

ICAS Bulletin

A Bimonthly Survey of Research and Analysis on China-US Relations
April 9, 2015

Twice a month, the ICAS Bulletin updates a global audience on American perspectives regarding the world's most important bilateral relationship. Research papers, journal articles, and other prominent work published in the US are listed here alongside information about events at US-based institutions.

Highlighted Document:

Letter from Senate Armed Forces Committee Leadership to Secretary of State Kerry and Secretary of Defense Carter

March 19, 2015

<http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/letter-to-secretary-carter-and-secretary-kerry-on-chinese-maritime-strategy>

Senators Jack Reed, John McCain, Bob Corker and Robert Menendez wrote to the Obama administration's defense and foreign policy leadership to call attention to China's land reclamation activities in the South China Sea. They express concern about the consequences if the Chinese government decides to militarize the new islands, and worry that the reclamation projects may be part of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) project in the South China Sea. They argue that such developments would destabilize the region.

Publications

Navigating Choppy waters: China's Economic Decisionmaking at a Time of Transition

Matthew Goodman and David Parker

Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 31, 2015

http://csis.org/files/publication/150327_navigating_choppy_waters.pdf

Goodman and Parker report on two years of research on China's political economy under the Xi administration. The work assesses the difficulties presented by the slowing of China's growth, and the adequacy of Xi's reform approach. They find that positive outcomes are possible, but also note the tensions within Xi's desire to increase the role of market forces on the one hand, yet increase the influence of

top policymakers on the other. They recommend a much more comprehensive strategic engagement of the US with China regarding economic matters, noting a lack of attention and organizational coherence in the Obama administration's China policy.

Shades of Gray: Technology, Strategic Competition, and Stability in Maritime Asia

Amy Chang, Ben FitzGerald, and Van Jackson

Center for a New American Security, March 2015

http://www.cnas.org/shades-gray-technology-strategic-competition-and-stability-maritime-asia#.VRr4e_nF-ps

The authors detail how the asymmetric development of new military technologies and their unprecedented "gray zone" applications increase instability in the Asia-Pacific region. The use of new technologies or coercive gray zone (between peace and war) tactics cause crisis instability because counterparts in a dispute might not share an understanding of either the meanings of challenges or the appropriate calibration of responses, potentially leading to cycles of escalation.

Using International Law to Defuse Current Controversies in the South and East China Seas

CNA Analysis and Solutions

Mark Rosen, February 2015

<https://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/COP-2015-U009819.pdf>

Rosen outlines both how the United Nations Charter on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is a legal regime that faces several current challenges, but also how it is still a useful instrument for providing constructive settlements to maritime jurisdiction disputes. The author notes that UNCLOS principles could productively be used by China in order to attain favorable results regarding disputes with Japan and the Philippines without the need for settling sovereignty disputes. This would allow for resource development and promote China's long-term goals better than opting out of UNCLOS-based negotiations.

Article Series: How is China Changing?

The Washington Quarterly, 37:2 Winter 2015

<http://twg.elliott.gwu.edu/>

China: The Post-Responsible Power

Yong Deng

The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Explaining Beijing's Assertiveness

Aaron Friedberg

Why Chinese Assertiveness is Here to Stay

Oriana Skylar Mastro

Projecting Strategy: The Myth of Chinese Counter-Intervention

Taylor Fravel and Christopher Twomey

This series takes on the much-discussed notion of the “newly assertive China” and its military modernization. Yong Deng argues that China has outgrown the “responsible power” model of adherence to the US-dominated status-quo, but has yet to convert its increased influence into a new, stabilizing mode of participation in global governance. Aaron Freidberg assesses various explanations for the new assertiveness, and finds it is a rationally chosen policy based in perceptions of a shifting balance of power. Oriana Skylar Mastro advocates that the US stop focusing so much on crisis-management and realize that Chinese assertiveness must be dealt with in a more confrontational and risk-accepting manner. Taylor Fravel and Christopher Twomey work to disprove the assumption commonly made in Washington that China’s military modernization plan is focused primarily on a “counter-intervention” strategy that seeks to gradually deny the US access to the Western Pacific.

Events at US-based Institutions

The Vietnam Forum with Ambassador of Vietnam to the United States Pham Quang Vinh and Ambassador of the United States to Vietnam Ted Osius

Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 24, 2015

<http://csis.org/event/vietnam-forum-pham-quang-vinh-ambassador-vietnam-and-ted-osius-ambassador-united-states-vietna>

The two ambassadors celebrated 20 years of normal diplomatic relations between the two countries and highlighted areas of ongoing cooperation. Both seemed optimistic about coming to an agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership and continuing security cooperation in the South China Sea. However, Ambassador Osius remarked that significant sales of lethal arms to Vietnam were unlikely any time soon, and highlighted human rights concerns as the most significant difficulty in the relationship.

Defense Priorities for the 114th Congress: A Discussion with Senate Arms Services Committee Chairman John McCain

Center for Strategic and International Studies

March 26, 2015

<https://csis.org/event/csis-series-congress-and-defense-defense-priorities-114th-congress>

Senator McCain outlined priorities for defense spending and organizational reform. McCain discussed several global challenges, and argued that the post-1945 liberal order is being challenged in unprecedented ways. He included Chinese assertiveness as one such challenge, and expressed concern that China, among other nations, sense a decline in American commitment to the current global order. McCain advocated ending current budgetary controls on the Defense Department and restoring a bipartisan consensus on American commitment to the liberal world order so that the US can reverse what he claims are perceptions of

American weakness around the world.

US-Japan Security Seminar 2015

Center for Strategic and International Studies

March 27, 2015

<http://csis.org/event/us-japan-security-seminar-2015-0>

This event was headlined by Japanese Member of Parliament and former Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura. Komura discussed ongoing efforts to reinterpret Article 9 of the Japanese constitution in order to allow Japan's SDF to engage in collective security arrangements. Komura indicated that Japan envisions its new security conception to allow for an increased role in global peacekeeping, nation-building, patrolling of sea lanes. He remarked that Chinese reclamation efforts in the South China Sea and its "opaque" military developments were worrisome developments. He expressed optimism that Japan could assert its claims over the Senkaku/Diaoyo islands without disrupting peaceful relations with China.

In a panel discussion, Akio Takahara of the University of Tokyo expressed concern about Japan/China relations on a few points. He noted that China is entering a period of economic transition and potential social disruption, which could affect Chinese foreign policy for better or for worse, depending on whether Chinese leadership chooses to further embrace nationalism or look to international integration to address problems. He also noted that there is a great deal of misunderstanding between the Chinese and Japanese publics regarding how to interpret the intentions and dispositions of the other. Kathleen Hicks of CSIS expressed concern about the lack of communication between China and the US on how to deal with a domestic crisis in North Korea. Later in the program, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage stated that the intentions behind Chinese military modernization were "unknown" therefore could not be considered threatening. He disagreed with the common opinion that Chinese assertiveness will encourage Asian states to strengthen ties with the United States, and suggested that the strongest signal of commitment that the US could make to Asian states was the completion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement.

USCSCAP Workshop on Maritime Security and the Marine Environment

CSIS Pacific Forum, Honolulu, HI

Monday March 30, 2015

<http://csis.org/event/uscscap-workshop-maritime-security-and-marine-environment>

This event was hosted by CSIS Pacific Forum as the US party to the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, a Track II forum. A number of transnational and international issues were discussed, including difficulties to implementing environmental protection regimes in the Asia-Pacific, poor coordination of disaster management regimes, and challenges to the DOC/COC process in the South China Sea.

Do Western Values Threaten China? The Motives and Methods of Xi Jinping's Ideology Campaign

Wilson Center, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, April 2, 2015

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/do-western-values-threaten-china-the-motives-and-methods-xi-jinping%E2%80%99s-ideology-campaign>

This event featured a discussion of the significance of the Xi administration's recent focus on discouraging political and social ideas associated with Western values. Richard Daly suggested that since the Chinese government's public relations efforts operate on a global scale, the new emphasis could impact relations between the US and China in terms of the projection of soft power. Anne-Marie Brady described changes in the Chinese state's "thoughtcraft" policies, while Richard McGregor, among other things, argued that ideological issues will not significantly affect the US-China relationship.

Commentary: The "Opaque Intentions" Problem

Alek Chance

China's land reclamation projects in the Spratly Islands have recently received a small increase in coverage in the US media in recent weeks. A letter out of the Senate Armed Forces Committee (see above) and articles in the *Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy* have allowed issues in the South China Sea to receive some attention in an environment dominated by discussion of ISIS, Iran's nuclear program and Vladimir Putin. While the South China Sea is low on the list of concerns for the general educated American public, many—though not all—scholars and government officials working on US-China relations attribute great significance to this issue.

Many analysts seem to believe that the islands in the South China Sea have little immediate or intrinsic strategic importance to the US or even some of the regional stakeholders. Rather, American scholars and policymakers tend to view the "new assertiveness" of China in the region as being significant mostly because of what it appears to signal. Many worry that recent events indicate a possible shift in China's long-term strategy, and introduce an element of unpredictability. In short, the maritime security issues have done much to reinforce the perception that China's intentions are "opaque," and all too difficult to decipher.

The word "opaque" is frequently used in this sense in Washington circles, and the problem of unknown intentions shapes American perceptions of the relationship at different levels. For one, American thinkers are divided in their explanations for the perceived "new assertiveness." Some argue it is a function of domestic politics, some contend it is a coordinated strategy to erode American influence in the region, and a variety of perspectives fall somewhere in between. Some scholars even dispute that there is any such trend as a "new assertiveness" in the first place (see the Friedberg article above for a partial summary of the debate on this issue).

This lack of consensus about the causes of Chinese behavior in turn facilitates uncertainty in the US about the future character of the bilateral relationship and China's position in the

global order. Along these lines, analysts in the US and other countries often interpret recent Chinese behavior as signaling a rejection of a “rules-based” international system—a phrase that is also very frequently used in conjunction with these issues.

At the level of concrete security strategies, the problem of “opacity” presents difficulties as well. In some quarters, American analysts are worried about a security dilemma in the Asia-Pacific region. According to this view, Chinese “A2AD” technologies and the United States’ (now renamed) “AirSea Battle Concept” unnecessarily create tensions because of a lack of mutual understanding about the rationales behind them.

The problems arising from “opaque” intentions are both well recognized and endemic to international politics. Yet it is helpful to reflect upon how to avoid scenarios of misperception between states, and political science has much to say on the matter. Robert Jervis, in his now classic body of work on misperception in international politics, identifies a number of tendencies statesmen have to underestimate the difficulties of communicating their positions to foreign counterparts.¹ Policymakers tend to overestimate how effective they are in communicating their messages, and they also often overestimate the degree to which the actions of counterparts are indicative of coherent policies.

Both of these observations seem relevant to the current period of US/China relations. As the scholar Amitai Etzioni pointed out in a 2013 article,² the Pentagon’s development of the operational concept formerly called “AirSea Battle” might have looked like the military prong of a US containment strategy for China. However, Etzioni found no evidence that the Obama administration put much thought into the issue at all, but was instead focused on trade and human rights issues in the relationship. If true, this means that the administration sent an unintended signal about US intentions, one that communicated a tougher stance than President Obama had meant. This was further compounded by the administration’s clumsy articulation of the rationale behind the “Asia pivot,” something that has drawn much criticism from American observers. The fact that both “the pivot” and “AirSea Battle” have since been renamed suggests that the Obama administration acknowledges a misperception problem in this area. In a recent article, Harry Kazianis criticizes the White House for a lack of a transparent and coherent messaging campaign explaining the rationales behind its strategic concepts in the Asia-Pacific region.³ He finds that insufficient communication has led China to misunderstand US policies, which in turn has facilitated a security dilemma.

On the Chinese side, recent decisions in the South China Sea may well be the results of uncoordinated bureaucratic decisions, a new focus on responding to popular demands for the settlement of sovereignty disputes, or other dynamics that have gone unrecognized in the United States. Whatever the origins of recent decisions, the signal that is often received in the US is one of a coordinated undermining of the “rules-based” international system, a challenging of US leadership in the region, or the aspiration to undue influence over neighboring states. If some or all of these are unintended signals, then clearly much work

¹ Among other works, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press, 1976.

² Who Authorized Preparations for a War with China? *Yale Journal of International Affairs* Summer 2013.

³ Is a Deadly US-China Arms Race Impossible to Stop? RealClearDefense.com March 29, 2015 http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/03/29/is_a_deadly_us-china_arms_race_impossible_to_stop_107818.html

must be done on both sides to discover better modes of communication through which long-term strategic visions can be more clearly articulated.

While states can derive certain advantages from being intentionally opaque, they are often so only through poor organization or communication strategies, or by making incorrect assumptions about their counterparts' perceptions. Because of the great importance of the relationship to global security, it is especially incumbent on the US and China to identify incoherence in their foreign policies, obstacles to communication, and sources of possible misperception so that the role of opacity in statecraft is as limited as possible.