

# China's thinking on peace and security

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## ■ Executive summary

This report is based on informal interviews and conversations with Chinese officials with access to cabinet ministers. China's rapid economic growth has been based on peaceful relations with major powers and neighbouring states, and on a common understanding of the UN Security Council as the guardian of peace and security. In 2009 Japan's Democratic Party government led by Fukio Hatoyama opted for closer ties with China, which was unacceptable to a U.S.-Japanese elite seeking to keep the U.S. alliance as Japan's primary relationship. By playing the territory card, i.e. by triggering a territorial conflict, they were able to calibrate the level of tension so as to bring about regime change in Japan and reset East Asian geopolitics. This coincided with China's fundamental loss of trust in the U.S. after the events in Libya and Syria, and with Russia's turn to China after the events in Ukraine. The new Asian geopolitics, the rise of the BRICS, and the loss of trust in the U.S. and Britain have forced China to develop closer ties with Russia. This does not indicate a new bipolar order, and China tries to maintain a pragmatic relationship of mutual respect with all the great powers, but it does indicate a new geopolitics characterised by fundamental distrust among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

## Introduction

Some scholars have argued that China's policy of "harmony and peace" with neighbouring states has changed after President Xi Jinping succeeded President Hu Jintao in 2013, but this change may not have been provoked by the change of leadership. In 2005 Hu presented his theory of the "three harmonies": *he ping*, *he jie* and *he xie* ("peace", "peaceful solutions" and "harmony").<sup>1</sup> Instead of confrontation, Chinese leaders spoke about peaceful dialogue, and, if a diplomatic solution was not viable, about United Nations (UN) operations. A unilateral Chinese military operation was only acceptable in defence of the Chinese homeland. China's deputy chief of staff, General Zhang Qinsheng, explained the precise meaning of the concept of "harmony" to the military forces by referring to (1) "common security", (2) "confidence-building measures", (3) "peaceful dialogue" and (4) "UN operations" (Xiangshan Forum, 2006)<sup>2</sup> – in short, the traditional security policy of Nordic Social Democracy. This was stated, not as support for the Nordic view, but as a message to neighbouring countries and to the U.S. Seemingly China was supporting a peaceful "Nordic

security policy" not because the country is small, like the Nordic ones, but because it is very large and wanted to reassure its neighbours. Since 2000 China has emphasised international law, the UN and a multipolar world (comprising the European Union, the U.S., Russia, China, Brazil, Japan and India), with the UN Security Council as a supreme entity. The question is whether this approach has essentially changed in recent years or whether China has modified its policy because of external pressure.

This report will examine the views of the new leadership in Beijing, i.e. President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. It is based on informal interviews and conversations with Chinese officials and scholars with access to the country's cabinet ministers.<sup>3</sup> It will deal with China as a global actor and "responsible stakeholder" in relation to the U.S., its collaboration with the BRICS countries (not least with Russia), and its understanding of peace and security. The report will examine China's role as a global and regional actor, its role in the UN Security Council, and Sino-Japanese tensions.

1 The Chinese concept of "harmony" (*he xie*) refers to the Confucian tradition and is analogous to instruments in an orchestra playing together "in harmony".

2 The biannual Xiangshan Forum attracts scholars and officials from China's East Asian neighbours, the U.S., Britain, Russia, India, Pakistan, France and the Scandinavian countries. In the past, one or two participants from the U.S. used to be quite senior.

3 A list of the individuals and institutes consulted is given at the end of this report.

## The making of the Sino-Japanese territorial dispute

Deng Xiaoping's leadership of China from 1978 prioritised economic development. There was no interest in engaging in a conflict on the country's sea borders, which would be difficult to resolve and could easily be detrimental to economic ties. The 1978 Sino-Japanese Treaty stated that the two sides shall "settle all disputes by peaceful means and shall refrain from the use or threat of force" (China-Japan, 1978). Territorial issues were raised, but put aside to avoid tension. During our conversations senior Chinese officials argued that there was an agreement "not to agree", that no one should make a unilateral move and that differences should be dealt with diplomatically. But recently something has changed.

In 2009 Japan's Yukio Hatoyama government, the first government to be formed by the Democratic Party (Japan's more left-wing party), announced closer ties to China, including an agreement to "deepen defence relations" (VNA, 2009), i.e. Japan would rely less on its ties with the U.S. The Hatoyama government supported the demand of the people of Okinawa to close down the U.S. military base on the island, one of the largest in the western Pacific. Prime Minister Hatoyama was not trusted in the U.S. He had to resign in June 2010 after being unable to move or close down the Okinawa base. In September 2010 a collision between a Chinese fishing boat and a Japanese coast guard vessel in a disputed area close to the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands (north of Taiwan) became a huge media story. Japanese media claimed that the Chinese fishing boat had rammed the larger Japanese vessel (the video film indicates the opposite). This incident was presented in the media as a major Chinese intrusion, despite the fact that incidents of this kind of fishing boats entering the disputed area had a long history. This time, however, it was made into something different, initiating a campaign for a Sino-Japanese split. In 2010, however, representatives of China's Defence Ministry and State Council (Prime Minister's Office) stated at a China Association Military Science Conference that neither the Japanese nor Chinese government wanted to make an issue of it (Xiangshan Forum, 2010). Let us look into this in some detail.

At a Sino-Japanese defence ministers' meeting in October 2010 both sides agreed that this incident should not disturb relations between China and Japan, but the media whipped up nationalist hysteria and turned the two countries against each other. U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton added fuel to the conflict by confirming that the islands fell under the U.S. Security Treaty for the defence of Japan, which the U.S. had not stated previously (Fu, 2012; Manyin, 2013). Advisers to China's prime minister and defence minister discussed this problem at the 2010 Xiangshan Forum in terms of a "trap". Chinese leaders felt that they had to respond to the Japanese provocation and defend the sovereignty of China, but by raising this issue a confrontation with Japan was unavoidable, which would destroy the

closer relations developed during the Hatoyama era. Both sides reluctantly fell into the trap. There were no longer significant Japanese demands for moving the U.S. military base from Okinawa and the Japanese rapprochement with China was over. The new Democratic Party prime minister, Naoto Kan, and his successor, Yoshihiko Noda, were unable to stop this development. Japanese politics moved in a nationalist direction, which opened the door for Shinzo Abe of the Liberal Democratic Party (Japan's conservative party) to become prime minister in December 2012. In two years Japan's traditional conflict with China and its firm ties with the U.S. were re-established by U.S. and Japanese stakeholders who had effectively instigated a territorial conflict that allowed them to calibrate the level of tension between China and Japan and thus reset East Asian geopolitics.

## The U.S. pivot to Asia and the use of the Japanese territory card

With the U.S. turn to East Asia from early 2010 (Ross, 2012) and with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's and President Obama's official launch of the "pivot" in 2011 (Clinton, 2011; Obama, 2011), U.S. allies made territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. In 2010 the Philippines awarded an Anglo-Filipino consortium a licence to explore for gas on Reed Bank, but drilling stalled in 2012 because of the presence of Chinese ships (Reuters, 2013). In Japan, the Kurihara family claimed the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands (bought in the 1970s from the Koga family, who claimed to have bought them in the 1930s). In May 2012 nationalist governor of Tokyo Shintaro Ishihara stated that he wanted to buy three of the islands to "shake up Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations" (Ito, 2012). When a private individual claimed to own the disputed islands, this did not disturb the 1978 Sino-Japanese treaty, but when the Japanese government or local administration unilaterally took control of the islands, this was in breach of the treaty, Chinese officials argued. In September 2012 media hysteria and nationalist sentiment made the weak prime minister Yoshihiko Noda try to ride the wave of nationalism by "buying" the islands, allegedly to prevent them from falling into the hands of Ishihara in order to fend off the radical nationalists' attempt to use them for propaganda purposes (*Japan Times*, 2012; McCurry, 2012). But this immediately raised the issue of sovereignty, and the Japanese measures were not acceptable to Beijing. Prime Minister Noda may have been tricked into taking such measures and may have been unaware of their potential consequences. In retrospect, it appears that Noda had fallen into a trap set by the radical nationalists and some U.S. actors who wanted to weaken Japan's Democratic Party government and stop its turn to China and its decision to force the U.S. out of Okinawa.

Senior Chinese officials interviewed in 2014 who were close to the prime minister, the Foreign Ministry and the chief of military intelligence argued that there had been no change in Chinese foreign policy as a consequence of the transition

from President Hu Jintao to President Xi Jinping and from Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Prime Minister Li Keqiang. What had changed had been U.S. policy on East Asia, which provoked or opened up the opportunity for Japanese and Philippine nationalist forces to make territorial claims, which forced the Chinese to make counterclaims, a process that, according to earlier agreements, should have been avoided. At a lower level in Beijing and in academic foreign policy circles in Beijing and Shanghai several scholars argued that President Xi and Prime Minister Li are “clearer” and more decisive than their predecessors, while senior officials pointed to the necessity of any leader responding to what was seen as the new U.S. power game. The fact that a senior adviser to Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, Ding Yifan (who was called “Wen Jiabao’s policy guru” in the U.S. media), continued as adviser to Prime Minister Li Keqiang and presented the latter’s new policy (Ding, 2013) indicates that the change is primarily external. Ding Yifan underlined the continuity, and his continuing role is evidence of that continuity. The change of policy in China should rather be explained by a right-wing U.S.-Japanese initiative to upset Sino-Japanese ties by playing the territory card and thus exploit China’s weak point. When China and Japan established closer ties in 2009 this was unacceptable to certain forces in Japan and the U.S. They responded by playing the territory card to increase Sino-Japanese tension in order to guarantee that the Japanese-U.S. alliance was kept as Japan’s primary relationship.

### **Escalation, nuclear temptation and the calibration of tension**

Neither the advisers to Prime Minister Li nor the most senior officials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry and military intelligence believed that China would go to war with Japan, while some academics did not exclude the possibility of a war and even believed that the U.S. would stay out of such a war to avoid a nuclear exchange. The recent talk about a Sino-U.S. partnership, the elevation of China to the position of a “responsible stakeholder”, and the relaxed meeting between President Obama and President Xi had made senior academics believe that the U.S. would stay neutral in an East Asian conflict. These academics (particularly in Shanghai) mentioned the example of France under President de Gaulle not trusting U.S. nuclear guarantees. The U.S. would not save Marseilles if it stood to lose New York, De Gaulle had said, and the same could be said of Tokyo and New York, one academic argued. Such a risky game was never mentioned at higher levels in Beijing.

The views of some academics were coloured by their own wishful thinking and by their hopes for closer Sino-U.S. ties. They did not see the real significance of the U.S.-Japanese agreement. This means that President Obama’s meeting with the Dalai Lama in February 2014 may rather be interpreted as a public U.S. signal to China not to encourage any Chinese misreading of U.S.

intentions. The meeting was a demonstration of U.S. loyalties, which could not be misunderstood in China. The Chinese protest against the meeting was strong and was delivered by First Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui. In April 2014 President Obama supported Japanese claims of sovereignty over the East China Sea islands (BBC, 2014). The signal was clear: the U.S. would support Japan and the territorial conflict would not be allowed to disappear, which in turn would allow the U.S. to bring about a Sino-Japanese split. When looking back at recent events, one can conclude that – as suggested above – U.S. and Japanese players have succeeded in calibrating the tension between Japan and China. There were no illusions about U.S. neutrality among the most senior Chinese officials. After the Libyan and Syrian wars China no longer trusts the U.S. and senior Chinese officials believed that China has to wait for a post-Abe government in Japan in order to establish better relations with that country. On the other hand, Japan seems to be attempting to normalise its relations with China, as illustrated by the meeting between their foreign ministers at the ASEAN Summit in August 2014 (Iwata, 2014), the meeting between former prime minister Yasuo Fukuda and President Xi in July and October (Ng, 2014), and by the 20-minute meeting between Xi and Abe at the APEC Summit in Beijing on November 10th 2014.

### **China’s historical experience and perception of its territory**

Its experiences in the 19th and 20th centuries have taught China that wars are a result of weakness in the face of foreign aggression, as illustrated by Western colonial rule and Japanese invasions in that period. China’s way of learning from these experiences and avoiding war is to arm itself. The country’s military budget represents 5.3% of the total budget (Perlo-Freeman, 2014), but the radically increased costs of military pensions is also part of this high figure. The combined forces of the U.S. and Japan are several times larger than China’s. In addition, China’s rearmament is not combined with an aggressive rhetoric. Historically speaking, China has tended to maintain the status quo. It has not tried to occupy territories outside its historical empire and it has no real offensive capabilities; for example, it will be decades before China has a genuine aircraft carrier capability (Till & Bratton, 2012). Chinese scholars said that they had studied European history before the First World War, noting Germany’s role as a rising power and its naval build-up that challenged British naval hegemony and was one of the causes of the First World War. In 2006 Chinese officials consulted by the author argued that China was well aware of this problem and would avoid a corresponding build-up that would challenge U.S. naval hegemony. China’s economic development depends on global stability and trust between it and its neighbours. Some scholars leaned more towards belief in a multipolar world order, while others believed that for the foreseeable future China would have to accept U.S. hegemony and a unipolar world. China alone is not likely to

challenge the U.S. in any part of the world as long as the U.S. does not threaten China's territorial integrity.

A more problematic aspect of Chinese security thinking is the understanding of China's territory as something given and unchanging over the centuries. The relative historical stability of East Asian borders has shaped a perception of the Chinese state as an entity with a clearly defined territory. In contrast to the European understanding of national territory as something constructed over the centuries with new states and new borders redefined by wars, the Chinese territory has been understood as fixed. External forces have conquered China and founded new dynasties, but Chinese territory has been relatively stable, shaped by Chinese civilisation. Civil wars and attacks by foreign aggressors have never been able to alter this perception. Both Beijing and Taipei have a common understanding of what "China" is, but not of who the legitimate ruler of that country is. This means that Chinese territory, including its historical islands, is perceived to constitute the "essence of China", which is a weak point that others seek to exploit. This is obvious in the South China Sea, where China claims reefs close to the Philippines and Vietnam (analogous to the Greek sea border close to Turkey). The Diaoyu/Senkaku islands conflict is different. Here China's claims are motivated not only by historical ties, but also by the fact that the islands are located close to Taiwan. They belong to China because they are part of Taiwan, the Chinese argue.

Norway found a pragmatic solution to its sea-border dispute with Russia, but this is more difficult in the Sino-Japanese case. The issue is not just about state interests, but about the "essence of the state". When U.S. and Japanese elites wanted to end the Sino-Japanese rapprochement and guarantee the primacy of Japanese-U.S. ties, they exploited this weak point by playing the territory card. By triggering a territorial conflict they were able to calibrate the level of tension and reset East Asian geopolitics, triggering regime change in Japan and increasing Sino-Japanese tensions in order to weaken China's influence in East Asia. It was that simple.

### East Asia vs the European theatre

All the Chinese consulted for this report argued that people in the West do not understand the difference between post-war Germany and post-war Japan. In Europe, Germany has become the state that is least willing to participate in military campaigns, while, unlike Germany, Japan has never admitted to its brutal past and its killing of millions of Chinese and hundreds of thousands of people in biological weapons attacks in Manchuria. The Japanese opened the living bodies of targeted Chinese to study the effect of their biological weapons (Endicott & Hagerman, 1998). After the Second World War central Japanese figures like Lieutenant General Ishii Shiro were recruited to the U.S. biological weapons programme, whose weapons were used during the Korean War in attacks inside Manchuria, as

if the Korean War were nothing but a continuation of the Japanese imperial war of the 1940s (Endicott & Hagerman, 1998). The very fact that the Second World War war criminal Nobusuke Kishi, the minister for munitions who was responsible for the Manchurian war that killed hundreds of thousands of Chinese, became prime minister of post-war Japan, and the fact that his grandson, Shinzo Abe, is currently prime minister of Japan and honours the war criminals of the past indicate that the East Asian theatre is different from the European one. The day after Abe visited the Yasukuni shrine to honour the men who died in the war against the U.S., he announced the agreement with the U.S. on the Okinawa base, which was appreciated by the U.S. In May 2014 an advisory panel appointed by Abe proposed a change in the Japanese constitution to allow Japan's "self-defence forces" to act overseas (*The Economist*, 2014). On July 1st Abe "approved [such a] constitutional reinterpretation" (DefenseNews, 2014).

### Trust, great power policy and China's closer ties to Russia

In April 2014 U.S. secretary of defence Chuck Hagel compared the Diaoyu/Senkaku conflict with the ongoing events in Crimea. He warned China about a "Crimea scenario" with China creating a fait accompli regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands similar to Russia's actions in Crimea (AP, 2014). This would be totally unacceptable, he said, but he was unaware that he had put Russia and China in the same basket. The wars in Libya and Syria and the conflict in Ukraine have made China and Russia move closer together and form a more trustful relationship, which on May 21st 2014 was cemented with a \$400 billion gas deal signed at the meeting in Shanghai between President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping. In terms of the deal Russia will provide China with natural gas for 30 years, linking the two states much more closely (Anishchuk, 2014). A deal has been made between Russia and China on harbour facilities in northern Siberia for the future use of the northern sea route, which will become accessible as a consequence of global warming (Staalesen, 2010). This route will reduce the distance between Europe and China by more than a third, but will not be commercially viable in the near future, several officials argued. Overall, Russia and China are now closer than ever: (1) the Libya and Syria crises have forced Russia and China together (see below); (2) U.S. "rebalancing" in the Pacific has had the same effect; (3) economic compatibilities (raw materials and industry) underlined by the Ukraine events and the Beijing-Moscow gas agreement have also tied them together; while (4) both China and Russia are labelled "non-democratic", i.e. the media campaign and external pressure have put them in the same boat. Putin obtained support from China and Brazil to escape Western sanctions over Crimea. The export of gas to China makes Russia less dependent on its European markets. China has developed closer ties to other BRICS members as the other side of the G-20 coin and in 2014 the BRICS established the New Development Bank with \$100 billion of initial capital as an

alternative to the World Bank, but Chinese ties to Russia have been given primacy and have also been expressed in common naval exercises. The first meeting between Xi and Putin lasted for 7 hours and 45 minutes, and in two years they have had eight meetings. This does not mean that we will see a China-Russia bloc and the new relationship does not point to a new bipolar world order, but it does mean that there is more real trust between the two countries. There have been informal meetings between President Obama and President Xi, but no sense of trust has been established.

China is trying to develop closer ties with both Europe and the U.S. according to China's model for great power relationships: (1) no conflict, (2) mutual respect, and (3) win-win relationships. The idea is to work towards cooperation, not conflict, and to maintain a pragmatic relationship. In practice, however, there are differences, and according to a recent Chinese Gallup poll, there is a strong interest in the U.S. vision of the world among middle-level officials in China, while there is much more trust in Europe – or, rather, in Germany – among top-level officials. Top Chinese leaders, including provincial leaders, prefer a German-European welfare state and Europe's domestic focus rather than the global power projection of the U.S., while leaders at the middle level may have studied in the U.S. and been influenced by that country (although they have less experience of U.S. politics and wars; see below). This Gallup pool included the Western powers, not Russia or other BRICS members.

## The wars in Libya and Syria and the new geopolitical shift

In 2012 South African president Jacob Zuma said at the UN that the "AU's plan [for Libya] was completely ignored in favor of bombing Libya by NATO forces ... it is the view of the AU that the 1973 Resolution of the UN Security Council was largely abused". NATO should be held "accountable", he said (Zuma, 2012). Russia and China held a similar view and have accordingly been vetoing any resolution on Syria similar to the Libyan one. Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev said about Libya that the West "kept telling us there would be no military operation, no intervention, but eventually they started a full-blown war that claimed many lives" (*Russia Today*, 2012). The president of the China Institute of International Studies, Qu Xing (2012), said that "Security Council authorisation had been abused". He spoke about "at least 25,000" killed. All top-level officials in China consulted for this report had a similar view. Qu and his predecessor, Ma Zhengang, and top officials from the Foreign Ministry, the State Council and military intelligence said they "were totally fooled in Libya" and that "this had consequences for our policy towards Syria". Such a "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) operation will never happen again, they said. China will not accept that the UN Security Council becomes a mechanism to legitimise regime change and geopolitical shifts in the name of R2P or "humanitarian interventions". Western "states involve

themselves in country after country to support the opposition to take down governments", they said. "Russia and China will not accept this policy any longer." Military intelligence officials argued:

We didn't believe they would bomb. We lost a lot in Libya [China had large investments and 30,000 people working in Libya], but the U.S. lost more, because they lost a large part of the world [many African, Latin American and Asian countries].

This U.S. loss of influence was illustrated by President Obama's 180-degree turnaround after he announced missile strikes against Syria in August 2013. The U.S. retreat did not just reflect a dissenting view within the U.S. intelligence community (Hersh, 2014); it was a remarkable event pointing to a geopolitical shift, Ma said.

Top Chinese officials argue that Western states had supported armed rebels in the name of "humanitarian interventions" in order to engineer regime change in oil-rich countries: the former U.S. supreme Allied commander in Europe, General Wesley Clark (2007a; 2007b), said that in 2001 the U.S. had already decided to go to war against the regimes in Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Iran, Syria and Lebanon. This would allow it to control the oil-rich Middle East, not for the purposes of U.S. consumption, a U.S. document said, but to control an oil-dependent future rival, i.e. China (Burr, 2008). To China this policy of regime change is unacceptable. In Geneva on June 30th 2012 the five permanent members of the Security Council (the U.S., France, Britain, Russia and China) agreed to a solution to the Syrian crisis with a transitional government and the maintenance of the country's security forces to avoid chaos. But, according to Kofi Annan (2012), at the following meeting in New York where the details were to be worked out, the Western states decided to opt out of this agreement and go for a Chapter VII operation, which they knew that China and Russia would never accept. They had been very clear on that in Geneva, Annan said. After consultations at home, the U.S. Britain and France used Chapter VII to justify a continued war in the hope of a rebel victory; this war has taken more than 100,000 lives and is still in progress. To the Chinese, the Libyan and Syrian wars taught lessons that led to "zero trust" towards the U.S. and Britain.

## China as a global power, diplomat and power broker

Some Chinese scholars have opted for closer Sino-U.S. ties. They have underlined China's role as a "responsible stakeholder", to quote former U.S. deputy secretary of state Robert Zoellick (2005). The influence of China as the world's second-largest economy will make China into a special U.S. partner that brings the two states closer together, they argue. Many U.S. officials have started to treat China as "No. 2" to the U.S. China overtook Japan's position in GDP ranking in 2010, and Timothy Geithner and

the U.S. Congress put pressure on China to allow its currency to appreciate in value. Ding Yifan immediately warned Washington that the U.S. may lose a trade war with China (Eckert, 2010). China could start selling its holdings of U.S. debt (estimated at \$1.5 trillion). The U.S. debt to China appears as a form of civilian “nuclear option” that could create a situation of Sino-U.S. “mutual assured destruction”. The size of China’s economy matters, but this does not mean that China can influence the world, and the idea of a “G-2” (Zoellick, 2009) comprising only China and the U.S. was rejected by the Chinese side. Senior Chinese officials are cautious and will not let the U.S. seduce them to accept an inferior “No. 2” position. They are well aware of China’s weaknesses compared to other countries. China is perhaps No. 4, No. 5 or No. 6, to quote former vice foreign minister Fu Ying (2010) during her visit to Oslo. But Chinese leaders will not let China play the second violin in a U.S. orchestra. China may accept a position as a “responsible stakeholder”, but not the role of a U.S. “assistant”. In athletics, to be “No. 2” is fine, but in politics the “No. 2” may develop into a convenient enemy. The Chinese leadership still follows the words of Deng Xiaoping: “you should feel the stones while crossing the river.” Radical change is not a Chinese choice.

Nonetheless, 10% growth for three decades has made China into an example to many poor countries. The size of the economy and its recent modernisation cannot be ignored. It has given China the strength to modernise its armed forces, but the main focus has always been on the domestic scene, i.e. on stability and welfare. There is no ambition to defend Chinese investments abroad. In Libya, China lost major investments, but the use of military force was never on the table. However, China has become a global player, and economies like the German one will be seriously affected if China’s economy were to slow down (Ding et al., 2014). China is unlikely to confront the U.S., but it is recognised as following a relatively independent and pragmatic foreign policy. From the late 1970s under Deng Xiaoping, China has favoured economic ties before ideological friendship. Different from the U.S. and many European states, China does not put conditions on various development projects and insists on the principle of non-interference, which means that many African states have preferred to work with China, which has assisted with infrastructure projects that have had an important economic impact on these states. Its trade with African states increased from \$10 billion in 2001 to \$150 billion in 2011 (Gamache et al., 2013). Its pragmatic relationship with various states has opened up the opportunity for China to become a power broker.

For pragmatic reasons China has close ties to both Iran and Israel. Its pragmatic and non-ideological approach has been acceptable to both sides, and China has facilitated back-channel talks between the two countries (with a delegation headed by former head of military intelligence General Huang Baifu) (Matthews, 2013). China’s strong economy and relatively weak military capability also

constitute an argument for more civilised behaviour, and China certainly prefers peaceful dialogue, UN operations and confidence-building measures, to quote General Zhang Qinsheng. The new, more assertive policy of President Xi and Prime Minister Li from 2013 onwards should rather be understood as a response to the U.S. attempt to reset East Asian geopolitics and to guarantee the primacy of U.S.-Japanese relations.

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Ding Yifan, deputy director, IWD

Qi Mei, director, North European Division, Chinese Foreign Ministry

Chen Naiqing, ambassador and vice president, CPIFA  
Ma Zhengang, ambassador, former vice minister and former president of the CIIS  
Cui Hongjian, director, CIIS's European Department (with Jin Ling of the same department)  
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