



ICAS BULLETIN

Institute for China-America Studies

A Bimonthly Survey of Research and Analysis on US-China Relations

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Publications

[How Xi Jinping Sees the World...and Why](#)

Jeffrey Bader

Brookings, February 2016

This report evaluates the leadership of Xi Jinping against the backdrop of broader trends in Chinese foreign policy. Bader is especially interested in the question of whether Xi's foreign policy constitutes a departure from China's previous conservative if tepid support for the international liberal order. Bader contends that Xi's leadership is broadly consistent with a longstanding ambivalence towards the international order—China is firmly ensconced in many key international institutions and regimes, but has always maintained a critique of their fairness or inclusiveness. China, according to Bader, accepts those elements of the international order that are useful and remains “indifferent or hostile” to those with which it disagrees. These characteristics are not unique to Xi's leadership style. Even trends that garner so much attention today—such as militarization, “assertiveness” in the maritime disputes and others—in fact predate Xi's tenure. Thus, in Bader's view, it is a mistake to attribute a turn in Chinese policy to Xi.

The United States and Future Policy Options in the Taiwan Strait: Driving Forces and Implications for US Security Interests

Mark Stokes and Sabrina Tsai

Project 2049 Institute, February 2016

This major report evaluates past US approaches to cross-strait relations. The authors contend that the policy currently dominant in the US is to maintain ambiguity as to the precise character of relations between Beijing and Taipei, and to focus on the nature of the process between the two rather than seek a particular solution. To the authors, this approach was adequate when originally formulated, but does not address new facts on the ground, such as Taiwan's increasing economic importance and track record on governance. The report assesses a variety of policy options and recommends a new approach of gradually extending equal legitimacy to Beijing and Taipei from within the context of a "one China" approach.

Power and Risk in Foreign Policy: Understanding China's Crisis Behavior

Kai He

Political Science Quarterly 130:4, Winter 2015-2016

The author applies insights from prospect theory via a "political survival prospect model" of Chinese leaders' behavior in crisis situations. It finds that realist and other frameworks don't adequately explain decisionmaking among the Chinese leadership. The author contends that a model that takes into account the domestic challenges faced by Chinese leadership can better account for variation in risk-acceptant or risk-averse behavior.

Americans are Less Likely to View the US as No. 1 Military

Frank Newport

Gallup, February 3, 2015

Recent survey results from the polling firm Gallup regarding American impressions of their military are summarized here. Somewhat surprisingly, it finds that only 49% of Americans now believe that the United States possesses the top military in the world. The article compares these findings with other polling data across time to compile a picture of an American electorate that has decreasing confidence in its country's military power. Party affiliation is a significant factor in this regard. For example, Republicans are more than three times as likely as others to believe that military spending is inadequate.

Chinese Views on Global Governance Since 2008-2009: Not Much New

Michael Swaine

China Leadership Monitor 49, February 8, 2016

Swaine evaluates the claim, made with increasing frequency, that Chinese foreign policy seeks to significantly alter or subvert the existing set of international governance regimes. In an examination of official, quasi-official and unofficial Chinese sources, Swaine finds that while there is a strong desire among many parties in China to adjust existing institutions and norms, there is little appetite for overturning them or creating alternatives. Chinese commentators criticize how existing international governance regimes fail to adequately serve developing nations, and how traditional norms of sovereignty are being undermined by new principles such as “Responsibility to Protect” and in the current mode for regulating the internet. However, in Swaine’s eyes, most commentary focuses on reforming existing institutions, and China’s adherence to the United Nations and the institution of sovereignty is hardly revolutionary.

Eurasia’s Infrastructure Rush: What, Why, and So What?

Matthew Goodman and David Parker

CSIS Global Economics Monthly, 5:1, January 2016

The authors discuss current infrastructure investment projects in the works across Eurasia, including China’s Belt and Road Initiative. They argue that given the obstacles to effective infrastructure investment from a commercial perspective, Belt and Road, along with Indian and Japanese initiatives are at least partly driven by geopolitical considerations. They note that the structure of the AIIB presupposes that there is a financing gap in infrastructure development, yet funding, not financing is the real problem with development in much of Eurasia. In short, financing for commercially viable projects around the world is not in short supply. What is difficult to find are viable projects that aren’t jeopardized by corruption, instability, or government incapacity.

Confronting China in the South China Sea

Mira Rapp-Hooper

Foreign Affairs, February 8, 2016

Rapp-Hooper discusses the latest US freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) conducted by the USS *Curtis Wilbur* in the Paracel Islands. She describes the operation as more successful than the earlier transit of the USS *Lassen* through the Spratly Islands because of clearer legal messaging on the part of the Pentagon and the unexpectedly positive response from Vietnam, one of the claimant states (along with China) in the Paracels whose policies the US meant to challenge. Rapp-Hooper goes on to discuss how the US should develop a robust system of coordinating its FONOPS with other states such as Japan and Australia, and clearly publicizing its activities in this regard.

The Special US-ASEAN Summit: An Investment in Asia's Future

Michael Fuchs

Center for American Progress, February 11, 2016

Fuchs discusses the upcoming summit that will see President Barack Obama host the leaders of the ten nations that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Rancho Mirage, California. Fuchs points to three reasons to explain why the ASEAN leaders are suddenly in high demand to attend special summits by non-ASEAN countries: flaring disputes over the South China Sea; the central role ASEAN will play in the region's security landscape for the 21st century; and global economic growth. The dispute over the South China Sea is just one of a number of delicate balancing acts that the group has to deal with as it looks to support neighboring countries that want ASEAN as a whole to stand up to China while, at the same time, maintaining positive relationships with China. According to Fuchs, the external pressures facing ASEAN raise a question bigger than any of the individual issues: can ASEAN effectively act as the driver of the region's emerging political institutions? Fuchs believes that Obama's decision to invite the leaders of ASEAN to California is a good one as it is "both an investment in the future of Asia and a recognition that ASEAN-centered institutions are the most effective mechanisms through which the United States can forge solutions to Asia's biggest threats."

American Fear of China Weighs in on US Election

Bruce Stokes

Nikkei Asian Review, January 29, 2016

In this essay, Stokes draws attention to the Asian issues that are surrounding the current US presidential campaigns. Stokes highlights that while evidence does not suggest that previous US presidential elections have turned on the candidates' positions on Asia-related matters, the concerns of the American public must be considered by each candidate. Stokes continues by pointing to how a number of potential nominees differ on Asia policy. The article cites Pew Research Center surveys since the early 1990s that highlight the feelings of Americans toward China. Research suggests that, in the last decade, the number of Americans harboring an unfavorable opinion of China has risen to exceed 50%. The TPP, economic challenges, Chinese territorial disputes, China's human rights record, and potential cyber-attacks are all concerns for the American public.

Events

Taiwan's Path Forward: Post-Presidential Elections Readout

CSIS, February 5, 2016

This event, focused on the recent Taiwanese presidential election, featured presentations by Bonnie Glaser, Director of the China Power Project, CSIS; Joshua Meltzer, Senior Fellow in Global Economy and Development, The Brookings Institution; and Emerson Niou, Professor of Political Science, Duke University. The three panelists discussed a number of issues regarding Taiwan's future since the DPP's election victory in January, including, the contending views surrounding cross-strait relations, and Taiwanese public opinion on national security issues.

Dissecting Taiwan's 2016 Election Results

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 8, 2016

Carnegie's Douglas Paal welcomed Taiwan expert Alan Romberg to discuss the significance of the recent Taiwan election to cross-strait relations and US-China relations. Romberg suggested that incoming president Tsai Ing-wen will not endorse the 1992 Consensus as such, but neither will she pursue independence. According to Romberg, Tsai's recent comments indicate a desire to take a moderate approach and keep cross-strait relations on their current course without accepting the specific language of the 1992 Consensus. How Beijing will react to such an approach remains to be seen.

The Vital Role of Development in the Asia-Pacific Rebalance: Perspectives from USAID

Address by Assistant Administrator for Asia Jon Stivers

Sigur Center, George Washington University, February 10, 2016

Assistant Administrator Stivers gave a broad overview of USAID's development policies in Asia and portrayed them as an important part of the Obama administration's "pivot" policy. He described US policy as focused on health, hunger prevention, democracy, education, climate change mitigation and disaster relief. Stivers also touched on USAID's rationale for its approach on technical assistance, civil society, education and other social and political programs, explaining them as the foundations of long-term economic stability rather than short-term gains. In response to a question about how considerations regarding China influence USAID's policies, Stivers contended that the "pivot" isn't about China and would take place even in the absence of China's rise. Stivers mentioned that the US often seeks to collaborate with China on development, but this can be difficult given a lack of transparency in the Chinese bureaucracy about development plans and priorities. (Video of this event may be available later.)

Commentary

The US-ASEAN Honeymoon Shouldn't come at China's Expense

Zhu Feng

The upcoming summit meeting between the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the Sunnylands Ranch in California on February 15-16, 2016 will highlight the vast significance of American relations with the ten-member Southeast Asian regional organization. By most accounts, it is an unprecedented summit meeting between both sides as it is the first time that the United States hosts such a summit on the North American continent. President Obama and his ASEAN guests will have a lot to say and discuss given the growth in their economic and trading ties, pending security issues and increased desire for more meaningful strategic partnerships. Whatever the result of this US-ASEAN summit, the “China factor” will certainly take a central place. The question here is in what way the “China factor” might adequately be addressed in order to have a positive impact on the region.

Since the end of the Cold War, a strong US-ASEAN relationship has never been more desired and important than it is now. With China's rise and its policy turn of “assertiveness,” both sides need to reinforce their security cooperation to hedge against any uncertainties in the region. President Obama's “Rebalancing” strategy has sought to refurbish its military, economic and political influences to counter a re-emerging China, while ASEAN as a whole is striving to pull the United States closer to counter-balance an active China in all domains. Tensions arising from the South China Sea territorial disputes create a big driver for ASEAN to tilt towards Washington to regenerate a delicate balance in the region. Consequently this new dynamic leaves the US considerably leeway to confront China on multiple fronts. In truth, the South China Sea friction is just one of them.

Building upon ASEAN's mounting China anxieties, President Obama's “rebalancing strategy” seems quite well-conceived. Washington has never been more relied upon to anchor the regional security order. Enhanced ties between the US and ASEAN would secure the Obama Administration's brilliant legacy in foreign policy. In contrast, Beijing has become cornered due to its lack of preparation for such a development. Moreover, there is no doubt that China risks losing ASEAN in the contestation of the South China Sea disputes.

Nevertheless, “keeping China cornered” would not automatically produce stability and cooperation. China has become “the elephant in the room” for all ASEAN member states. How to productively and intelligently come up with a policy package to curb contentious security concerns in the Asia-Pacific while managing lingering disputes will be a real test of the wisdom and vision of leaders all over region.

At Sunnylands, President Obama will surely tout the economic and trading ties between the US and ASEAN. In recent years, American investment in ASEAN has exceeded investment in China, Japan and Korea combined. Four member states of ASEAN are now members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The economic heft of the United States in ASEAN is expected to grow further still. China will clearly benefit from a prosperous ASEAN and closer trading ties between the US and ASEAN as well. Similarly, Beijing’s efforts to update infrastructure in ASEAN states will in return strengthen economic bonds between the US and ASEAN countries. Beijing should anticipate and welcome positive results on economic issues at the Sunnylands summit.

Beijing’s grave concern will be the South China Sea statement from Sunnylands. Last week, the White House acidly warned China that maritime territorial disputes must not involve “bullying.” President Obama has also used the word “bully” to describe Chinese behavior in the South China Sea at other times. This sparks Beijing’s irritation, and against the nationalistic backdrop of Chinese domestic politics, perhaps emboldens Chinese hardliners to reject conciliatory positions. If President Obama is going to project China as a “bully” in the South China Sea disputes at Sunnylands, this tactic will clearly not help one bit in diminishing current tensions.

What can we expect of the Sunnylands statement on the South China Sea? Will it keep China under fire? Or will it seek a way to accommodate contending concerns while unequivocally setting down a roadmap to a settlement? We’ll have to wait and see. In any case, turning the US-ASEAN Sunnylands summit into anti-China chorus would do little to assuage the US or ASEAN’s “China anxieties.”

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