

CHINA'S SEARCH FOR SECURITY

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States Alliance
ARATS	Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
CLSG	central leading small group
CMC	Central Military Commission
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
FBI	U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation
GDP	gross domestic product
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KEDO	Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization
KMT	Kuomintang, Nationalist Party
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
MR	military region
MSG	Military Strategic Guidelines

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NPC	National People's Congress
NPT	Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty
NSC	U.S. National Security Council
ODA	official development assistance
PACOM	U.S. Pacific Command
PAP	People's Armed Police
PBSC	Politburo Standing Committee
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
SASTIND	State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SDF	Self-Defense Forces
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SEF	Straits Exchange Foundation
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

INTRODUCTION

China's Search for Security grew out of a previous work called *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress*, which was published in 1997.¹ We set out to produce a revised and updated edition of that book, but China's position in the world has changed so much that we ended up with what is almost entirely a new book. The analytical approach remains the same: we look at China's security problems from the Chinese point of view in order to analyze how Chinese policymakers have tried to solve them. The basic conclusion also stands: China is too bogged down in the security challenges within and around its borders to threaten the West unless the West weakens itself to the point of creating a power vacuum.

In other respects, however, China's position in the world has changed. In 1997, it was a vulnerable country, fielding a foreign policy that was mainly defensive and aimed at preventing domestic instability, avoiding the loss of historically held territories such as Taiwan and Tibet, and reconstructing strained relations with potentially threatening powerful neighbors such as Japan, Russia, and India. It had no major interests or significant means of influence in parts of the world beyond its immediate periphery. It was not an actor of consequence in Europe, North or South America, Africa, or the Middle East.

But the 1997 book predicted that things would change, saying, "China is the largest and economically most dynamic newly emerging power in

the history of the world. It intends to take its place in the next century as a great power.”² That century has arrived, and China has fulfilled its intention. *Great power* is a vague term, but China deserves it by any measure: the extent and strategic location of its territory, the size and dynamism of its population, the value and growth rate of its economy, its massive share of global trade, the size and sophistication of its military, the reach of its diplomatic interests, and its level of cultural influence. It has become one of a small number of countries that have significant national interests in every part of the world—often driven by the search for resources—and whose voice must be heard in the solution of every global problem. It is one of the few countries that command the attention, whether willingly or grudgingly, of every other country and every international organization. It is the only country widely seen as a possible threat to U.S. predominance.

It is easy to forget that China’s rise was what the West wanted. Richard Nixon laid the groundwork for the policy of engagement by arguing in 1967, “[W]e simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation.”³ He launched the engagement policy with his historic visit to China in 1972. Every American president since then has stated that the prosperity and stability of China are in the interest of the United States.

Engagement was a strategy designed to wean China from Mao Zedong’s pursuit of permanent revolution by exposing the country to the benefits of participation in the world economy. Over the course of three decades, the West opened its markets, provided loans and investments, transferred technology (with a few limits related to military applications), trained Chinese students, provided advice on laws and institutions, and helped China enter the World Trade Organization (WTO) (although negotiating hard over the conditions of China’s entry; see chapter 10). American and more generally Western support had incalculable financial and technological value to China, and it is not an exaggeration to say that Western support made China’s rise possible.

Seldom has the admonition “be careful what you wish for” been so apt. At home, China did abandon Maoist radicalism, but it did not democratize. Instead, economic growth strengthened the one-party dictatorship’s hold on power. Abroad, China took its place as a full player in the global

system with a stake in the status quo, as the engagers intended. But now Americans wonder whether a strong China poses a strategic threat.

Thirty-five years of rapid economic growth were bound to produce some shift in relative power just by bulking up Chinese resources. But China's rise turned out to be all the more dramatic because of its competitors' weaker trajectories. While China surged, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the successor Russian government struggled to define an international role. Japan stagnated economically and vacillated between accepting security dependence on the U.S. or taking more responsibility for its own defense. India engaged less deeply than China with the world economy and focused most of its security energy on its nearby enemy, Pakistan. While China cultivated mutually cooperative relations with any country that was willing, the U.S. vitiated the advantages of its status as the world's only superpower with a series of wars and confrontations that weakened rather than strengthened its global influence. For all these reasons, the shift in China's relative power has been more striking than it otherwise might have been.

These developments have given rise to two interlinked debates over Chinese foreign policy. First, is China an aggressive, expansionist power with enough resources to overwhelm its neighbors and create a "Chinese century" in which China will "rule the world," or is it a vulnerable power facing numerous, enduring security threats? We argue controversially that vulnerability remains the key driver of China's foreign policy. That is why the subtitle of the previous book, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security*, takes its place as the title of this new volume. The main tasks of Chinese foreign policy are still defensive: to blunt destabilizing influences from abroad, to avoid territorial losses, to moderate surrounding states' suspicions, and to create international conditions that will sustain economic growth. What has changed is that these internal and regional priorities are now embedded in a larger quest: to define a global role that serves Chinese interests but also wins acceptance from other powers.

We add that last qualifying phrase because defining a role for a rising great power is not a unilateral process. A decade ago it was largely a matter for China itself to determine how to provide for its own security (except for its management of the Taiwan issue, on which the U.S. asserted a right to limit Chinese options; see chapter 4). But as China's core interests evolve from regional to global, they intersect more and more with those of the

other major powers, leading to greater possibilities for both cooperation and conflict. As China's influence increases, so do other powers' efforts to channel or constrain that influence. Rising power brings not only new scope for action, but new checks. China will have to define its role through interactions that are inevitably contentious with other actors and that may turn conflictual, which makes it more important than ever to understand what drives Chinese foreign policy.

That is why we start in chapter 1 with the fundamentals of geography and demography—where China is on the map, who lives there, how its population is distributed, and who its neighbors are. The relevance of these facts is emphasized by the approach to foreign policy analysis called “geo-strategic” or “classical realism,” which says that the world does not look the same from every point on the map. The Chinese are not where we are, they are not who we are, and we have to look at their situation to understand their actions. China is not special in the fact that geography matters; what is special for China—as for every other country—are the specifics of its geopolitical situation.

Chapter 1 also takes account of culture and ideology. People think and talk about their national situation and national interests in terms that are meaningful and understandable to them. We need to know the concepts they use in order to understand the discourse. Paying attention to culture does not mean cultural relativism: a country's core security interests are intelligible to an analyst from any culture. But to understand how they are being talked about requires a process of interpretation.

The causal path from facts on the ground to policy outputs runs through actors and institutions—the people who make policy and the institutions within which they do so. These people and institutions are discussed in chapter 2. Sometimes the connection is straightforward. Sometimes it is distorted by cognitive factors (misinformation, miscalculation), perceptual factors (erroneous guesses about others' motives), and value commitments (preferences for values besides security) or by institutional habits and structures, domestic political needs, and leadership shortcomings. Thus, we may sometimes fail to find an interest-based explanation that makes sense of a particular element of foreign policy. When that happens, we turn to other factors to explain why China—like other countries—sometimes adopts policies that apparently do not serve its national interests. As we show, this happened relatively rarely in China even during the Mao period

and has happened rarely since then. Chinese foreign policy has usually made sense as part of a search for security. Why Chinese policy should more often be more interest based than some other countries' policies is a question we explore in several places, especially in the first four chapters.

CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

The second debate occasioned by the rise of China is whether its policy-making processes are driven more by culture, nationalism, and resentment over a “century of humiliation” or more by a realistic calculus that seeks to match available resources to concrete security goals. On this question, we lean, again controversially, to the position that Chinese foreign policymaking is more often than not rational. To be sure, China’s behavior can be puzzling at first glance. Why did China formally ally itself with the Soviet Union in 1950, then split with it ten years later? Why did it move from antagonism to rapprochement with the U.S. in 1971? Why does China pursue disputes with Japan over historical issues at certain times and not at others? Why did China seek to promote unification with Taiwan by counterproductively building up a missile threat to the island from the early 1990s onward and threatening to use military force if Taiwan were to “secede”? Why does China cooperate with “rogue states” such as North Korea, Sudan, Iran, and Burma? What were Beijing’s aims in forming the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)? What are its territorial ambitions in the South China Sea?

Every decision, no doubt, has a back story—bureaucratic politics, misperception, international signaling—that we are usually not going to know because it is confidential. But such actions and policies also make larger patterns that we as observers are able to discern. We find that the puzzles of Chinese foreign policy most often yield answers through the insights of a theory called “realism,” which suggests that foreign policy is driven by national self-interest—in turn meaning strategic and economic advantage, or what we call “security” in this book. For all its vastness and resources, China has extensive vulnerabilities throughout its security environment, a theme we develop in chapter 1. Because of rapid social change

Despite its impressive size and population, economic vitality, and drive to upgrade its military, China remains a vulnerable nation surrounded by powerful rivals and potential foes. Understanding China's foreign policy means fully appreciating these geostrategic challenges, which persist even as the country gains increasing influence over its neighbors. Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell analyze China's security concerns on four fronts: at home, with its immediate neighbors, in surrounding regional systems, and in the world beyond Asia. By illuminating the issues driving Chinese policy, they offer a new perspective on the country's rise and a strategy for balancing Chinese and American interests in Asia.

Though rooted in the present, Nathan and Scobell's study makes ample use of the past, reaching back into history to illuminate the people and institutions shaping Chinese strategy today. They also examine Chinese views of the United States; explain why China is so concerned about Japan; and uncover China's interests in such problematic countries as North Korea, Iran, and Sudan. The authors probe recent troubles in Tibet and Xinjiang and explore their links to forces beyond China's borders. They consider the tactics deployed by mainland China and Taiwan, as Taiwan seeks to maintain autonomy in the face of Chinese advances toward unification. They evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of China's three main power resources—economic power, military power, and soft power.

PRAISE FOR *China's Search for Security*

"The rise of China is the most important international trend of our time, and this superb book is the best guide to it that I've seen. Broad, deep, and wise, it is simply an indispensable introduction to all aspects of China's ongoing encounter with the world at large. Any politician or pundit who wants to say anything at all about this subject should have to pass a test on Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell's tour de force before doing so."

—Gideon Rose, editor, *Foreign Affairs*

"For the scholar, student, and general reader, *China's Search for Security* is a source of value. Nathan and Scobell successfully view the world through Chinese eyes and provide just the right mix of interpretation and narrative. Nuggets of insight glitter on every page."

—Richard Bush, Brookings Institution

"Nathan and Scobell are extremely well qualified to assess China's foreign policy. As their book makes clear, understanding that policy is essential to the consideration of virtually every issue of international concern. I strongly recommend *China's Search for Security* to all those with an interest in global public policy."

—Aryeh Neier, president emeritus, Open Society Foundations

"Even though China's foreign policy has become more practical and confident, China's rise has generated regional and international anxiety. Nathan and Scobell explore the mix of forces reshaping Chinese strategic deliberations, providing the deepest insight yet into how Chinese decision-makers perceive their geostrategic predicaments and security challenges."

—Zhe Sun, Center for U.S.–China Relations, Tsinghua University

"A fresh and new approach and beyond doubt the best book available on China's foreign policy."

—Michael Yahuda, George Washington University

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