



# China's Global Influence: Perspectives and Recommendations



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# Synthesis

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1 The views and recommendations expressed in this chapter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, US Department of Defense, or US Government.

As noted in the introduction, the workshop and ensuing volume were designed to leverage the knowledge and expertise of the Regional Center (RC) faculty to bring their unique perspective to bear on security challenges in a global context. As attendees at the workshop learned, the impacts of security challenges often manifest themselves differently in regional and sub-regional political, economic, and social contexts. Consequently, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) efforts to influence international, regional, and state-level actors engender a variety of reactions and responses.

If the preceding chapters have illustrated anything, it is the importance of context in evaluating new data. For that reason, Part I laid out the nature of strategic competition and how competition is perceived in the US and within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Workshop participants were in general agreement that a state of competition does exist between the US and PRC, but that this does not preclude cooperation in narrow areas where interests overlap. Understanding the vision of the international system embraced by the General Secretary of the CCP, Xi Jinping, aided participants and authors to better understand the lens through which PRC policymakers view their regions and the tools of interstate influence. This helped frame the discussion and enabled authors to better analyze attempts by the PRC to exert influence.

In Part II, authors have called attention to the various ways the PRC is attempting to expand its influence in their regions and demonstrated both the effects it is having, as well as how it is perceived among the inhabitants within those regions. In doing so, they have developed policy recommendations tailored to the regions they study. Part III provided a different perspective, that of specific tools of influence wielded by the PRC. As discussed during the workshop, these tools are also influenced by the regional context, and wielded by the PRC differently to meet their varied objectives in different regions. Thus, though these two sections are distinct, there is a great deal of overlap, which served to cross-pollinate ideas during the workshop, and aided the synthesis that follows.

In shaping this concluding chapter as a synthesis of the various regional and tool-centered analysis, the goal is to quickly draw out the overall themes identified by the authors and workshop participants, then distill all of their specific policy recommendations into a few overarching recommendations. It is intended to be a quick summation of the key results of the project; however, it should not be seen as a substitute for the insightful analysis and specific recommendations developed in the pre-

ceding chapters. Both the chapters and this analysis provide important, but subtly different insights to assist the United States (US), its partners, and its allies in developing quality policy options for navigating a world the PRC is actively attempting to change.

## **KEY THEMES AND OBSERVATIONS**

A combination of insights from the workshop and discussions with the authors as they developed their contributions have led to the identification of several broad themes that can be used to better understand the PRC's approach to global influence. This list is not exhaustive, and their order may be rearranged depending on the geographic context of the author making a list. However, the following topics were generally informed, or were informed by, multiple segments of the workshop and later incorporated into the text of multiple chapters:

**The PRC engages regions differently, with different objectives and approaches.** This intuitive observation was met with an equally non-intuitive observation that these differences were not widely understood by those who focus on specific aspects of PRC governance, security policy, or foreign policy. Studying and understanding these differences could provide opportunities for the US and other countries to engage with the PRC more effectively in each region.

**The PRC was perceived to take a more competitive stance in areas geographically proximate, and was potentially more cooperative in relatively distant regions.** Beijing was perceived as less likely to cooperate in regions closer to its border, especially relating to more traditional "core issues" such as territorial and resource claims in the South China Sea. However, regionally-oriented participants opined that the PRC is more likely to cooperate in more distant areas, such as Africa. Issues in relatively far-flung regions were potentially less sensitive, and thus perhaps more likely to foster future cooperation. One potential exception to this is the battle over narratives. The PRC is likely to continue to vigilantly defend its preferred narrative of peaceful rise, US decline, and the importance of making way for non-western normative concepts.

**Countries and regions have complex relationships with the PRC.** Countries that struggle with the PRC over territorial disputes still have robust economic relations that benefit both countries. Some countries that accept loans as part of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR; 一带一路) initiative do so because it is difficult to attract sorely needed investment from other sources. As most security practitioners understand the complexity inherent in these relationships, this observation is mentioned

solely to highlight the narrative challenge the US encounters when it tries to discuss competing with the PRC, when most countries are concerned this competition will affect their economies, and potentially their stability.

**Messaging is critical to the success of US efforts to engage with the PRC.** Partners and allies are important to the success of US national security interests. Likewise, there is significant overlap in the interests of partners, allies, and the US. Many of these partners and allies have complex relationships with the PRC, and these entities may not be as willing to cooperate with the US if they do not understand—or receive contradictory messaging about—US objectives and US relations with the PRC. This theme surfaced repeatedly throughout the workshop as participants discussed the impacts of unclear US messaging, often calling attention to inconsistencies of the message, as well as partner confusion regarding the nature and purpose of US policies.

**Some of the PRC activities most damaging to US national security interests are those that ignore international law, are inconsistent with the international order, or attempt to divide and marginalize regional organizations.** The US is closely identified by many as the face of international law. Therefore, PRC actions that are, or are perceived to be, contrary to the current order undermine US credibility if left unaddressed.

## GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshop focused on PRC activities within the context of strategic competition, with the objective of using this information to formulate specific policy recommendations for use by the US and other countries as they engage the PRC. As they pertain to the US, it is important to note these recommendations were developed within the context of an overall strategy that pursues US national interests first, then engages with the PRC depending on the alignment of interests and willingness of the PRC. These recommendations should not be perceived as a second-handed formulation that simply responds to PRC activities; rather they should be formulated to promote US interests.

While each of the authors in parts II and III made policy recommendations specific to the region or tool they were discussing, the editors thought it important to collect the broadest recommendations from the chapters and workshop. Taken together with the specific recommendations, the book as a whole offers both strategic and tactical level options to policy-makers attempting to protect US interests while



navigating through a changing international environment. While the impetus for these recommendations was PRC activities, only a minority of the recommendations addressed the PRC specifically, and all are broadly applicable to the pursuit of a liberal international order.

**The US should cooperate with partners in areas of shared interest.** The US and like-minded partners should engage and collaborate on ways to strengthen the current international order and international law to enhance security and enable shared prosperity. It is by recognizing where our interests converge that cooperation and mutually beneficial exchange is possible. Some specific areas of collaboration include technical standards for emerging technology and scientific research, which will reduce barriers to entry and promote global commerce, and wide-ranging trade liberalization that sets companies and individuals free to pursue their own prosperity.

**The US should continue to engage with partners and allies.** While this recommendation is obvious to the point it may be perceived as unnecessary, it is critical to highlight the importance of consistent US engagement in the regions at all levels, with representation across Departments, and including congressional and national leadership. The US needs to show it values its relationships, and sustained engagement achieves this aim.

**The US needs to encourage and promote good governance.** In many cases insufficient institutions, procedures, and knowledge contribute to national decision-making that place countries at risk of being unduly influenced by other nations. The US and other countries can provide the expertise to help countries strengthen their institutions so their sovereignty is not threatened, and they remain stakeholders in a free and open international system.

**The US should reform its development objectives.** Many countries are at risk to debt-trap diplomacy due to weak institutions, constrained financing opportunities, and governance structures that are opaque and unaccountable. The US has a multitude of ways to enhance development: through multilateral efforts promoting transparency, by helping set the conditions for private sector investment, or through cooperation with the PRC when appropriate. Though counterintuitive, cooperation with the PRC could help increase transparency and fiduciary oversight to their activities, while leveraging their capital.

**The US needs to improve its ability to formulate a clear, consistent message regarding US policy.** Engagement with partners and allies toward common objectives requires significant time, effort,

and trust. Effective messaging is complementary to these engagements, and thus to pursuing US national security interests. Unclear or inconsistent messaging can limit the effectiveness of policy decisions and actions it is meant to support. The US can improve the integration of its whole-of-government messaging procedures, as well as the training of its diplomats and officials engaging audiences worldwide, to ensure consistent and coherent messaging.

**The US, other countries, and international organizations need to clearly and consistently highlight the PRC when it conducts activities that are duplicitous or contrary to international norms, laws, or standards.** When entities fail to call attention to this behavior, they have effectively allowed a new, lower standard for acceptable behavior.

### A SIMPLE SOLUTION

In conclusion, the PRC is expanding its global influence in pursuit of its national interests. This pursuit is challenging existing global norms and international laws, while bringing more complexity to every country's relationship with the PRC, and with each other. However, most of the specific recommendations in the preceding chapters, as well as discussions at the workshop suggest the most important policy options the US and like-minded partners can pursue will build positive relationships and promote shared values. In short, they are options that do not so much counter the PRC, as they do promote the values and benefits of the liberal world order and its association with the US. Therefore, despite increasing complexity caused by the PRC's attempts to influence the global order, at the strategic-level, the task remains deceptively simple:

1. identify interests and build a strategy to achieve them,
2. find friends and partners who share those interests and are willing to cooperate,
3. find ways to accomplish those interests that are efficient, effective, and do not undermine one's values, and
4. be consistent and clear in advertising what you do and why you do it, while highlighting duplicitous words and deeds of those who threaten your interests.

In fact, the US has a natural advantage in terms of global influence. Given the choice, most people would rather live in, and be like the US than the PRC. The key task of our leaders is to ensure they continue to find ways to promote and protect our interests without becoming the PRC. Technical threats and tools cannot be ignored, but the tactical

solutions chosen must not sacrifice our interests or tarnish the values that have made the US a beacon in the night for so many. Successfully developing and implementing these solutions will protect and maintain a nation that projects a genuine influence that is global.

## **FUTURE WORK**

The process of preparing for and compiling this book has reinforced the conviction that the RCs have a valuable role to play beyond their enormous contribution in executive education and development of security practitioner networks. The world-class international and multi-disciplinary faculty these Centers have curated in support of their educational programs are also resources to the broader US government. Their years of study and research are combined with continual first-hand interaction with international security practitioners who live with real world security challenges on a daily basis. RC programing brings these experiences into the seminar room and exposes them to critical analysis by academics and fellow practitioners. In the process, not only do practitioners become more adept at handling complex challenges, but the faculty have their ideas tested and exposed to the crucibles of debate and real-world challenges.

The result of this process is a worldwide cadre of academics who are constantly testing their ideas against practical problems and thereby refining their understanding of the security environments our military and diplomatic corps operate in, and that our policymakers attempt to influence in accordance with US interests. Consequently, they are a resource that should be routinely tapped for their insight into the most challenging security issues of the day. While this is certainly done during visits to the Centers and executive courses, workshops such as the one that nurtured this book should continue to be organized, and RCs should seek opportunities to send their academics to other forums where they can inform the policymaking process in the US and partner-countries alike.

Regarding the challenge posed by the PRC, this workshop was a useful first step in building understanding, but by no means the culmination of what is possible. Other related topics that could benefit from similar gatherings include, but are not limited to: formation of international norms, regional security architectures, exploring megatrends, and the future of the internet. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but a start to exploring how the varied regional contexts represented by the combined RC faculty can be leveraged to better understand and exploit



the emerging strategic relationship between the US and the PRC.

In the final analysis, there is a difference in the way the US and the PRC are approaching the world. Both face challenges implementing their strategies due, in part, to a failure to fully understand the geographical and cultural context of other actors. In the RCs, the Department of Defense has a ready-made resource to increase understanding in this vital field, both in relation to the PRC and more broadly as the US seeks to promote its interests as it works with partners and allies to build a free, open, and prosperous world.