

Global Attitudes: Perspectives on the US- China Power Shift

Bruce Stokes

Director, Global Economic Attitudes project, Pew Research Center; Associate Fellow, Americas Programme, Chatham House

Roderic Wye

Associate Fellow, Asia Programme, Chatham House

Dr Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer

Senior Transatlantic Fellow and Director, Paris Office, German Marshall Fund of the United States

Chair: Dr Robin Niblett

Director, Chatham House

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10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE T +44 (0)20 7957 5700 F +44 (0)20 7957 5710
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Robin Niblett

Ladies and gentlemen, sorry for keeping you waiting for a couple of seconds while we got all of the technology set up. Thank you very much for joining us today for this discussion of the Pew's latest global attitudes survey – 'Perspectives on the US-China power shift', which is going to be the dimension of this latest one in the series of Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes project reports, which was released actually this morning or at least released today and reported in today. We're getting the news of this fresh off the press. We're going to focus on this particular aspect of the Pew Research Center's latest set of global attitudes survey data.

I'm delighted we've got a great panel with us today to help discuss it. We're going to be kicked off in a minute and I'm going to sit in the front row so we can see some of the data here. It's going to be kicked off by Bruce Stokes, who heads up or is one of the leaders of the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes project, and somebody who's spent a lot of time specialising and putting together polling data around US foreign policy and especially his area of expertise has been for a long time US trade policy, economic relations and he can bring that dimension as well.

A particularly important aspect as we will all appreciate of the China part of this, where I think some of the most interesting data is coming in on perspectives of the US-China power shift, how that power shift is reviewed and understood within the United States, how it's perceived also outside. Bruce, in addition to having his position at Pew, is also an associate fellow of the Americas Programme at Chatham House. So Bruce, we're delighted to have you be part of that process with us as well.

Then after he's given his remarks, we're going to come up and have a conversation here, joined by Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, who is a Senior Transatlantic Fellow of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and head of their Paris office. She also leads GMF's transatlantic security task force and can bring therefore both a US but also a Europe looking at the US perspective to the debate.

Then Rod Wye, who's an associate fellow of the Asia Programme at Chatham House, China specialist, somebody who spent nine years as head of the Asia Research Group at the FCO, which he left in 2011. He also served in Hong Kong, twice in Beijing, and is one of our China experts and somebody we're delighted to draw upon. Rod can tell us whether Pew's analysis is right or not, or at least how the Chinese are going to look at the data that you've brought up here.

With those opening remarks, this is on the record. There are Twitter options and so on to follow things if you want. But please, Bruce, over to you to kick this off. Thank you very much.

Bruce Stokes

Robin, thanks so much. I really appreciate the opportunity to be back here at Chatham House and appreciate being associated with Chatham House. Robin and I go way back to CSIS days in Washington. It's great to see Alexandra again. We were colleagues at the German Marshall Fund at one point.

What this survey is, are results from a survey that the Pew Research Center has been doing every year since 2001, looking at attitudes towards the United States in particular, but over the years we've developed a series of questions we ask about China as well. So this is really an attempt to look at the global perspective on both China and the United States, as seen in 44 countries around the world, including China and the United States, but also the UK and countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America.

Just so you know our background, we're funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, which is a foundation in the United States, God bless them. We are non-partisan, non-advocacy, in the sense that we do not take positions on issues. I can tell you that we discovered 1 + 1 + 1 but I can't tell you it equals three. I'll let you draw your own conclusions about that.

We survey on a range of topics. All of this is free. All of it is available on our website. All of it is searchable, which is even more interesting. So if you see something of interest, you can go to the website, the material is there, you can see what we ask about a particular issue in France in 2007 or whatever. It's a very useful research tool, I would say.

The blue are the countries that we surveyed this year, 44 countries in all including the United States. We are constantly trying to expand the number of countries that we survey in, and we would be the first to admit that it would be nice to survey 150 countries, but even we face financial limitations.

The survey was done between mid-March and early June of this year. There were 48,000 respondents. Most of it is face-to-face. Some of it is by phone, in the United States and a number of European countries and in Japan. The sample, the margin of error is about three to 4.5 per cent.

Just to give you an overview of what we found in this survey, we were looking at attitudes towards the US and attitudes towards China, how those have changed over time. As you can see, this is a global map of the countries where we had a higher rating for the US. The red is higher rating for China. The question is, 'Do you have a favourable/ unfavourable view of the United States? Do you have a favourable/ unfavourable view of China?' We also asked other questions, about the EU about, Japan, etc. But these are the findings for the US and China.

As you can see, for the most part, the favourability of the United States exists all over the world except in the Middle East. I can tell you that the favourability of the US collapsed at the beginning of the Bush administration. It has never recovered, which is I think a telling finding.

We ask every year, or have at least for a number of years now, we've asked people in our survey countries, 'Who do you think is the world's leading economic power?' Now, there's a factual basis here. We know that the United States is the world's largest economy. What is interesting is that over time, in 20 countries where we've surveyed every year since 2008, you see a steady increase in the percentage of people who say that China is actually already the world's leading economic power.

Again, that is a perception. One could argue that it's factually incorrect, but the reality is when you do public opinion survey research, you're not necessarily asking people for a

rational response. You're asking them for an emotional response. Their emotional response is that there is a growing sense that China is the world's leading power, although still most people would say it's the United States.

We ask a second question which is a bit broader, which is about who is the world's leading superpower. This is to capture a broader sense of strategic power, military power, whatever. Again, what you see, this time in red, is China. You can see it goes from 41 per cent to 50 per cent over the last six years, in terms of the public saying that China will eventually or has already replaced the United States. We'll get back to that in a minute, but it's an interesting perception.

First off, let's look at more detail about how people perceive the United States. You should know a little background here. We first surveyed attitudes towards the United States in 2001. At the time, we were going to do a survey around the world in 40-some countries about globalization. We thought that was the hot new issue on the public agenda. This was right before 9/11.

What we found when we did the survey after 9/11 was not that people cared much about globalization. They mostly liked globalization. What we found was there was profound anti-Americanism around the world. So one of the staple questions we've asked throughout the last more than a decade is about attitudes towards the United States and the American brand.

What you see is about two thirds of people in the 44 countries that we surveyed this year have a positive or favourable view of the United States, with the strongest view being in Africa. But Europe also quite strong, two thirds. The only place where brand America is very low is in the Middle East. I can tell you it collapsed after 9/11, especially after the invasion of Iraq. It has never recovered. In a number of these regions, it had gotten very low at the end of the Bush administration, then recovered. But it has not recovered in the Middle East.

In Europe in particular, you can see that the year to year change in favourable view of the United States is actually a little bit surprising, I found. You have an 11 point increase in support for the United States in France. Alexandra may be able to explain that to us. I'm not sure I can. In the UK, favourability of the US is up by eight percentage points since last year. In other countries, for the most part it's unchanged. Bear in mind, with the three to 4.5 per cent margin of error, anything that's around two or three per cent up or down is not a significant change.

The Greeks, of all Europeans, are very disappointed in the United States. We're not quite sure why. We're not sure whether that's just because they're sour about the world or somehow we've let them down. But anyway, there is not very strong support for the US in Greece.

As might be expected, British on the right – we ask people, 'Where would you put yourself on the spectrum from left to right?' – people who self-identify as being on the right are more supportive of the US than people on the left. But still you have basically three out of five Brits who self-identify on the left still have a favourable view of the United States, as

do young people are more supportive of the United States than older people. But not in a statistically significant difference.

We find all over the world, by the way, that the strongest support for the United States is among younger people, as is the strongest support for China, by the way. It's a very interesting combination.

We also have tested every year since 2001 how people feel about the American president. What you can see is that since Barack Obama became president, favourability of him has gone down dramatically. This is confidence in him doing the right thing in world affairs. Obviously there are various ways you could measure this, but this is the question we ask. As you can see, there's been a dramatic drop-off in places like Germany, 22 percentage point drop-off in favourability of Obama. Since 2009, in the UK it's a 12 percentage point drop-off.

That's the bad news. The good news is of course, he's still at 71 per cent in Germany. That's right up there with Merkel, the approval rating of Merkel. He's at 74 per cent in the UK. That's much higher than David Cameron. So it really depends how you look at this. Clearly Obama has taken a hit in Europe as his presidency has continued. But most politicians would die for these kinds of ratings in their own country.

What is striking, and we'll talk about this a little bit more, the drop-off in Germany has been stronger than any place else. Part of that has to do with policies, and again we'll show you some of the drop-off in support for his policies, especially in Germany. But also, you have to assume that part of this is just that he was so unrealistic, the expectations that people had in 2009 of this new American president.

At the time, we asked people, 'What do you think about this guy Obama? Do you think he's going to bring peace to the Middle East?' 'Of course he's going to bring peace to the Middle East. He's going to solve the economic crisis. He's going to solve the climate change crisis.' These were unbelievably unrealistic expectations. So it's probably not surprising that they've tailed off a bit as reality has set in.

We ask people a number of questions over the years about America's soft power image. One of the questions we've asked in the past and we asked this year was, 'Does the government of the United States respect the personal freedoms of its people?' Now this has particular salience at this moment because of the NSA revelations, but remember this is 'protect the personal freedoms of Americans', not other people.

58 per cent of the public around the world still think the US respects the personal freedoms of its own people. This is stronger than say the percentage in the 44 countries who think that China respects the freedoms of its own people, or Russia respects the freedoms of its own people. That's still a fairly strong aspect of American soft power.

However, that faith is eroding in Europe. As you can see, and we can't totally attribute this to NSA, but I would say it's probably largely attributed to the revelations about the National Security Agency, the Snowden revelations, you can see a 23 percentage point drop in Germany in terms of belief that the United States protects the freedoms of its own people. A 20 point drop-off in Russia, which you might expect I suppose. Even in the UK,

a 10 percentage point drop. So the US has paid a stark price, especially in Europe, for the NSA activities and the revelation of those activities.

To dig deeper into the NSA scandal, we asked people all over the world, 'Do you think the United States monitors...?' Well, assuming that the US does monitor foreigners, which I think the US has more or less acknowledged, 'Do you think that's acceptable or unacceptable? What about the monitoring of your leaders? What about the monitoring of US citizens? And what about the monitoring of suspected terrorists?'

As you can see, basically among Europeans, they find it unacceptable for the US to monitor foreign citizens, overwhelmingly so. They find it largely unacceptable to monitor their leaders, except the Italians. This may say something more about Italy and the politics in Italy than it does about... And it's very interesting. Italy is one country, they're kind of divided on this issue. In the Philippines and Nigeria, people say, 'Oh, that would be fine if you monitor our leaders.' But again, it probably says more about their leaders than it does about the United States.

'How do you feel about the US monitoring US citizens?' Basically people find that objectionable. It flips, though, if you say, 'What about suspected terrorists?' Basically everyone in Europe believes that's fine if you monitor suspected terrorists.

Another aspect of the Obama administration's foreign policy, bear in mind that the Obama administration uses drones far more sensibly than the Bush administration ever did, there's overwhelming opposition to this in Europe. In fact, this opposition has grown in just the last year. So this is an objectionable aspect of American foreign policy to most Europeans. By the way, it's objectionable to everybody around the world. The only people in the world in our 44 country survey who find it acceptable are the Kenyans, the Israelis, and the Americans. Everybody else, all 41 other countries, find it objectionable.

Flipside here, let's look at the image of China. We asked people if they had favourable views of China. About half the public in our survey said yes. The strongest favourability is in Africa. I find this interesting, because we're all aware of the anecdotal newspaper reports we've read about exploitative Chinese investments in Africa. They bring in Chinese workers to build factories or whatever. They exploit the natural resources.

Those may all be true, those anecdotes, but for a general public – and bear in mind this is a survey of the general public – it doesn't seem to bother people. In a survey we did last year, we asked people about Chinese business practices in Africa. Africans, except for South Africans, find them totally acceptable. Again, I think we have to realize there may be a difference between elite opinion and public opinion.

Notice that favourability of China is lowest in Europe, and by the way, it's also lowest in the United States. There's the favourability of China in the United States. As you can see, it is as low as it's ever been since we began a consistent survey question on this. So while there's a certain natural rhythm here, up and down, we're at a particularly low point in the United States in terms of views of China.

We asked people around the world, 'Do you think the Chinese economy is good for your economy, for your country?' What's interesting is the division in Europe. Basically, the

Brits, the Greeks – thank you, China, very much for those investments, and the Germans basically think that China is good for their economy. The Italians, the French, the Poles, are really not so sure that it's good for their economy.

We asked people all around Asia about territorial disputes with China. Last year, we asked people a different question. We said, 'Do you think this is a big problem, somewhat big problem, not a problem at all, for your country?' You got a fairly even distribution, where people in the North East of Asia said it's a big problem for our country; people in Indonesia, Australia, said it's really not much of a problem at all.

This year we asked a different question. We said, 'Are you afraid that it could lead to a military conflict?' And what you see is that almost everywhere, half or more of the population believes or worries that territorial conflicts with China could lead to a military conflict.

I think there's really an escalation of concern about this, the potential for this. Now, even 62 per cent of the Chinese we surveyed were worried that this could lead to a military conflict. I did have one wag say to me, 'We don't know if the Chinese thought that was a good thing or a bad thing.' I must admit we don't. But one has to presume they thought it was a bad thing.

We asked people, 'Who do you consider your closest ally? Who do you consider the biggest threat to your country?' What is interesting is that only the Malaysians and the Pakistanis were first to name China. In terms of biggest threat, the Japanese named China, the Filipinos named China, and the Vietnamese named China. People were much more likely to name the US as an ally, but there were a number of countries where people thought the US was the biggest threat. Just to give you a sense of this.

Notice that the US thought you were the biggest ally, and that Russia was the biggest threat. Bear in mind the timing of this survey, it was right around the time of Ukraine and Crimea. My guess is last year, if we'd asked this question, then China would have been in there, not Russia.

How does it then balance out between the US and China in the survey? Europeans are overwhelmingly more favourably disposed towards the US rather than China. In the UK, there's a 19 percentage point difference here. Only the Greeks... We have a lot of Greek Americans. We took all these people in, why do they... But they don't see us that favourably. Frankly, I don't know why.

The simplistic answer may well be that the Greeks are so negative about everything. They believe that somebody did this to them. We do know that there's a lot of discourse in Greece about the crisis and how it was brought on by Wall Street, which frankly I think it probably was. So the Greeks have good perception of things. And it may be that there's a perception that the US hasn't done enough to help them.

But again, this is just speculation. We don't know from the survey why the Greeks seem to be more favourably disposed towards China than the US, other than there has been some very visible Chinese investment in Greece, buying up ports and so forth.

If you look regionally at who people think is the world's leading economy, basically the Asians say it's the United States. What's interesting is that Europeans say that China is already the world's leading economy. Now, we know that that is factually wrong. So this is a perception. It's an emotion. It's not reason, but of course people vote with emotion. They hold positions based on emotion, not reason. The fact that Europeans already think that China's economy is stronger than the United States' economy, I think is something we who are allies need to take into consideration.

We asked people, 'Do you think China has replaced or will replace the United States?' What's interesting regionally is that the Europeans are the most likely to say that China has already replaced the United States or will soon replace the United States as the world's leading superpower. Notice the Asians are much more divided on this issue.

All of this material is available on the Pew website. There's far more of it available than I was able to share with you. The important thing is it's searchable. So if you have a question about this data, you can probably look it up and the data is free. So if you have further questions, I think going to the data is a good way to do it. One little advertisement, we will be in the fall releasing a huge survey in these 44 countries on attitudes towards globalization, trade, and foreign investment. I'm looking forward to the results myself. I think it will be another interesting insight into how the world views one of these emerging issues. Thank you.

Robin Niblett

We're not going to do this subject justice, I feel, in the amount of time we've got left, with 35 minutes, because I would love to almost... Each of those bits of data there, Bruce, I just thought was fascinating. There are some issues you wouldn't necessarily expect, this idea that especially those polls right at the end, that people in Asia overwhelmingly see the United States still as the main geopolitical power, and the world's main economic power. The Europeans, they're closest to the Europeans who so far away don't. I mean, this is a very interesting projection I suppose, one might say, of impressions and so on, which we might want to dig in.

Interesting to note as well, the extent to which the UK, which is of course very open to investment, takes a fairly positive favourability rating. I think the divergence of the European perspectives towards the favourability of China and its role and so on, very interesting as well. I could pick lots of other points out. I noticed that Russia is generally not noted as a contributor to your European polling data. An interesting question would be Russian attitudes, given where we are at the moment, in particular with the changed environment. We might want to come back to that later on.

Let me just get some first reactions from our two other panellists here and see what points you thought stood out in particular. Alexandra, let me start with you. What bits jumped out to you in particular from your perspective sitting in Paris? But representing a US institution that is focused on transatlantic relations, founded by Germany.

Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer

Thank you for your invitation. It's great to be here and great to see you, Bruce.

I thought the report was extremely interesting, because to me it raised two questions. The first one was how are American and Chinese power perceived? Perceived by themselves and by the others. I thought that these two perspectives were interesting. The second one was, who are America's and China's allies, partners and friends? I thought it was really interesting and in a certain way it confirmed very much a lot of the key findings we had from the Transatlantic Trends, our annual report that we publish every September.

So for the first question, very quickly, the perception of American power, I mean this is an issue that we deal daily with from the transatlantic organization perspective and being based in Paris makes the question even more challenging. Why are these reports interesting and important? Because the perceptions are key in international relations. If you perceive yourself as being weak, vulnerable, or in retreat, then others will be more prone to see you, perceive you in that way.

We see that President Obama today is facing that kind of difficult challenge. He was elected in 2008 to recalibrate American power and today, Europeans in particular but also Asians are saying that Obama and Obama's foreign policies may be not that firm and active on the international scene as it should do.

There is this question, and I think that the results also reflect that increasing doubt vis-à-vis the American power, and I think that that explains in big part why Europeans perceive China as already the superpower, because there is this idea that we have a sort of American power fluctuating and partially and strategic retreat and so we look to another big power, but of course with much more anxiety which is China. I'll get back to this issue in a second.

Then there is the perception of the Chinese power. It is perceived much more being on the rise, much more concerning as a phenomenon. But what's interesting, from your report, is that the Chinese and most of the Asian countries that were polled do not perceive themselves as being on the rise. That again is an interesting, I would say, self-perception which I thought was very striking in the report.

So pretty much everyone – the Americans, Europeans mostly – perceive China as being on the rise, but when you ask the people in the region, they don't perceive themselves as being on the rise.

Back on the American power, I think that what is striking and that comes out in the Transatlantic Trends as well, is that Obama's image, the image of the United States, the approval of Obama's foreign policy is still very high. As Bruce said, we started so high, I mean in France I think it's still like 83 per cent approving President Obama since 2008. I mean, these figures are so high that it is still quite exceptional. So this Obama bounce has not been waning. Even in Germany, there have been some rifts because of the NSA revelations. But I don't think that's a big change.

There are some disagreements inside the transatlantic community, but disagreements more about the methods and I would say the modalities of US power, but then again, if we Europeans are more and more reticent towards the use of drones, or we are angry because of the NSA revelations, then we do not think that it's such a bad tool to use spying and

surveillance vis-à-vis terrorists or suspected terrorists. So then again, there's not such a big disagreement in the foreign policy methods.

The other thing, if we look more closely between 2013 and 2014, because you showed both figures, it's interesting to look at the Polish case more closely, because you all know how Poland was very disappointed in the Obama first mandate, because of the anti-missile shield and all of these issues. It's interesting to see that between 2013 and 2014, there has been a leap of six points, where maybe we could explain that by the sort of reassurances that President Obama has been giving to his Polish allies and Eastern European allies in the context of the Ukraine crisis. I thought that this slight increase was quite interesting.

What's even more interesting is that even if China or the Chinese people that were polled perceived the United States as their number 1 threat, they are more than 51 per cent to approve the conduct of President Obama's foreign policy. There has been a leap of 20 points compared to last year, so maybe I don't know if Rod you have the answer, but I thought that was very striking.

On the other hand, like I would make a parallel with the Polish, the Japanese that were polled were 60 per cent to approve Obama's role in foreign affairs, but there has been a decrease of 10 points compared to last year. This I would say is very much linked to, compared to the Polish, to this perception that the United States is maybe not providing enough reassurances to their Japanese allies, especially in the context of the Chinese threat.

What else? Yes, when I was saying that the Chinese do not perceive themselves as the world leading economy, only I think it's one fourth of the Chinese perceive themselves as being the world economic leader, compared to Europeans. Americans are much more split. It's almost equal. I found that interesting, because it says that Americans are a bit in that middle of power transition where they don't really know if they're really waning or if Chinese are really taking over. Whereas Europeans have a much more, I would say, clearer view. Maybe not a realistic one, but more willing to see Chinese as being the new power.

The second question, and I'll finish with that, is who are America's and Chinese allies, partners and therefore the other side's greatest threat? I thought this was really important to underline in the report. The United States is still generally seen as a reliable ally in the future, including in Asia. The feeling is very strong in the EU. The Middle East is very striking, but I remember a Pew research report back in 2011, right after the Arab Spring revolts, it was very striking to see how these events were even bringing the Middle Easterners far away from the Obama administration, which complicates very much Obama's counter-terrorism strategy in the region.

As you all know in his West Point speech, he made it very clear that he was willing to help others help themselves, as the America strategy because they don't want to intervene directly. But it was about helping Jordan, helping Turkey revamp their counter-terrorist capacities, but of course this is not as simple as it might seem if you have a very anti-American public opinion. I thought this was also interesting.

The other question that I wanted to of course underscore was the threat perception. The Chinese perceive America as the greatest threat, Russia, and I agree with you that if we had asked that question to the Americans before the Ukraine episode, China would have been indeed perceived as the greatest threat.

But let me conclude with some very brief remarks. We are in what many people call a power transition phase. I'm not so sure we're really heading there, but what we can take from this report is that Europeans, it's as though the transition has already happened. That's very clear. I said this is very much linked to the change that the US leadership is really profoundly undergoing today.

The Americans are in the middle. They are not really sure if their country is in decline. They're not really sure whether China is on the rise. Asia and the Middle East is a bit in that kind of phase as well, and I would say even more so in the Middle East where we increasingly see Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, turning to other partners than the United States, especially in the post-Arab Spring episode where the United States has lost many strategic partners in the region. So it's interesting to see how the geopolitical landscape is being redefined in the Middle East, and redefining the regional balance of power.

Then lastly, China. It seems that they feel that they're not yet there. They're not yet the leading economic power. They have not supplanted the American leadership, but there is still this idea that this might probably very well happen in the future. So it seems that all of these different actors have very different perceptions of where the geopolitical landscape and balance of power stands today.

I'll just finish from a transatlantic perspective, because I work on a daily basis with the objective of strengthening the special relationship. This stands out in your report and also in our Transatlantic Trends report, is that American leadership is still very much desired today, I would say at least from the European perspective. I think that the Americans maybe have the debate upside down, because there's this idea that the less Americans will do, especially in the European peripheries, East and South, the more Europeans will have to do.

I'm not sure that this will actually take place. European governments are continuing to decrease their defence budget and that's why I say, we're in a sort of phase where it's less or less, whereas we should I think seriously rethink the transatlantic partnership. This really stands out here and in the results of our reports as well. I hope that the September NATO summit will be this opportunity.

Robin Niblett

Thank you very much, Alexandra, for bringing out a whole bunch of very interesting points there. We'll come back to each of them. I'm conscious of time. So Rod, why don't you come in first, and then we'll pick up some of these key points here. Maybe get some in from the audience as well, and then let Bruce come back at the end. Why don't you step in first? I think Alexandra set you up quite nicely with some of her remarks and insights. How do you think the Chinese... Do you share her interpretation of the data? Or do you want to interpret it differently?

Roderic Wye

I'll just make a few very brief points on this. I do agree with Alexandra, by and large on this. I think one of the important things is that we are in a stage of transition. That transition, the transition between China and the US and the relationship between China and the US, affects Asia much more directly in a way than it does Europe. Europe is in the happy position of being able to make sort of wide, sweeping statements about what is happening.

The Asians I think are much more cautious because for them, there's an element of, I suspect, what they would like to be happening as well as what they see actually happening. I found it fascinating in one of the questions in this response, about the question of would China eventually replace the US as top dog? And the people who answered most strongly that it never would were Vietnam, the Philippines and Japan.

It seems to me that there may be something there related to what they would like to see, not just what they are actually seeing. This of course also relates to this whole big question of the US pivot towards Asia, the reliability of the US as an ally, and I think it's reassuring maybe for many US policy-makers to see that sort of list of Asia countries that see the US as an ally. But not all of them.

Some of them, especially if you like the less aligned, the non-aligned, Malaysia and Thailand see China as an ally. This is another of my points – this whole question of China's soft power, that we've been rather dismissive of, saying that the Chinese really don't understand it, that they have a very mechanistic attitude towards it. But certainly, that those countries that, as it were, have bumped up less against China, where you might see soft rather than hard power considerations predominating, there is a much more favourable view of China.

The unfavourable view of China comes from those where there are distinct clashes of interests. One of the real sadnesses from all this is the consistently low scores on China that come from Japan, with the one exception as to whether or not the Chinese economy is good or bad, because Japan, well they're pretty mixed. But elsewhere it is poisonously low, and it seems to me that given the kind of things you were saying about the decline with respect to the US in the Middle East, the relationship between China and Japan, it seems it's going to be very, very hard to improve in the short term and that there is something really long-term and dangerous there.

That brings me onto the sort of final point I would like to make, and that question that you asked about military concerns about territorial disputes leading to some kind of military action. It would be fascinating if you could sort of break that question down, and exactly what do they mean by military action, who's taking it, is it China versus US or small scale conflict?

But what you do certainly see is concern in the region that things are getting to a much more dangerous stage where military conflict in the perception of the public certainly, is likely. And from the Chinese too, I think it is a sort of interestingly mixed question as to whether that seems a good thing or a bad thing from the Chinese perspective. It is certainly part of this new assertion of China's place in the world, which doesn't really sit

that well with this continuing refusal to accept that China's economy is doing as well as it is.

One sees huge amounts in the data of the importance of the Chinese economy to all the Asian countries, and although as I say, as you pointed out, that the balance amongst the Asians is that China is not going to overtake the US soon. I think that balance is skewed by the ones who really don't want it to happen. I think the overall Asian feeling, and you see that mostly clearly in the responses from – as I said – the sort of non-aligned-ish places, is that certainly China is rising, certainly China is a country that they have to take more account of.

Then one final, final point – you asked a question about Xi Jinping and his visibility, which is actually quite low. I'm not sure whether this is about Chinese foreign policy, or whether it's about the Chinese projection of their leaders on an international scale, on an international stage. It's certainly another aspect, perhaps, of China's less than hard power that they might consider from this.

Robin Niblett

Just 10 or 20 seconds, Rod, if you could, do you have any explanation for this leap in approval of Obama's foreign policy in China? This 20 per cent leap that Alexandra pointed out? Is that just an aberration? Or do you think there was something going on there?

Roderic Wye

Well, I mean we get a lot of propaganda out of the Chinese machine about how the US is stirring up the Asians in particular. But I think what one sees is – and this also reflects the high respect for the United States that there is generally in China, I mean these two questions I think go together in a way – that the Chinese, despite the ups and downs of the governmental relationship, still have a very remarkably high approval rating for the US. I think that's mostly the explanation for that.