

III. China's security diplomacy initiatives

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China has taken several initiatives aimed at reshaping the international order since Xi Jinping became president in late 2012. China is creating economic, financial and political institutions that provide an alternative to the traditional US-led world order. Some Western analysts consider this a direct challenge to the current international system dominated by the West and criticize China for trying to provide alternative structures, while simultaneously making use of the existing institutions to China's own advantage.¹ From a Chinese perspective, under President Xi, China is taking advantage of its strategic opportunities and is starting to actively shape the international order by assuming greater global responsibility both in its direct neighbourhood and further afield. Furthermore, China is beginning to project its rising power abroad by investing in infrastructure and creating alternative spaces for dialogue outside existing platforms.

In November 2014 during the first work conference on foreign policy held by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 2006, President Xi called for a more active and creative foreign policy. He stated that 'we should be keenly aware of the protracted nature of contest over the international order; on the other hand, we need to recognize that the direction of reform of the international system will remain unchanged'.² Xi claimed that China should 'highlight the global significance of the Chinese dream' and build a 'new type of international relations underpinned by win-win cooperation'.³

In the economic sphere, China is establishing an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and has set up a Silk Road Fund, thus competing with the existing Bretton Woods institutions and the Asian Development Bank. In its foreign policy, China has set out to create the 'Silk Road Economic Belt', which aims to connect China economically with large parts of Central Asia, Russia and Europe (and potentially also with South Asia). Central Asia would function as a logistical link between Asia and Europe, promising to boost Asian infrastructure and economic development. China already invests heavily in infrastructure projects in Central Asia, and

¹ Jorgensen, H. and Strube, D., 'China, the G20 and Global Economic Governance', *Lowy Institute Analysis*, Nov. 2014; and Ikenberry, G.J., 'The rise of China and the future of the West', *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2008, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63042/g-john-ikenberry/the-rise-of-china-and-the-future-of-the-west>>.

² 'Xi eyes more enabling international environment for China's peaceful development', Xinhua Net, 30 Nov. 2014, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/30/c_133822694_2.htm>.

³ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Central Conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing', 29 Nov. 2014, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml>.

estimates of the total value of the project range up to \$21.1 trillion.⁴ The Silk Road Economic Belt is complemented by the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ project, which starts in China’s Fujian Province, running through the Malacca Strait to India and through the Indian Ocean to Kenya.⁵

These initiatives are part of the larger ‘Asia for Asians’ concept propagated by President Xi. This concept promotes the creation of Asian institutions, instead of existing Western-led institutions, to deal with Asian-related affairs. During the fourth summit of the ‘Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building in Asia’ (CICA) in May 2014, Xi called for a ‘new regional security architecture’ and announced that China would take a leading role in the creation of an Asian security partnership programme.⁶ ‘Matters in Asia ultimately must be taken care of by Asians, . . . and Asia’s security ultimately must be protected by Asians’, he stated.⁷ Xi’s vision of a new regional security order is based on the ‘new security concept’ that China propagated in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A position paper released by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Asia for Asians concept was intended to ‘rise above one-sided security and seek common security through mutually beneficial cooperation’ and names ‘mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination’ as the core instruments of the concept. The world should overcome the ‘cold war mentality’ and abandon the system of US-led security alliances, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to form a new system of ‘cooperative security’. States should cooperate regardless of their different political, social and economic systems.⁸ In line with this strategy to establish alternatives to existing institutions, it seems that China is pursuing a path of selective multilateralism, promoting new regional security forums without US participation, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and CICA, but also aiming to increase its influence over more inclusive ones such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Furthermore, the PLA has established its own public diplomacy initiative with the Xiangshan Forum, a track 1.5 forum held in Beijing with high-level defence officials from Asian countries. The Xiangshan Forum is designed as an alternative to the Singapore-based Shangri-La Dialogue. For the Xiangshan Forum’s fifth meeting on 20–22 November 2014 under the topic

⁴ ‘Silk-Road Economic Belt project’s scale at US\$21tn’, *Want China Times* (Taiwan), 16 Sep. 2014.

⁵ ‘图解丝绸之路’ [A map to understand the New Silk Road], Xinhua Net, <<http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/newsilkway/>>.

⁶ ‘China Focus: China’s Xi proposes security concept for Asia’, Xinhua Net, 21 May 2014, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-05/21/c_133351210.htm>.

⁷ ‘China president speaks out on security ties in Asia’, BBC News, 21 May 2014, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-27498266>>.

⁸ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘China’s position paper on the new security concept’, Chinese UN mission website, [n.d.], <<http://www.china-un.org/eng/xw/t27742.htm>>.

of 'cooperation and win-win, build Asian community of destiny', China invited the defence ministers of Japan, North Korea and South Korea.⁹ In August 2014 the Chinese Ministry of Defence announced that from 2014 onwards the formerly biannual forum would be held annually.¹⁰

The impact of these initiatives on the regional order remains to be seen, but China is shifting away from a foreign and security policy based on maintaining a low profile and reluctance to take the lead, as has historically been the case since Deng Xiaoping formulated the policy in the 1990s. As a result, China's foreign and security policy under Xi is increasingly meeting regional resistance, especially among US allies in Asia.

⁹ 'Defence chiefs of Korea, Japan invited to security forum in China', Yonhap News Agency, 15 Sep. 2014, <<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2014/09/15/58/0301000000AEN20140915006600315F.html>>.

¹⁰ 'China to build high-end security forum: DM spokesman', *China Daily*, 28 Aug. 2014.