global Order: Signalling Threat or Friendship?." *International Affairs*. 89(3): 615-634.
- Carlsson, Märta, Susanne Oxenstierna and Mikael Weissmann. 2015. *China and Russia - A Study on Cooperation, Competition and Distrust*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI).
- Ding, Sheng. 2008. "To Build A 'Harmonious World': China's Soft Power Wielding in the Global South." *Journal of Chinese Political Science*. 13(2): 193-213.
- Dotson, John. 2014. "Political Factions and Spicy Ginger: Elder Networks in PRC Politics (Part 1)." *China Brief*. 14(19): 14-19.
- Harris, Stuart. 2014. *China's Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Heath, Timothy R. 2012. "What Does China Want? Discerning the PRC's National Strategy." *Asian Security*. 8(1): 54-72.
- Jakobson, Linda. 2013. "China's Foreign Policy Dilemma." Lowy Institute for International Policy. February 5. Available at <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/chinas-foreign-policy-dilemma> [Accessed on February 10, 2015]

Jakobson, Linda, and Dean Knox. 2010. "New Foreign Policy Actors in China." SIPRI Policy Paper (26). Available at <http://books.sipri.org/files/PP/SIPRIIPP26.pdf> [Accessed on February 6, 2015]

Jerdén, Björn. 2014. "The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How So Many Still Bought into It." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*. 7(1): 47–88.

Johnston, Alastair Iain. 2013. "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security*. 37(4): 7–48.

Kavalski, Emilian. 2012. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Chinese Foreign Policy*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Lampton, David M. 2001. *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Lampton, David M. 2013. "A New Type of Major-Power Relationship: Seeking a Durable Foundation for U.S.-China Ties." *Asia Policy*. July 2013, 16: 51–68.

Qin, Yaqing. 2014. "Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*. 7(3): 285–314.

Rozman, Gilbert. 2013. *China's Foreign Policy: Who Makes It, and How Is It Made?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Scobell, Andrew and Scott W. Harold. 2013. "An 'Assertive' China? Insights from Interviews." *Asian Security*. 9(2): 111–31.

Shambaugh, David L. 2002. *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Shambaugh, David L. 2013. *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Spakowski, Nicola. 2009. "National Aspirations on a Global Stage: Concepts of World/Global History in Contemporary China." *Journal of Global History*. 4(3): 475-95.

United Nations. 2014. "Agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on trade and intercourse between Tibet region of China and India. Signed at Peking, on 29 April 1954." Available at <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20299/v299.pdf> [Accessed on February 6, 2015]

Xi, Jinping. 2012. "Speech at the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations and U.S.-China Business Council Luncheon, Washington, D.C., February 15, 2012" cited in Lampton, David M. 2013. "A New Type of Major-Power Relationship: Seeking a Durable Foundation for U.S.-China Ties." *Asia Policy*. July 2013, 16: 53.

Wei, Zonglei & Yu Fu. 2011. "China's Search for an Innovative Foreign Strategy." *Contemporary International Relations*. 21(2): 43–51.

Weissmann, Mikael. 2010. "The South China Sea Conflict and Sino-ASEAN Relations: A Study in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building." *Asian Perspective*. 34(3): 35-69.

Weissmann, Mikael. 2012. *The East Asian Peace: Conflict Prevention and Informal Peacebuilding*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weissmann, Mikael. 2014. "Why is There a Relative Peace in the South China Sea?." In Pavin Chachavalpongpun, ed. *Entering Unchartered Waters? ASEAN and the South China Sea Dispute*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Weissmann, Mikael. 2015. "The South China Sea: Still no War on the Horizon." *Asian Survey*. 55(3) (May/June 2015).

Yan, Xuetong. 2014. "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*. 7(2): 153–84.

Zhao, Kejin. 2013. "Guiding Principles of China's New Foreign Policy." Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy. September 9. Available at <http://carnegietsinghua.org/publications/?fa=52902> [Accessed on February 6, 2015]

Zhu, Liqun. 2010. "China's Foreign Policy Debates, Chaillot Papers." (September). Paris: Institute for Security Studies, European Union (EUISS).