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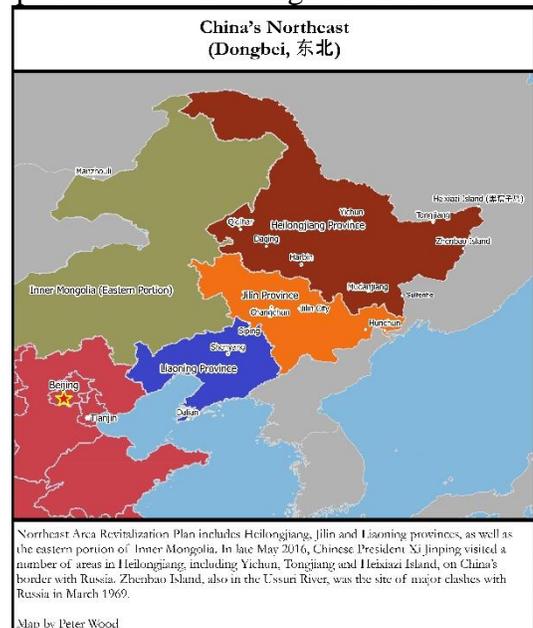
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By Andrea Ghiselli

In a Fortnight: Xi Visits China's Northeast, Emphasizes Revitalization, Environment and Food Security

Chinese President and Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping has visited China's northeasternmost province of Heilongjiang. The visit, on May 23–25, included a number of towns along the border with Russia (see map). Xi's inspection visits are not just a prime photo opportunity. This is his third visit since 2013, and he has now traveled to all three of the provinces constituting *Dongbei*, China's northeast. The visit highlighted a number of important issues, including food security, environmental protection and economic revitalization of this strategically important though declining region (*Xinhua*, May 25). China's most vibrant economic centers are in the East and South, where the primary ports and factories that connect China to international markets are concentrated. But before China's "Reform and Opening" in

the late 1970s, China's economic might was concentrated in *Dongbei*. The region is home to a number of China's core industries. China's largest oil field, Daqing (大庆油田), in Heilongjiang, is responsible for 19 percent of China's total oil production (*EIA*, April 11). While the northeastern cities of Harbin and Shenyang are both home to major defense companies that respectively produce many of China's military helicopters and advanced fighter aircraft.



The plan to improve the economy in *Dongbei*, “Revitalize The Old Northeast Industrial Bases,” (振兴东北老工业基地) is a national priority. The plan has been pushed by China’s central leadership since 2003, but has taken on more urgency as the core industrial and mining zones in *Dongbei* were hit, first by the global economic slowdown, and then by China’s own shrinking demand for steel (Xinhua, April 26).

Possible solutions for the slumping economic fortunes of the large extractive industries and steel producers have included expansion of economic ties with Russia, and building infrastructure to better deliver products from the area to markets even further away. Development of the Changchun, Jilin and Tumen River areas (shortened to “Changjitu area”) have been explicitly linked to China’s broader “One Belt, One Road” project and the China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor (Heilongjiang Daily, May 25; China Brief, May 15, 2015). Given the areas’ overland connections with Russia, expanding such links could better connect industries and food producers in *Dongbei* to Russian, Central Asian and even European markets. Russia in particular is eager to cooperate with China to bring Russian and Chinese grain to international markets. Russia’s Minister for Development of the Far East, Alexander Galushka, has previously noted that Russia-China agricultural cooperation was a priority and that the two countries are working to create a multi-billion-dollar development fund to sell agricultural products throughout East Asia (Global Times, November 17, 2015).

However, there are widespread fears among Russian analysts and the general public that China is attempting to “annex” parts of Russia’s Far East, through buying up farmland, and the relocation of Chinese industries across the border to Russia (EDM, June 25, 2015). From Russia’s perspective, the threat of China’s economic and demographic weight is intimidating—the three provinces that make up *Dongbei* (not including eastern Inner Mongolia) have a population of over 110 million. But China’s factories have locally caused widespread environmental problems, prompting fears in Russia that, if transferred across the border, would result in China “offshoring” its pollution (EDM, April 28).

Perhaps to help calm Russia’s fears, during another stop on Heixiazi Island, in the middle of the Ussuri River, which forms part of the two countries’ boundary, Xi emphasized that he did not want Heixiazi to become an economic development zone (despite its proximity to Khabarovsk, Russia’s second largest city in Siberia) and that the local authorities should “preserve the environment and leave a clean sheet of paper” (Xinhua, May 25). He also met with members of the local border guard unit, encouraging them to carry out the Party’s new goals for the military and to adapt to the new requirements and responsibilities—likely referring to China’s ongoing military reorganization (Heilongjiang Daily, May 27). The border guards are responsible for a vast area, and one that in 1969 saw massive clashes between China and the Soviet Union.

The majority of Xi’s visit focused on environmental and agricultural issues. Xi met with the staff of the Yichun forest area to learn about measures to decrease commercial timber clearing (CCTV, May 24). During another stop in Heilongjiang at a rice farm in Fuyuan city, a major grain production area, Xi noted that China should shift toward a cooperative farm system (农业合作社) to ensure sufficient domestic food production. The Chinese leader has used similar inspections to highlight a number of issues that do not regularly make headlines, yet which are important for the country’s development. In July of 2015 he emphasized food security during his visit to Jilin, also a core point of visits to Henan in March of this year (People’s Daily, May 26; China Brief, March 8).

A professor at China’s People’s Agricultural University, Deng Fengtian, writing in the CCP’s journal *Seeking Truth*, noted that as one of China’s “breadbaskets,” *Donbei* is integral to Chinese food security (Qiushi Online, May 27). Regarding Xi’s visit, professor Deng noted that the dominant agricultural system, the household-responsibility system (家庭联产承包责任制), which has made important contributions to social equality and improved the lives of many people, is increasingly mired in corruption or inefficiency due to these farms’ small size. As a result of China’s high population density and difficult geography, such farms are “too small and too dis-

persed.” Other factors, including an aging population, are having an effect as the average age of farmers is 57. Few young people want to stay on the farms.

China’s “rustbelt” is going through a major economic transition. *Dongbei* will remain an important strategic and economic corridor connecting it with Russian markets, a source of natural resources and a breadbasket to feed its population. Though China’s East and South have come to dominate the economy, the Northeast, China’s legacy industrial zone, could form an important part of its economic future. But unless this area remains a target for investment, as proposed by Xi, and if environmental considerations are not taken into account, the area will continue to decline.

Team Tsai Ing-wen: a Who’s Who of the New Cabinet

By Lauren Dickey

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen took office on May 20 with no shortage of challenges ahead. Her inaugural speech focused on five specific areas: transforming economic structures; strengthening the social safety net; addressing social fairness and justice; promoting regional peace, stability and cross-strait relations; and contributing toward diplomatic and global issues. The domestic focus shows that Tsai recognizes that broad political unity will be key to tackling her agenda ([Central News Agency](#), May 20). Nowhere is unity more important than in Tsai’s Executive Yuan Council (or cabinet, 內閣), the chief policymaking organ of the Taiwanese government comprised of nearly forty ministers and led by Premier Lin Chuan (林全) ([Apple Daily](#), April 28).

Tsai’s cabinet selections were greeted with a lukewarm response from many Taiwanese, yet the eclectic groups represents an intentional effort to forge political unity ([TVBS Poll Center](#), May 12). President Tsai’s inner circle is overwhelmingly male—there are only four women—and older than Ma Ying-jeou’s cabinet, with a median age of 60.5 years. Over

half of the new appointees have completed Ph.Ds. or a degree overseas. Tsai and Premier Lin deserve credit for pulling candidates into government from across both the professional and political spectrums. Though the cabinet is weighted heavily toward academics (19 former professors), 15 people have government experience and 6 bring private industry experience. Also noteworthy is that the cabinet is predominantly independent in its political leanings (62.2 percent), with those linked to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Kuomintang comprising 29.7 and 8.1 percent, respectively ([Storm Media](#), May 16).

Building on these data points, an examination of top cabinet members’ backgrounds provides a useful rubric for understanding President Tsai’s policies going forward.

Promoting and Protecting Taiwanese Freedom

A senior cabinet member that should be familiar to any Taiwan-watcher is Chao-hsieh “Joseph” Wu (吳釗燮), the new secretary-general of Taiwan’s National Security Council (NSC). With a strong media footprint, a track record of academic publications, and, more recently, appearances on the think tank circuit in Washington, Wu now leads the highest advisory body in the Taiwanese government ([CSIS](#), January 19).

Born in Changhua just before the end of the civil war, Wu comes from a “red and green” family ([Phoenix](#), April 15). His grandfather opposed the Japanese occupation in favor of the communist motherland; one of his uncles was known for close ties to the independence faction (獨派); another uncle was a well-known unification advocate ([Taipei Times](#), October 12, 2008). Exposed to the full political spectrum, Wu’s interest in politics led him to study political science at National Chengchi University, the University of Missouri at St. Louis, and eventually Ohio State University, where he earned a Ph.D. in 1989. His academic publications have focused on Taiwan’s democratization, the comparative experience of divided nations, and the macro-level implications of China’s rise.

Wu has taken advantage of the revolving door between academia and policy. He began his teaching career at National Chengchi University's Institute of International Relations, a series of posts he left in the early 2000s to serve as deputy secretary-general to then-president Chen Shui-bian. He succeeded Tsai in service as chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council (2004–2007), and replaced current Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lee as head of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in Washington, DC from mid-2007 to July 2008 (he was the only non-Kuomintang-affiliated representative of Taiwan to Washington). Beginning in 2014, Wu began work as the DPP secretary-general while continuing duties as representative to the U.S. and executive director for the DPP's policy platforms.

What Wu brings to the table—aside from a strong foundation in both academia and political affairs (能文能武)—is an extensive track record of discussing and explaining DPP policy ([Phoenix](#), April 15). In his role as MAC chairman for instance, he spoke about Beijing's Anti-Secession Law in terms of Taiwan's policy objectives, stating that misunderstanding should be minimized and mutual trust built via “normal interactions” ([Mainland Affairs Council](#), January 7, 2005). Nearly a decade later, his ideas are only minimally repackaged: “we will do our utmost to find a mutually acceptable mode of interaction...to safeguard peace and stability between the two sides” ([CSIS](#), January 19). Regarding other issues, Wu has spoken about the Taiwan Relations Act as a “blueprint” for a strong Taiwan-U.S. partnership, and one that is more relevant nearly forty years later than ever before ([The Diplomat](#), May 14, 2014). In his capacity at the NSC, Wu must also manage issues beyond the cross-strait and Taiwan-U.S. relationships—including governance, the economy, and indigenous defense development—in overseeing both internal and external security and well-being of the Taiwanese people ([Formosa Foundation](#), September 2006; [ThinkTech Hawaii](#) interview, October 26, 2015; [Taipei Times](#), October 7, 2015).

Fulfilling Taiwan's Global Duties

Leading Tsai's foreign policy team is Ta-wei “David” Lee (李大維). Mr. Lee has been on the diplo-

matic circuit since the 1990s, and as with other cabinet appointees, has had a career that blended academia and policy work. Born in Qingdao in 1949, Lee fled to Taiwan with his parents and grandparents after the Communist victory ([United Daily News](#), April 15). He completed his BA at National Taiwan University in international relations before enrolling at the University of Virginia to complete Master's and Doctoral degrees. His research on Congress and its foreign policy toward Taiwan enabled Lee to access high-level U.S. government officials otherwise reluctant to see Taiwanese diplomats given the sensitive nature of the cross-strait relationship.

Lee returned to Taiwan to serve as principal assistant to Lien Chan, then-minister of foreign affairs, before transitioning into an adjunct professorship at National Taiwan Normal University and using the time to publish a book on the legislative processes underpinning the Taiwan Relations Act. From NTNU, Lee was drawn back into government, this time as deputy director-general for the Department of International Information Service in the Government Information Office. He then moved to Boston to serve as director-general of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO).

After a final tour at the Government Information Office in the late 1990s as director-general, Lee officially entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) as a deputy minister in 1998. With a few years in Taipei under his belt, he was posted to Belgium, Washington, Ottawa, and Australia. His time in Washington coincided with the turbulent second term of former President Chen Shui-bian. Despite the ups and downs U.S. policymakers encountered throughout Chen's tenure, for Lee, his time in Washington helped him develop “unparalleled knowledge of the United States and extensive connections in Washington” ([Lowy Interpreter](#), April 20).

Lee enters his ministerial role with bipartisan support, due in part to his own affiliation with the now-opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT). President Tsai herself has justified Lee's appointment in terms of *shan yong guang yong* (善用廣用)—something that is good, even if from the opposition party, should be put to broad use ([Liberty Times](#), March 26). Lee has over eight years of experience working with the

DPP; as Secretary-General Wu put it, Lee is highly regarded across the Taiwanese political spectrum for his “rich qualifications” ([Liberty Times](#), March 26; [United Daily News](#), March 27).

Our knowledge of what ideas Lee brings into his new role is somewhat limited, largely due to the low media profile Lee has maintained throughout his career. For Lee, diplomacy is built upon national interests rather than party affiliations ([Storm Media](#), March 26). It remains to be seen how Lee will tackle tough issues at the top of the agenda, such as the invitation to attend the inauguration of the expanded Panama Canal on June 26, the extradition of Taiwanese nationals to the mainland (as in recent cases of Kenya and Malaysia), spats in the South and East China Seas, and any future diplomatic fallout from countries switching recognition to the PRC ([Apple Daily](#), May 1; [China Post](#), March 25).

Defending Taiwan

Filling the shoes of the Minister of National Defense (MND) is retired Republic of China Air Force general Shih-kuan “Kent” Feng (馮世寬). General Feng rounds out the cabinet as its oldest member and the only appointee with a military background ([Liberty Times](#), May 1). He was born in Jiangsu province at the end of the Chinese civil war, moving with family to Taiwan and growing up in one of the military dependents’ villages (眷村) established for Nationalist soldiers after the retreat of 1949 ([China Times](#), April 15).

Feng graduated from the Chung-Cheng Institute of Technology in the mid-1970s with a degree in aeronautical engineering. He then joined the Taiwanese Air Force and was trained as an F-5 fighter pilot. He later served as military attaché to both the United Arab Emirates and the United States, eventually rising to vice-chief of the general staff of the MND before retiring in 2006.

Upon his retirement from the air force, he took up a position as chairman and CEO of the Aerospace Industrial Development Corp (AIDC 漢翔航空工業股份有限公司), Taiwan’s then-state-backed aerospace manufacturer known for building the island’s first homegrown fighter jets and supporting the F-16 fleet.

In a 2008 interview with *Defense News*, and nearly six years before AIDC would successfully privatize, Feng outlined three goals for AIDC: meeting national defense needs, expanding the scale of Taiwan’s aerospace industry, and reinforcing strategic business alliances ([Defense News](#), August 18, 2008).

Feng’s time at AIDC important for understanding how he fits into the Tsai administration. One of Tsai’s biggest policy pushes has been for the growth of an indigenous defense industry, a point made even clearer through her visits to both AIDC and weapon systems developer Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology (國家中山科學研究院) ([FTV](#), March 28; [China Brief](#), April 21; [Taipei Times](#), March 16). Arguably no one that understands indigenous R&D and procurement processes better than Feng. Critics, however, suggest that Feng is too close to the defense industry due to questions about a Chen-era arms firm, Taiwan Goal (鎗震), which came under suspicion for corruption. While Taiwan Goal was ultimately dissolved—and those accused of scandals all proven innocent—the opposition is concerned that Feng’s new government role may mean the DPP will try to resurrect similar tactics ([China Review News](#), February 26, 2008; [China Post](#), April 19).

Transforming the Feeble Economy

Taiwan’s new minister of economic affairs, Chinkung Lee or C.K. Lee (李世光) brings an applied sciences background in both policy and academia. Born in Taipei in 1959, Lee completed a Bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering at National Taiwan University before completing a Ph.D. at Cornell University. His time at Cornell is touted broadly across Taiwan, as he is frequently heralded as the inventor of modal sensors and actuators, not to mention the recipient of dozens of other awards for his research and engineering designs ([Journal of Applied Mechanics](#), June 1990; [Epoch Times](#), April 15).

Throughout his career in both the private and public sectors, Lee has continued his research on photoelectronic and automation technologies. He worked for over a decade at IBM as a researcher before moving back to Taiwan for various levels of professorships at National Taiwan University. Beginning in the

early 2000s, Lee served as a consultant, an advisor to the Ministry of Education and chief executive for the Institution for Information Industry (財團法人諮詢工業策進會) after completing short stints at both the Industrial Technology Research Institute (工業技術研究院) and the then-National Science Council (now the Ministry of Science and Technology 中華民國科技部). Lee likely learned to tailor R&D agendas to the policy objectives of his government clients during his time in close proximity to policymakers—a capacity well-suited to his new ministerial post.

Lee's engineering background may not be that of a traditional economic adviser, yet his expertise in and recognition for key technological innovations is a further indication of Tsai's determination to hitch Taiwan's economic future to a green, indigenous, and tech-savvy economy. Arguably the largest task for Lee, and one that underpins his ability to keep promises of relatively stable energy prices to the Taiwanese public, is the mandate of developing green, sustainable energy (China Times, May 6). The Tsai administration intends to progress toward a nuclear-energy-free island by 2025, a goal that requires an overhaul to the island's existing energy dependencies (Epoch Times, April 15). Fortunately, Lee also has a background in energy research that, paired with his undergraduate work in civil engineering, is guaranteed to come in handy. In 2014, he was named CEO of National Energy Program Phase-II (第二期能源國家型科技計畫), to oversee research and implementation of steps to support collaboration on "green energy" and lead opportunities to strengthen Taiwan's energy sector.

Insofar as energy policy is concerned, the Tsai administration is clearly in good hands. But Lee's ability and comfort handling macro-level economic policy formulation and implementation is unknown. He will be aided by a vice minister, Shen Jong-chin (沈榮津), a Ma Ying-jeou era appointee that the DPP administration has opted to keep in place. Shen is best known for leading a delegation to Vietnam in mid-May 2014 to assist Taiwanese businesspeople hit by unrest and protests linked to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Taipei Times, May 22, 2014). Like Lee, he has a background in industry, though Shen's career has been spent climbing the

ranks of MOEA (Ministry of Economic Affairs, May 20).

Overseeing "Proper Management" of Cross-Strait Relations

In her inaugural address, Tsai pledged to work with China to maintain mutually beneficial, stable relations but stopped short of endorsing the 1992 Consensus (Central News Agency, May 20). While acknowledging the reality of a historical meeting between the two sides of the Strait in 1992, she offered an alternative basis for continuing cross-Strait discussions. The new Taiwanese government will "conduct cross-Strait affairs in accordance with the Republic of China Constitution, the Act Governing Relations Between the People of Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation." Leading these endeavors is Mainland Affairs Council minister Hsiao-yueh "Katharine" Chang (張小月).

Chang is one of only four women in Tsai's cabinet, and the second woman aside from Tsai herself to ever lead the Mainland Affairs Council. A career diplomat, Chang completed a Bachelor's in Diplomacy at National Chengchi University and a Master's in International Relations at Long Island University. Her first post in the diplomatic service was within the Department of International Organizations in the late 1970s; she spent a decade thereafter as secretary of TECO in New York (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 20). She rotated through several other posts pertaining to North American affairs, serving as deputy director-general of MOFA's Department of North American Affairs and director-general of the TECO office in Seattle. Chang returned to Taiwan for a few years as director-general and spokesperson of MOFA's Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, and in between Taipei Representative Office (TRO) posts to the Netherlands (2003–2006) and the United Kingdom (2007–2011) served as vice minister of foreign affairs. She starts her post as MAC minister having just completed four years as TECO representative in Australia.

Chang's resume is testament to her diverse experience in diplomatic affairs, but at least on paper, she has never been directly involved in the nuances of cross-Strait relations. She has previously commented

on the “precious” nature of Taiwan’s democracy and the impact it has upon the mainland; and in a 2013 blog comment, noted the “clear, firm, and fruitful” policy Taiwan has toward both the mainland and the United States ([United Daily News](#), April 15; [East Asia Forum](#), April 4, 2013). Prior to Tsai’s inauguration, she held a series of “deep” conversations with out-going MAC minister Andrew Hsia, even listening in on the sidelines of his final briefings ([United Daily News](#), May 6; [United Daily News](#), May 11). But in terms of substantive comments that Chang has made about the cross-Strait relationship, little can be gleaned from the press. More likely is that Tsai herself will direct cross-Strait policy for the next four years, abating concerns about Chang by closely managing her and her deputies, Cheng-yi Lin (林正義) and Chiu-cheng Chiu (邱垂正) ([United Daily News](#), April 15).

Conclusion

Nearly a month before taking office, Tsai warned her cabinet about the problems ahead, urging both humility and discretion from the new batch of ministers ([Taipei Times](#), May 1). She has consistently advocated putting the people of Taiwan first; now it is up to each of the ministers to fulfill their political mandate in support of the vision Tsai and the DPP have set out for the island. The new government will have no honeymoon period, as daunting challenges lie ahead. Tsai’s inaugural speech has prioritized domestic reforms and economic development, but certainly not to the expense of Taiwan’s outward-looking and cross-Strait agendas. Only time will tell if Tsai can shepherd her cabinet to her advantage and in service of her expansive agenda, or whether zero-sum thinking will lay claim to her presidency.

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China Dictates Terms for Sino-Japanese Relations During First Japanese Foreign Minister Visit in Four Years

By Michael S. Chase and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga

Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio’s official visit to Beijing from April 29 to May 1, the first trip to China by a Japanese Foreign Minister since November 2011, represented renewed effort to mend the frayed relationship between Asia’s two most powerful countries ([South China Morning Post](#), April 30). [1] The visit came as the two sides continue to spar over the Senkaku Islands—which Japan administers but China claims and refers to as the Diaoyu Islands—and Tokyo becomes increasingly concerned about the implications of China’s growing military power and more assertive foreign policy. These direct bilateral tensions are fueling an intense regional competition for friends and influence, as China’s One Belt One Road initiative seeks to consolidate inroads into Asia and Africa while excluding Japan, and Japan provides military aid to China’s rival claimants in the South China Sea.

Chinese commentary on the trip, including unofficial and official statements, highlighted the sensitivity and difficulty of the task, underscoring how frosty the China-Japan relationship has become in recent years. Chinese media reports on Foreign Minister Kishida’s trip suggest Beijing expects Tokyo to make the first significant moves toward reconciliation, and even accommodation. Appearing firm on Japan is certainly important domestically for Chinese leaders, though disappointing economic growth for both countries likely acts as a brake on these nationalistic strains. On the whole, Beijing appears to recognize that a more stable relationship with Japan is in its interests, and Foreign Minister Kishida’s visit may well help to set the stage for a Xi-Abe meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 meeting in Hangzhou later this year.

Rolling out the Red Carpet?

Ahead of Foreign Minister Kishida's visit, Chinese state-run press set a strident tone demanding Japan's accommodation. One *Global Times* article cited several Chinese scholars who said Japan should avoid any further involvement in South China Sea issues, warning that any perceived meddling there would only hamper attempts to steady the bilateral relationship (*Global Times*, April 29). "Japan should be aware that interfering in disputes in the South China Sea undermines Sino-Japanese relations, which also belies its words on improving ties with China," said Lu Yaodong, director of the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). A Xinhua article clearly laid down the government's position that Japan was responsible for fixing the relationship: Foreign Minister Kishida was expected "through his sincerity rather than empty talk [to] take concrete actions to improve ties between the two closest neighbors," as "Japan is doing little to help mend frayed bilateral ties" and should "meet China halfway" (*Xinhua*, April 29).

Official statements from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) were more diplomatically worded, but almost equally circumspect. On April 27, MFA spokesperson Hua Chunying implied that Japan holds responsibility to repair the relationship: "We hope that the Japanese side would work with China toward the same goal [...] properly deal with relevant issues and make concrete efforts for the sustained improvement and growth of relations with China" (*MFA*, April 27).

In a speech Tokyo prior to leaving Japan, Foreign Minister Kishida acknowledged the visit might be challenging but signaled an openness to dialogue (*Kyodo News*, April 25). He feared that the relationship "could be a house built on sand" and said Japan and other countries are "concerned about China's unilateral actions to alter the status quo in the East and South China seas, under the country's goal of becoming a maritime power," as well as "about China's rapid and opaque increase in its military expenditures" (*Japan News*, April 25). In response, the *Global Times* focused on China's consternation at these negative comments and highlighted Chinese unease about Japanese security cooperation with the

Philippines (*Global Times*, April 29). Reinforcing this as the prominent issue of the meeting, on April 29, Hua reiterated China's stance on its maritime territorial claims, stating that China's activities are "completely justified and lawful" and that China had lodged a protest with the Japanese side (*MFA*, April 29).

Kishida's visit is part of renewed diplomatic activity that nonetheless has done little to move the needle toward substantially improved ties. After negotiations failed for a visit by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Beijing around the September 2015 military parade, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi visited Tokyo in October and met with Abe and other senior leaders (*Japan Times*, August 24, 2015; *SCMP*, October 13, 2015). In November, China, South Korea and Japan held their first trilateral leadership summit in three years (*Yonhap*, November 1, 2015).

"If You Come With Sincerity, We Welcome You"

Foreign Minister Kishida met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Premier Li Keqiang and State Council Yang Jiechi on April 30. Official statements on the discussions between Foreign Minister Wang and Foreign Minister Kishida generally echoed the unyielding tone taken before his arrival. According to China's MFA, the four hours of discussions between Wang and Kishida at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse began with Wang expressing China's sympathy for the damage suffered during the earthquake that recently struck Japan's Kumamoto Prefecture. But from there the talks took on a more confrontational tone. Wang noted that this was Kishida's first visit to China after assuming the post of Japanese Foreign Minister—over three years ago. Wang then stated that the China-Japan relationship "has suffered various setbacks over these years, falling to a low ebb." The Japanese side, Wang said, "knows clear the reason behind that" (*MFA*, April 30). Specifically, the "root cause for twists and turns in China-Japan relations is Japan's outlook on history and China" (*MFA*, April 30).

After laying the blame for the downturn in China-Japan relations squarely on the Japanese side, Wang

continued, stating that Japan had shown a “willingness to take the first step.” Furthermore, Wang said, “If you come with sincerity, we welcome you.” Yet again reasserting China’s demand for Japan to make the first move, he added, “I am ready to listen to your opinion about how to improve China-Japan relations, and I am also going to see whether the Japanese side will match its words with deeds” ([MFA](#), April 30).

Offering a way forward on Chinese terms, Wang Yi laid out a “four point requirement on improving China-Japan relations” ([MFA](#), April 30). These were:

1. *Uphold past agreements, including adhering to China’s stance on Taiwan.* Japan should “face up to and reflect upon the history and follow the one-China policy to the letter. No ambiguity or vacillation is allowed when it comes to this important political foundation of the bilateral ties.”
2. *Stop criticizing China.* Following the longstanding formulation that “the two countries are each other’s cooperative partners rather than threats,” Japan “should have a more positive and healthy attitude toward the growth of China, and stop spreading or echoing all kinds of ‘China threat’ or ‘China economic recession’ theories.”
3. *Cooperate with China.* “The Japanese side should establish the concept of win-win [economic] cooperation” and “enhance equal-footed and pragmatic cooperation with China in different fields based on mutual benefit.”
4. *Respect China’s interests.* “The two sides should respect each other’s legitimate interests and concerns, and have essential communication and coordination in a timely fashion.” Japan “should cast aside the confrontation mentality and work with China to maintain peace, stability and prosperity of the region.”

These conditions follow a longstanding pattern in Chinese foreign policy, which frames China as the victim or weaker party and thus places the burden of

action on the other party. In recent relations with Japan, this has manifested itself in negotiations over the infamous Xi-Abe handshake at APEC in November 2014 and Abe’s potential attendance at the September 2015 parade, both cases where China held firm on its conditions ([Taipei Times](#), October 23, 2014). This approach is also evident in China’s domestic discourse over the South China Sea territorial disputes, which portray rival claimants as having taken advantage of China’s previously weakened position and Beijing now acting to right this perceived injustice, thus requiring accommodation through China’s preferred resolution mechanism, bilateral discussion (see [China Brief](#), April 3, 2015).

Good Cop, Bad Cop?

Premier Li Keqiang and State Councilor Yang Jiechi struck a more upbeat tone in their meetings, according to Chinese statements. Premier Li said that despite past tensions, “bilateral relations currently have positive momentum for improvement, but the foundation is still fragile, so the two sides should take responsibility to move Sino-Japanese relations in the right direction” ([Chinese Government Online](#), April 30). Li was less critical of Japan than Wang Yi and placed more emphasis on improving the relationship, though he said that he “hopes Japan sticks to the path of peaceful development [and] pursues a positive China policy.” Yang Jiechi reiterated Wang and Li’s emphasis on the tenuous improvement of relations, the framework of the four founding documents and the 2014 four-point consensus, as well as the need for practical steps to boost ties ([China News](#), April 30). [2] Although Li and Yang outranked Wang Yi, the latter’s meeting with Kishida was given prominent media coverage, likely due to his primary role in messaging Chinese conditions for the relationship.

The job of explaining Li and Yang’s comments in starker terms was left to Chinese academics in the state-run press. Yang Xiyu, a former MFA official now at the MFA-affiliated China Institute of International Studies (CISS), said Kishida’s meeting with all three senior Chinese leaders in one day, which went above and beyond diplomatic protocol, “fully demonstrated the determination of high-levels within the Chinese government to improve Sino-Japanese relations.” But reflecting the Chinese government’s

tone for the visit, he added that the ball is in Japan's court and it is up to Tokyo to improve the relationship moving forward ([China News](#), April 30). Yang highlighted two longstanding problems of concern to China—Japan's nationalization of the Senkakus and Abe's policies toward history and revising the constitution—and one new problem—what he called Japan's linking of the East and South China Sea issues “to create an anti-China joint front.” Another expert from CASS said, “Of course, whether or not the two countries can really improve ties depends on whether the Japanese government can correctly face history and treat China's rise with a ‘normal state of mind’ ” ([Global Times](#), May 3).

Japanese Reaction to Chinese Conditions

Chinese and Japanese media reporting revealed what appears to be a wide divergence in perspectives. According to Chinese official statements, Kishida took a positive approach to the meetings, as he “highlighted that China's development means opportunities for Japan” and “[commended] China for its positive role and important contributions in many of international and regional affairs.” After reaffirming past bilateral agreement, Kishida said Japan “will join the Chinese side in building mutual understanding and trust, expanding exchanges and cooperation across the board, properly managing differences and crisis and broadening the positive dimension of the bilateral relations so as to build a Japan-China relationship in the new era” ([MFA](#), April 30).

However, Japanese media reports suggest the tone of Wang Yi's demands for the relationship was “deeply irritating” to Tokyo and noted that Kishida “vehemently denied Japan talking up Chinese threats, saying, ‘it is not a fact. They are simply reported by media’ ” ([Nikkei Asian Review](#), May 2). Although Chinese statements did not identify specific topics of conversation, Japanese media reports said the topics the two sides discussed included North Korea, the South China Sea and Taiwan ([Japan Times](#), May 1).

One positive aspect of the visit that went largely unreported in official Chinese accounts but was picked up in Chinese media was Kishida's reported offer to “ease visa requirements for Chinese visitors to Japan,” according to Japanese media reports ([Asahi](#)

[Shimbun](#), April 30). On May 13, the Japanese government released plans to “relax eligibility conditions for multiple-entry visas, double the validity period for the visas from five years to 10 years, and simplify visa application procedures for certain students” this summer, following from initial discussions in early April by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Seiji Kihara and earlier easing in January 2015 ([China Daily](#), January 14, 2015; [Global Times](#), April 6; [Global Times](#), May 2; [China.org](#), May 7; [Japan Times](#), May 13; [China Daily](#), May 16). [3] Chinese tourism to Japan has been one bright spot in the relationship, with Chinese visitors doubling in 2015 and now accounting for 40 percent of tourism revenues ([China Daily](#), May 16). The Chinese government may have sought to overlook this outreach because it did not neatly fit their critical narrative of Japan.

Japan's ASEAN Outreach Highlights Challenges

Following Foreign Minister Kishida's visit to Beijing, he traveled to Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam ([Japanese MFA](#), May 6). In Bangkok, he gave a speech at Chulalongkorn University on Japan's role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ([Japanese MFA](#), May 2). He touted Japan's support for ASEAN connectivity and integration, human resource development, environmental protection of the Mekong River as well as economic and infrastructure development in the region. Pivoting to the elephant in the room, he said “ASEAN and its partners, including Japan, are confronted with a pile of various challenges, including [...] those related to maritime security.” Kishida reasserted the “Three Principles of the Rule of Law at Sea,” Japan's recent G7 statement in opposition to “attempts to unilaterally change the status quo in the South China Sea” and the need for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. [4]

Chinese media coverage was critical of Kishida's comments calling for ASEAN solidarity against China in the South China Sea, with the *Global Times* writing that his “face [attitude toward China] turned faster than a book page” ([Global Times](#), May 3). Another article claimed Kishida was “Abe's henchman,” that the low point in relations was due to “Japan's maneuvers in China's peripheral affairs such as

the East and South China Seas disputes” and that Japan “[passed] the buck” on improving China-Japan relations to Beijing ([Global Times](#), May 3).

Conclusion

Notably, each of the points Foreign Minister Wang raised as part of China’s “four point requirement” demand action on Tokyo’s part without reciprocity from China. Although what appears to be a hardline bargaining approach may play well at home, there is little reason for China to expect that Tokyo will meet all of the conditions it set forth during Foreign Minister Kishida’s visit or that Tokyo will provide other potential benefits in response to Chinese pressure. Additionally, friction over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and maritime disputes in the South China Sea would seem to make it unlikely that there will be any major improvement in China-Japan relations in the near future. Nonetheless, the visit suggests both sides recognize the costs and potential dangers of continued poor relations and are seeking a more stable status quo. With China hosting the G20 in Hangzhou this September, an opportunity awaits for Xi and Abe to find a way to forge a steadier future for China-Japan relations ([Japan Times](#), May 1).

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Notes

1. Foreign Minister Kishida visited Beijing in November 2014 for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit hosted by Beijing, but this was not an official visit, and both sides considered the April 2016 visit his first official visit as foreign minister ([Japan Times](#), November 8, 2014).
2. The four founding documents are the 1972 joint statement on the normalization of diplomatic relations, the 1978 bilateral peace and

friendship treaty, the 1998 joint statement, and the 2008 joint statement on promoting a strategic and mutually beneficial relationship ([People’s Daily Online](#), January 26, 2013).

3. Japanese citizens do not need a visa for up to a 90 day visit to China.
4. The Three Principles are “(1) states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law, (2) states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims and (3) states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means” ([Japanese MFA](#), May 2).

The Courage to Fight and Win: The PLA Cultivates *Xuexing* for the Wars of the Future

By Ryan D. Martinson

With all its new weapons systems and platforms, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has become a powerful military by any standard that can be quantified. But how will PLA officers and enlisted, however well-armed, perform when faced in combat by a capable adversary? China’s civilian and military leaders are not optimistic.

Since early 2013, the PLA has conducted a political campaign to cultivate *xuexing* (血性)—courage, or valor—in its soldier, sailors, and airmen. Prompted by instructions from Xi Jinping, this campaign has sought to ensure that the services exhibit the aggressiveness needed to defeat a powerful adversary. It was initiated due to a perceived lack of warrior spirit in the military. The PLA seeks to rectify inadequacies by changing service culture through political work and training. Understanding this effort sheds light on how Chinese leaders gauge the balance of power between China and potential foes.

Background

The PLA's focus on fostering *xuexing* can be traced to the 2013 Instructions for Political Work in Military Training, issued just three months after Xi Jinping became Chairman of the Central Military Commission. The official summary of the Instructions stated that in 2013 the Chinese military would “vigorously cultivate a combat spirit of, first, not fearing hardship and, second, not fearing death (一不怕苦, 二不怕死).” Military training would be conducted in “harsh and complex conditions,” to cultivate *xuexing* ([PRC Central Government](#), February 7, 2013). Subsequent Instructions, issued in 2014 and 2015, reiterated the need to develop *xuexing* in the Chinese military ([PRC Ministry of Defense](#), February 10, 2014; [PRC Central Government](#), February 2, 2015).

Authoritative sources directly connect this objective with remarks made by Xi Jinping. On at least one occasion, Xi warned, “In peacetime, we cannot let the military become soft (娇气). A mighty army must be mighty, and soldiers must have *xuexing*.” At the Gutian Work Conference in November 2014, Xi emphasized the important role of political work in instilling the warrior spirit, calling on the military to cultivate a “new generation of revolutionary soldiers,” which, among other things, must possess *xuexing* ([Renminwang](#), December 21, 2015).

Xuexing means having the courage to pursue victory despite prospects of hardship and death. A close reading of Chinese sources discussing the term and the campaign indicates several other noteworthy characteristics: [1]

1. *Xuexing* is cultivated, not inherited. Political work is vital to its cultivation.
2. The campaign is fixated on developing the ability to defeat a “powerful adversary” (强敌) [i.e., a euphemism for the United States, and perhaps Japan]. A military without *xuexing*, has no hope of victory against a powerful adversary.
3. *Xuexing* remains important even in an age of “informatized” warfare, where enemies may never see each other.

4. Common metaphors: *xuexing* means having a “steel backbone” (钢铁脊梁), a military without *xuexing* is like a sword with a dull edge, *xuexing* is a “force multiplier” (倍增器).
5. The precondition for *xuexing* is loyalty to the Party and love of the nation.

The Problem – Peace Has Corroded the PLA's Fighting Spirit

The *xuexing* campaign is animated by fears among Chinese leaders that the PLA lacks the fighting spirit needed to defeat a powerful adversary. Procuring advanced new weapon systems is simply not enough. At a PLA Navy indoctrination session held in August 2015 on the topic of the “new generation of revolutionary soldiers,” one officer pointed out that “the wars of the future will be conflicts between weapon systems. But more importantly, they will be contests of will and courage (*xuexing*). The gap in weapons systems [between China and its future adversary] is not scary. What is scary is the gap in *xuexing*.” [2]

According to the diagnoses of the PLA's political officers, several factors have caused the military's *xuexing* deficit. Most important is the fact that China has not fought a war in several decades. One essay published in *People's Navy* argued that past victories, made possible by Chinese *xuexing*, created the conditions for the peace of today. However, while “peace is what the soldier looks forward to most, it also the greatest enemy.” The problem is not that the PLA's skills have dulled with disuse, but that the military has not preserved the *xuexing* that made possible the triumphs of the past. [3]

As a result, some elements of the PLA have developed “peacetime habits” (和平积习), a derogatory term that pervades the literature of *xuexing*. According to PLAN officer Zhang Weile, writing in early 2015, the military's “softness, apathy, and indolence are on the rise. Meanwhile, thoughts of being prepared to fight tonight (今夜准备打仗) have declined, and notions of serving as peacetime soldiers and being peacetime officers have increased. There are many who hide from tasks and fear difficulties.” [4]

Writing in a February 2016 issue of *Air Force News*, one essayist declared, “In the context of a peaceful

environment that has lasted more than 30 years, the following questions arise: have we succumbed to ‘peacetime habits’ and have we preserved the ‘*xuexing*’ of the past? The answers to these questions do not inspire optimism.” [5] In a similar vein, an anonymous commentary published in a June 2015 issue of *Rocket Force News*, opined, “We have not fought a war in over 30 years. A long period of peace has caused some soldiers to lower their guard (忧患意识), weakened their sense of the need to prepare for war, and reduced their courage (*xuexing*) and boldness.” [6] This “lowering of the guard,” at least according to political officers of the PLA Navy’s East Sea Fleet, can be traced to the mistaken belief—once famously held by Deng Xiaoping—that “peace is the mainstream, and China is unlikely to fight a war.” [7]

In discussions of *xuexing*, this peacetime state of mind is often contrasted with the spirit that once pervaded the Chinese military. One *Air Force News* article published in May 2014 under the byline of Hao Jinmao stated bluntly that “a long period of peace has bred the germs of sloth and corroded the mentality of the soldiery and the body of the military. A comparatively stable life has cooled the *xuexing* that once was boiling.” The author then cited an American sinologist to highlight a now familiar theme: The most important difference between the U.S. and the Chinese militaries is not the technologies and armaments the two sides possess; rather, the biggest difference is that the Chinese military has lost the aggressive fighting spirit that it possessed in the 1950s and 1960s. [8]

The Solution – Change Organizational Culture

Cultivating *xuexing* in Chinese soldiers is considered political work. The PLA strives to rectify the military’s perceived lack of fighting spirit through media indoctrination at the national level and in person at the unit level. One common technique is to study the PLA’s glorious past, when *xuexing* was abundant. This serves both to heighten awareness of the problems of today and instill a sense of pride.

The PLA’s “victory” in the Korean War is often front and center in this narrative. Chinese “volunteers,” poorly armed but filled with fighting spirit (钢少气多), defeated the powerfully-armed but dispirited (钢

多气少) American military, “creating a miracle in military history.” Chinese fearlessness made this possible. [9]

In any conceivable future conflict, the PLA Navy would play the largest role. Since the Korean War was largely an air and land campaign, the service must look elsewhere for proof of past *xuexing*. According to an April 2015 article commemorating the 66th anniversary of the founding of the PLA Navy, the service has taken part in over 1,200 sea battles (海战), in which it has sunk, damaged, or captured more than 400 enemy vessels and shot down or damaged over 200 enemy aircraft. Examples range from victory over Nationalists forces during the Yijiangshan Island Campaign of 1955 and the downing of American combat aircraft flying near Hainan in 1968. None of these victories would have been possible without *xuexing*. In this narrative, naval combat with the Vietnamese in 1974 and 1988 goes unmentioned—for Vietnam was not (and is not) a powerful adversary. Inspiration can also be found in peacetime displays of courage. These include everything from the successful efforts to save submarine number 372, nearly lost due to freak ocean conditions during a 2014 patrol in the South China Sea, to the valor of PLA Navy pilot Wang Wei, who died after his aircraft collided with a US Navy EP-3 conducting “close-in” surveillance near Hainan in April 2001. [10]

After talking about the meaning of *xuexing*, it must then be forged on the training field, where soldiers can inure themselves to suffering and vanquish their fears. To this end, training exercises must attempt to approximate the stresses of actual combat. If a military with *xuexing* is comparable to a blade with a sharp edge, realistic peacetime training serves as a whetstone (磨刀石) to hone that edge. [11]

For the PLA Navy at least, *xuexing* is also cultivated during actual deployments. Unlike other services, it regularly encounters the future adversary: on, above, and beneath the sea in the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Service leaders see these encounters with American and Japanese forces as a chance for the Navy to “use the enemy to train the troops” (拿敌练兵). To be sure, a big purpose of seeking out and

engaging foreign forces in peacetime is to collect intelligence and probe for warfighting advantage. But numerous Chinese sources also recognize that these engagements provide important opportunities to cultivate and test the *xuexing* of Chinese sailors. [12]

Implications

The aim of this article is not to show that Chinese officers and enlisted are soft and cowardly, or imply that they would show timidity in combat. Indeed, strategists and planners must assume that in wartime the PLA would fight like a bear. It does, however, suggest that Chinese leaders have grave doubts about the ability of the PLA to confront a powerful adversary such as the United States. This conclusion is consistent with research done by Dennis Blasko about the PLA's recognition that its capabilities are "incompatible" with the tasks assigned to it by the party-state, including fighting a local war under informatized conditions ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2013).

The balance of power is not an objective fact: it exists in the minds of men and women. If Chinese leaders genuinely believe that the PLA lacks fighting spirit, this suggests that they see the current balance of power as more disadvantageous for China than commonly assumed from the mathematical comparisons. For the United States, this would imply correspondingly greater leeway for the use of military persuasion to deter Chinese behavior judged harmful to American interests.

At least for now. For as Blasko points out—and this article confirms—the PLA is striving to remedy its perceived weaknesses. While its success is far from certain, the campaign to cultivate *xuexing* is a clear measure of Chinese commitment to placing its new military hardware in the hands of soldiers unafraid to use it.

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Notes:

1. These points have been distilled from an analysis of 50+ articles published in key service newspapers such as *People's Navy*, *Air Force News*, and *Rocket Force News*.
2. Xiao Yong, Gao Yi "Deep Blue Voyage Builds a Standard for a Powerful Military," *People's Navy*, August 5, 2015, p. 3.
3. Jie Xuezhu, "Spiritual Blade and Steel Backbone," *People's Navy*, June 19, 2015, p. 4.
4. Zhang Weile, "My Views on Xuexing," *People's Navy*, March 23, 2015, p. 4.
5. Shao Wenjie, "Xuexing, the Soldier's Most Important Spiritual Quality," *Air Force News*, February 15, 2016, p. 4.
6. "Forge the Xuexing and Boldness Needed for Fighting and Winning," *Rocket Force News*, June 9, 2015, p. 1.
7. Xu Gangyao, Yu Shufeng, Song Xiaoying, Jing Feiyue, Peng Jingliang, Chen Yinxiang, "Forging a Sword Along the Maritime Frontier," *People's Navy*, August 15, 2014, p. 3.
8. Hao Maojin, "Awaken the Soldier's Xuexing," *Air Force News*, May 20, 2016, p. 2.
9. Mei Yunlong, "A Youth with Xuexing is the Most Beautiful Kind," *People's Navy*, April 12, 2013, p. 4.
10. This narrative claims that the collision was a result of dangerous maneuvering by the American aircraft. See Zhang Qingbao, "Xuexing—the PLA Navy's Bright Spiritual History," *People's Navy*, April 21, 2015, p. 4.
11. Ding Rui, "Growing Up in a Tempest," *People's Navy*, August 12, 2015, p. 2.
12. See, for instance, Wang Qiangjiang, Cai Shanfei, "Use the Spirit of the Sword to Cultivate Guardians of the Sea and Air," *People's Navy*, January 13, 2016, p. 4.

Growing Overlap Between Counter-Terrorism and Overseas Interest Protection Acts As New Driver of Chinese Strategy

By Andrea Ghiselli

Late November 2015 marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of how terrorism is perceived in China. The death of a Chinese citizen at the hand of the ISIS and the fact that three senior managers of China Railway Construction Corporation were among the casualties of a terrorist attack in Mali's capital Bamako triggered a broader reflection on the risks Chinese citizens face in Africa and the Middle East ([Guanchazhe](#), November 23, 2015). Writing for *Contemporary World*, a magazine published by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) International Department Central Committee, Zhang Jinping, Professor and Deputy Director of the Antiterrorism Center of the Northwest University of Political Science and Law, stated that China needs to be able to fight terrorism abroad because its citizens have already become targets of terrorism inside and outside China. [1]

This was not the first time Chinese citizens abroad were threatened or were victims of terrorist attacks. However, until November 2015 political instability was seen as the main threat to Chinese interests abroad, with terrorism merely one of its byproducts. After the events in Mali and Syria, terrorism began to be framed as an independent threat, naturally related with political instability, but whose elimination requires forceful means.

This development has already had deep repercussions for the role of force in China's foreign policy in both making the country more comfortable with authorizing third parties to use it and accelerating the internationalization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Political Instability and Terrorism

Framing terrorism as a direct threat to Chinese overseas interest is a recent change, but not a sudden one. An examination of the way Chinese officials and media described the events in North Africa and the Middle East, including Libya (2011), Mali (2013), Iraq (2014) and Yemen (2015), shows that the relationship between general political instability and terrorism grew stronger and stronger over time. The main factors led to this change were the extent of harm to the Chinese nationals involved, either as victims or as peacekeepers, and the capability of local forces to ensure the protection from the threat.

According to General Yin Zhuo, in the case of Libya the threat to Chinese citizens was due to political instability caused by socioeconomic problems and external intervention, not terrorism ([Sina](#), March 19, 2012). After the attack in Mali, terrorism entered into the Chinese public's consciousness as a threat, though still in a marginal way. Although Resolution 2100(2013), which established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) highlights the important role played by terrorists in destabilizing the country, the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense did not mention terrorism among the issues Chinese peacekeeper had to deal with ([PRC MOD](#), June 27, 2013). This acknowledgement of the terrorist threat arrived only a few months later when the Chinese peacekeepers started being deployed in Mali ([PRC MOD](#), January 15, 2014). However, according to Liu Zhongmin, Professor at Shanghai International Studies University's Middle East Studies Institute, the spread of terrorism was not the cause of instability in Mali, but its byproduct. [2]

In 2014, in Iraq, terrorism emerged as a more prominent threat, but the relationship between it and political instability was still rather confused. Indeed, one of the people in charge of supervising the activities of China National Petroleum Corporation in the country described how the situation was worsening during an interview, but almost made no reference to terrorists ([News 163](#), June 18, 2014). Although a Chinese citizen was kidnapped in June 2014, the Chinese government managed to remain calm and expressed confidence in the ability of the Iraqi security

forces to protect Chinese nationals in the country—likely because the hostage was set free shortly afterwards ([Xinhua](#), June 18, 2014).

Yemen in early 2015 was in many ways similar to Iraq and Mali in Chinese eyes: terrorism flourished due to the civil war and the intervention of external powers. [3] Yet, despite the scene of two PLA Navy frigates docking in Aden to rescue a few hundred Chinese nationals, Yemen's situation is more similar to Mali in that China did not have major interests in the country. The importance of what happens in those countries is given by the spillover effects over their neighbors, such as Iraq in the Middle East or Algeria in North Africa, where Chinese interests are more pronounced. Thus, while terrorism remained a significant issue, a mix of efficient planning to rescue the Chinese citizens from the country and the absence of significant assets there probably both limited the sense of a direct threat and convinced the Chinese leadership at least partially, that threats could be negated through timely actions.

All of these examples indicate that, until recently, terrorism was viewed much more as an indirect threat—though a growing one—resulting from political instability. This further explains Chinese commentators' constant reference to economic aid as China's preferred tool to combat terrorism ([Qiushi](#), March 18, 2015). With this background in mind, the use or the authorization of force did not appear to be an option for China. The bloody events in Syria and Mali in late November 2015, however, have dramatically changed the situation.

The Death of a Chinese Hostage in Syria and the UNSC Resolution 2249(2015)

Although Russia and the United States were the main actors involved in the negotiations UN Security Council Resolution 2249(2015)—seen by many as the authorization at the highest level to use force against the Islamic State both in Syria and Iraq—China's attitude toward the resolution is worth noting. The approval of the Resolution occurred a few days after the execution of Fang Jinhui, a Chinese citizen kidnapped by the Islamic State in Syria, and on the same day that three Chinese nationals were killed during a terrorist attack against a hotel in the Bamako,

Mali. Tellingly enough, Chinese Ambassador to the UN, Liu Jieyi, cited the fact that “ISIL and other terrorist organizations had launched deadly attacks around the world and had killed Chinese citizens, among others” as a reason for China's support of the resolution ([UN](#), November 20, 2015).

China's support of the resolution can be seen as the first reaction to Chinese President Xi Jinping's call to strengthen international cooperation against terrorism immediately after confirmation of Fang's execution. This marked a significant break with China's traditional foreign policy: the sovereignty of a third state—Syria or Iraq—was subordinated to the need to protect Chinese citizens and interests.

The shift in Chinese foreign policy is visible in a comparison of official policy toward the UN Resolution on Syria and France's 2013 intervention in Mali. Despite the fact that France intervened at the request of Mali's government and framed its intervention as part of the fight against the spread of terrorism in the country and North Africa at large, the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs limited his comment to “China is aware of the intervention of the relevant country” ([Xinhua](#), January 17, 2013). Chinese scholars, however, were much more critical. He Wenping, an expert of African affairs from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, accused France of using the excuse of fighting terrorism to protect its interests in the region ([Global Times](#), January 18, 2013). Against this background, the change in China's approach to military intervention against terrorism, or at least the use of terrorism as a justification for intervention, has clearly changed in a significant way in Syria.

Both a Security Challenge and a Diplomatic Opportunity

Now that China has begun to reframe the threat of terrorism to Chinese citizens and interests abroad, it is important to note that while terrorism is clearly a challenge for the Chinese government, at the same time, this issue can also be seen as an important diplomatic opportunity for China.

As in European countries, public opinion is pushing the Chinese government to consider how to take action and effectively eliminate the threat. Indeed, on November 22, 2015, an article titled “The media explain why the Chinese peacekeepers could not help the Chinese people involved in Mali” published by the China Business Net (华商网) was widely reposted by Xinhua, the Global Times and other Chinese media ([Xinhua](#), November 22, 2015). The article specifically addresses netizens who asked why Chinese peacekeepers in Mali did not intervene. As stated in the article, the peacekeepers were approximately 1200 km away from Bamako in northern Mali, and, moreover, were under UN command.

Nevertheless, to reassure worried citizens that the government was taking action Xinhua and other media widely reported that the Chinese peacekeepers quickly organized an “emergency antiterrorism exercise” (应急反恐演练) the day after the attack in Bamako ([Xinhua](#), November 22, 2015). This “dialogue,” made of explanatory posts and pictures of fully geared peacekeepers, between the Chinese government and its citizens clearly shows some uneasiness due to the limits of what China can actually do to protect its interests abroad. It should be pointed out that the behavior of the media seems consistent with the latest instructions given by Xi Jinping to the media to be more careful in listening the concerns expressed by the public opinion ([China Brief](#), May 11). While better communication can temporarily ease popular pressure at home, but cannot eliminate the threat on the ground. Indeed, while the PLA is more than ready and capable to plan and carry out an evacuation in the event of a conflict in a third country, terrorist attacks are harder to predict and prepare for. Even with a base in Djibouti and new laws that empower the PLA to operate abroad to both fight against terrorists and protect China’s overseas interests, the political and diplomatic cost of taking such huge step will be significant ([China Brief](#), January 25; [China Brief](#), January 25).

However, while acting alone likely remains too costly, a more active approach to counter-terrorism abroad has already created new opportunities for Chinese diplomacy, especially with Europe. Even before the tragic events of late November, Zhao Lei,

a Professor at the CCP Central Party School’s Institute for Strategic Studies, listed antiterrorism among the fields of dialogue and potential cooperation between China and Britain in the new “golden age” of the Sino-British relationship ([Guangming](#), October 22, 2015). Later, in January 2016, the Chinese and the British Ministers of Foreign Affairs released a joint declaration on Syria where the two countries stated their common intention and interest to fight terrorism ([PRC MFA](#), January 5). China remains under pressure for what the Global Times labelled “China’s antiterrorism responsibility theory” (中国反恐责任论), that is Western criticism for the policies of the Chinese government toward the country’s western regions ([Global Times](#), March 5, 2015). Yet, the creation of ad-hoc dialogues with Western countries undoubtedly helps China to present itself as a potential partner in international security and go beyond the sometimes too-tight Sino-Russian relationship. It seems indeed that there is a bitter dissatisfaction in Beijing with having Syria likely destined to become the “orphan” of Russia’s intervention and seeing further instability ensuing in the region ([People’s Daily](#), March 18).

Conclusion

China’s understanding of terrorism is undergoing a major transformation, from primarily an internal threat to a major threat to Chinese interests abroad. Indeed, while external elements, such as the alleged support from Turkey for Uyghurs or the war in the neighboring Afghanistan, could add fuel to the fire, for a long time terrorism was mainly seen as one of the homegrown “three evils” that threaten China’s internal stability ([China Brief](#), February 4; [China Brief](#), January 25). The death of Chinese nationals at the hand of Middle Eastern and North African terrorists made terrorism to become an external threat to Chinese interests inside and outside the country, thereby adding great pressure over Beijing to strengthen cooperation with other countries and develop the necessary capabilities to deal with it. According to the latest Chinese statistical yearbooks published in late 2015, more than 160,000 Chinese contract workers were working in North Africa and the Middle East at the end of 2014. Considering the enlargement of the Chinese presence in those regions envisioned by the

“One Belt, One Road,” it has already become common knowledge among Chinese scholars that Xi Jinping’s flagship diplomatic initiative must be protected against terrorism. [4] Nonetheless, significant challenges lie ahead. China not only lacks, at least now, the capabilities and the will to act alone or in a more direct way than peacekeeping, but even international cooperation is seen with skepticism. Li Xiruo, a researcher with the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), for example, affirmed that significant divisions in the international community prevent any meaningful cooperation vis-à-vis a common threat. [5] This is an opinion that recurs frequently on Chinese academic works on the subject.

At a more conceptual level, this change means that the classic Chinese receipt to cure instability—economic aid and diplomatic support—is slowly evolving. Understanding terrorism as a violent byproduct of- and, simultaneously, a cause of- instability adds a more proactive and security oriented element to China’s foreign policy. This is already visible in China’s latest policy paper on the Middle East and in tasking the peacekeepers in MINUSMA to “deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas (emphasis added)” (UN, April 25, 2013). China now appears more comfortable with the possibility of authorizing the use of force in international affairs, and prepared to walk an ever-thinner line between respecting other countries’ sovereignty and protecting its own interests.

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Notes:

1. Zhang Jinping, “The Two-Principles Led Regulation of the Use of the Armed Forces Abroad in China’s Antiterrorism Law” (中国反恐怖法中境外武力反恐怖行动的两个原则性规定), *Contemporary World* (当代世界), No.3 (2016), pp.55–57.

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