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**To the House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

**Hearing entitled  
“China’s Rise: The Strategic Impact of Its Economic and Military Growth”**

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*“At present, the national security issues facing China encompass far more subjects, extend over a greater range and cover a longer time scale than at any time in the country’s history.”*

—Chinese President Xi Jinping, 2014<sup>1</sup>

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you on “China’s Rise” as pertains to Chinese security affairs. I want to note that the views I express in this testimony are my own and do not reflect the views of CNA, any of its sponsors or affiliates, the United States Navy, or the Department of Defense.

I have been asked to discuss Chinese security issues. I would like to focus on issues that are especially pertinent to understanding and interpreting the *future* of China as a security actor, in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world.

There are four main points that I wish to make:

- First, for China’s leadership, “national security” encompasses *many* domains, not just military and defense, and it includes both internal and external security.
- Second, to understand the Chinese leadership’s outlook on security issues, we need to understand how these issues have been defined, shaped and framed by China’s historical experiences, and how China’s security interests are evolving today.
- Third, China’s leadership is currently taking action in multiple domains to become more capable of securing these interests. This includes initiating major, far-reaching military reforms. However, PRC leaders still have significant concerns about their country’s ability to safeguard its security interests.
- Finally, a major issue for the United States going forward is whether and how the U.S.-China relationship can manage China’s insecurities in a manner that is convergent with U.S. interests.

## **I. The PRC leadership’s definition of national security**

The first thing I want to draw your attention to is how China’s leadership defines “national security.” In the Chinese view, “national security” is extremely broad. In fact, it encompasses *all* the areas that are being discussed at this hearing today—internal stability, economic growth, political legitimacy, and the more traditional area of national external defense.

Chinese views of national security today are consistent with long-standing norms there that interlink (a) China’s domestic and international security, and (b) the security of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with the security of the Chinese state and people. Xi, as with all of the

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, “A Holistic View of National Security,” Speech at the first meeting of the CPC Central Committee’s National Security Commission, 15 April 2014, in Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014), p. 221.

PRC's leaders, does not view the security of the nation as distinct from the security of the CCP. Because the Party is viewed as the vanguard and indisputable leader of the Chinese people, military, and state, none of the other domains can be secure if the Party's leadership is not secure. Therefore, China's primary security issue going forward will continue to be the CCP's ability to maintain its monopoly on political power.

The breadth of PRC conceptions of "national security" is usefully illustrated by a speech that Chinese President and CCP Secretary General Xi Jinping gave in his 2014 address to the new national security committee whose establishment he announced in late 2013. Xi said in that speech that "we must maintain a holistic view of national security" such that

"We must pay close attention to both traditional and non-traditional security, and build a national security system that integrates such elements as political, homeland, military, economic, cultural, social, science and technology, information, ecological, resource, and nuclear security."<sup>2</sup>

There are two critical implications that come out of this conception of national security. First, we should always expect to see China's leaders prioritizing domestic security—that is, the indisputable leadership and stability of the Chinese Communist Party over the country's people, territory, government and military. External security is important to the Chinese leadership in part *because* it allows the CCP to maintain its internal legitimacy.

Second, the "holistic" view of national security means that we should expect the Chinese leadership to use every instrument of national power to secure what they perceive to be China's security interests, assuming they have the institutional and material capacity to do so.

## II. China's past, present, and future security concerns

There are three key sources for how China's leaders frame their security concerns: (1) China's *past* as a divided, subjugated nation; (2) security interests that have emerged over the past few decades or are *presently* emerging as a result of China's expanded global footprint; and (3) China's changing assessments of the *future* nature of warfare and the conflicts China is most likely to face. I will discuss each of these in turn.

*Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, China has been deeply insecure about its ability to safeguard its national rights, interests, and dignity*

To understand China's future as a security actor, we first need to look backwards. Modern China's identity as a nation-state is premised on a *deep existential anxiety* about the government's ability to sustain internal stability and external sovereignty. The PRC's and CCP's modern identity are built around a narrative of loss and redemption in which modern China was forged out of a crucible of shame and suffering at the hands of foreign powers.<sup>3</sup> This is

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<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping, "A Holistic View of National Security," pp. 221-222.

<sup>3</sup> I have written in more detail on this topic elsewhere. See Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus* XXV: 1 (April 2010), 1–33, doi: 10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x; and Alison A. Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation' and China's National

part of the PRC's founding narrative, in the same way that colonial Americans' chafing under British taxation and their subsequent battle for independence is part of ours. *I want to emphasize that understanding these beliefs does not mean condoning them*, but it does help to highlight the issues that may be most sensitive for Chinese policy-makers today.

Some key points are:

- This narrative interprets the period between the mid-1800s and the mid-1900s as a “Century of Humiliation” during which China failed to secure its most basic national interests. Internal rebellions threatened the legitimacy of the central government, and foreign powers forced China to open its ports to foreign trade and to relinquish large portions of its territory to foreign concessions and extraterritorial jurisdiction. China lost a humiliating war to Japan in 1895. By the 1920s, China's imperial government had collapsed, the new republican government controlled just a third of the territory that China had held a century earlier, and China's confidence and pride was deeply wounded. Chinese scholars and politicians, at the time and since, bemoaned China's inability to protect its self-determination, international status and “rights” as a sovereign nation.
- According to this narrative, it was the CCP and its armed branch, the Red Army (the precursor to the modern People's Liberation Army, or PLA), that “saved” China from foreign predations and internal chaos, restored most (but not all) of its historical territory, and put China back on the path to self-determination and international standing.
- As a result of this history, the goal of all PRC leaders has been to ensure China's “national rejuvenation,” i.e. its recovery from these losses and indignities. With regard to the international arena, “national rejuvenation” would mean that China has returned to a state where the country's rights, interests, power and dignity would be restored and its self-determination guaranteed.<sup>4</sup>

This history matters today for several reasons.

First, in order to understand what China's leaders want to secure in the future, we need to know what they think they have lost in the past. The Chinese preoccupation with “sovereignty and territorial integrity,” for example, comes directly from the historical memories—revived generation after generation—of being unable to secure China's territory against foreign intrusions and predations. With regard to Taiwan, in particular, the sense is that China's wounds from this difficult past will remain open until the two sides of the Strait are reunited under CCP rule.

Of note, the *content* of the concept of “sovereignty and territorial integrity” appears to be somewhat flexible. Until fairly recently, almost the entire focus was on Taiwan, and threats to

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Narratives,” Written testimony for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on “China's Narratives Regarding National Security Policy,” March 10, 2011, <http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase has gotten a lot of attention under Xi Jinping, who has linked the term to his “China dream,” but in fact Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping all used it too.

China's claims over islands and features in the East and South China Seas were not generally called out as a separate security concern.<sup>5</sup> Now, those maritime features are regularly incorporated into the PRC leadership's definition of China's "indisputable territory." So we might say that China's definition of what constitutes its interests in this case has expanded, but the *justification* for why it is important has not. The language used to explain it is so fundamental to modern Chinese identity that it immediately resonates with people who are sensitive to any hint that China's "rights and interests" could be eroded. This raises the question, of course, of whether China's definition of its "indisputable territory" could expand further in the future.

Second, the Chinese concern with international status, and with the ability to participate in the international arena in a state of "equality and reciprocity" with great and small powers, is genuine. For many decades both prior to and after the establishment of the PRC, Chinese diplomats lobbied tirelessly for their country to have a seat at the international table. When China has gained participation or membership in major international organizations—the WTO is a good example—this has been hailed within the country not only as an important tool for improving China's material conditions, but also as a symbol of China's improved international status. This framing is potentially important for the United States, because as a central player in many international institutions, the U.S. is viewed as a "gatekeeper" for membership or enhanced participation in them. Hence U.S. encouragement or discouragement of Chinese membership in international organizations is sometimes viewed as a barometer of the U.S.'s broader willingness to allow China to regain its international dignity and standing.

Third, this history matters because these losses to China's territory, autonomy, and international standing are laid directly at the feet of foreign powers, particularly Western powers. The language that we see in many Chinese writings about international affairs today derives directly from an assumption, developed during the "Century of Humiliation," that it was in the very nature of Western great powers to seek to encroach on other countries' territories and to subjugate them in a "win-lose," zero-sum situation. There has grown from this a deep-rooted suspicion of Western intentions toward China that has been repeatedly reinforced by all PRC leaders, who say that the West seeks to deprive China of its power by stunting it in the international arena and seeking the overthrow or subversion of the Chinese communist system. Xi Jinping is no exception. What this means for the U.S. is that, no matter what we say in the short term, China's leadership is going to approach U.S. actions and relationships—particularly in the Asia Pacific—starting from a point of great suspicion.

Finally, this narrative emphasizes the centrality of military power for securing national power, autonomy, and dignity. The historical formulation is "*fuguo qiangbing*" (富国强兵)—rich nation, strong army—and Xi Jinping has recently revived this language. China's recently-issued 2015 defense white paper puts it simply: "the Chinese dream is to make the country strong. ... Without a strong military, a country can be neither safe nor strong." In other words, even if all of China's security concerns were resolved tomorrow, we would expect China to continue to strengthen and modernize its military simply as a matter of what it views as historical necessity.

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<sup>5</sup> See Murray Scot Tanner and Peter W. Mackenzie, *China's Emerging National Security Interests and their Impact on the People's Liberation Army* (Arlington, VA: CNA; Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2015), pp. 11-12, especially footnote 18.

To sum up, China today starts from a position of *deep resentment* about the loss of its rights, power, and dignity, a *deep desire* to have a central role at the international table, and *deep insecurity* about the willingness of the rest of the world to let China seek its own destiny and secure its own interests.

*China's economic growth and globalization have resulted in significantly expanded national security interests*

In addition to these historical anxieties, China has added a host of additional security concerns over the past several decades. First, in the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping calculated that China's major challenge in the immediate future would not be to stave off major war from outside invaders, but rather to ensure its own prosperity. This necessitated a stable, peaceful and non-hostile regional and international environment conducive to China's economic growth, and therefore gave China a strong interest in managing frictions with its neighbors and with major powers. China's leadership since Deng has sought to build peace and stability through increased participation in international institutions and economic and diplomatic outreach to neighboring countries, avoiding conflict with major powers, and expanding its military diplomacy.<sup>6</sup>

Even more recently, China's growing international footprint has caused its global security interests to expand. As the PRC's trade and investment with foreign nations grows and as its people go further afield as workers and tourists, China has increasingly far-flung interests that need to be protected.

Two of my colleagues at CNA identified six arenas of "emerging" national security interests that result from China's expanded regional and global presence.<sup>7</sup> They include the needs to:

- Protect overseas investment and Chinese working abroad
- Deepen energy and resource security
- Strengthen maritime security interests
- Stabilize China's western borderland regions
- Develop space and cyberspace security interests
- Shape China's security environment.

Each of these interests has the potential to require new missions and capabilities on the part of China's main security force, the PLA, as well as other security forces.<sup>8</sup> Protecting overseas investments and people, for instance, could require the PLA to conduct non-combatant evacuation operations in an unstable country. Deepening energy and resource security requires that China be able to protect SLOCs through which its energy supplies pass. Strengthening maritime security interests could require the PLA to be able to: defend China's claimed maritime territories; exploit and protect maritime resources; maintain strategic depth, access, and power projection in areas near its national coastlines; and conduct maritime security cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tanner and Mackenzie, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Tanner and Mackenzie, Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> Hu Jintao explicitly tasked the PLA with helping to manage and defend these expanded security interests in his 2004 speech on "The Historic Missions of the Armed Forces in the New Period of the New Century."

<sup>9</sup> Tanner and Mackenzie, pp. 47-48.

Of note, many of these expanded national interests do not necessarily conflict with those of other nations, and the Chinese recognize these as areas with potential for burden-sharing with other countries.

*China's national security outlook is also shaped by the future conflicts and challenges that PRC leaders believe their country might face*

Finally, China's leaders make assessments about trends in warfare and international relations, and the implications of these trends for the kinds of future challenges that China is likely to face.<sup>10</sup> Recent PRC strategic documents depict a world in which the possibility still exists of full-scale warfare resulting from Taiwan independence or from foreign "hegemonic countries inciting war with the goal of delaying or interrupting [China's] rise."<sup>11</sup> They describe a world in which conflict is increasingly likely to arise from the escalation of *crisis*, particularly as a result of boundary or jurisdictional disputes in the maritime domain. They see a world in which transnational, non-traditional issues such as terrorism, piracy, natural disasters and pandemics threaten the security and prosperity of all nations. They depict a world in which internal instability from other nations may spill over into China's territory. And finally, they portray a world in which changes in the conduct of warfare increasingly demand advanced capabilities in the maritime, space, cyber, and nuclear deterrence domains.

There are a few important implications here. First, this list suggests that China's leaders see a future where problems may be driven by crisis and by non-traditional security threats as much as by deliberate provocation. This leads to an assessment that *crisis management* is an essential strategic task in order to prevent an escalation to war.

Second, it suggests that China increasingly views distant geographical areas as directly relevant to its own security; China's military will consequently need capabilities that give it a greater reach into areas further from China's territory.

Finally, it suggests that we should expect to see China's military make a concerted effort to improve its maritime, cyber, and space capabilities. In 2012, Hu Jintao stated in his final work report as the CCP Secretary General that it was time to "build China into a maritime power."<sup>12</sup> The 2015 PRC defense white paper elaborated that "The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and greater importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests."<sup>13</sup> Recent PRC statements and documents have also emphasized the importance of the cyber and information domains, arguing that "information dominance" is a critical element in the management of conflict and the prosecution of war, and have noted that space is also increasingly prominent as a domain of potential conflict.

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<sup>10</sup> State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy* (Beijing, May 2015); Shou Xiaosong, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy (Zhanlue Xue; 战略学)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> "Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress," *Xinhua*, Nov. 27, 2012, [http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/18th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress\\_Eng/t992917.htm](http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/18th_CPC_National_Congress_Eng/t992917.htm)

<sup>13</sup> *China's Military Strategy*, Section IV, "Building and Development of China's Armed Forces."

### **III. The Chinese leadership is taking steps across multiple domains to improve the country's ability to secure these interests**

*China's military is tasked with a very long, and growing, list of missions.*

The PRC leadership's interpretation of China's history, its current expanded security interests, and its future challenges together shape the list of situations for which they feel the PLA and other national security actors must prepare. These add up to a very long list of things that the PLA needs to be able to do. The 2015 defense white paper sums them up:

“China's armed forces mainly shoulder the following strategic tasks:

- To deal with a wide range of emergencies and military threats, and effectively safeguard the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea
- To resolutely safeguard the reunification of the motherland
- To safeguard China's security and interests and new domains
- To safeguard the security of China's overseas interests
- To maintain strategic deterrence and carry out nuclear counterattack
- To participate in regional and international security cooperation and maintain regional and world peace
- To strengthen efforts in operations against infiltration, separatism and terrorism so as to maintain China's political security and social stability; and
- To perform such tasks as emergency rescue and disaster relief, rights and interests protection, guard duties, and support for national economic and social development.”

Thus the PLA is tasked not only with war preparation, but also with crisis management, military diplomacy and cooperation, internal security, and support for national economic development. A burning question for the CCP, therefore, is whether the PLA is institutionally, operationally, or politically prepared to take on this huge roster of missions.

*PRC leadership is increasingly confident in China's ability to secure many of its interests, but they acknowledge that many obstacles remain*

In many ways, China today is a world away from the insecure, weakened state of the Century of Humiliation. Over the past decade, official Chinese documents have increasingly declared the centrality of China as a global player. There appears to be a much greater confidence in China's international standing and power. Five years ago, there was still a raging debate in China about whether it could be, or would want to be, a “great power.” Now, that debate is over and no one in China (or elsewhere) disputes that China is a major world power.

In the recently-issued 2015 defense white paper, for instance, the authors say that “China's comprehensive national strength, core competitiveness and risk-resistance capacity are notably increasing, and China enjoys growing international standing and influence.”

This growing confidence is reflected in many domains. The most obvious is China's more assertive behavior in the East and especially South China Seas, where China's media and



government justify activities such as building structures on marine features as essential for restoring China's stolen "rights and interests" in the maritime domain. It is possible that the PRC leadership thinks that it can now afford to take bolder steps in this area both because the PLA is more militarily capable in the past, and because China can bear greater risk to its peripheral relations and to regional stability. But we also see growing confidence in China's ability to cooperate and to burden-share, through e.g. increased Chinese participation in anti-piracy operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and sending more skilled personnel to international peacekeeping missions. And, finally, we see growing confidence in China's ability to win international support for its role as a central player in, or even creator of, international institutions, for example through the recent establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

That said, the PRC leadership still thinks China has a long way to go in being able to secure all its interests, near and far. Some of these obstacles are external: they repeatedly argue, for example, that the U.S.—its dominance in international institutions, its presence and activities in Asia, and its regional alliances—presents significant challenges to Chinese self-determination.

China's leaders also recognize many *internal* obstacles to attaining their national security goals. Many of these have to do with the need to reform the PLA, as discussed in the next sub-section.

*China's military and defense establishment has been ordered to take a number of steps to improve its ability to safeguard China's security*

In November 2013, Xi Jinping announced wide ranging, national-level reforms at the Third Plenum of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. These included nearly four dozen areas of reforms for the PLA. The areas covered by these reforms give us a useful snapshot of the operational and institutional areas that China's leadership have deemed most important and/or most in need of improvement. They include:

- Command and control for joint operations
- Organizational changes, including rebalancing of the force structure to put greater emphasis on the navy, air force, and second artillery; it could also entail rebalancing of the four PLA general departments, and perhaps the Military Regions
- A continuation of a long-standing concern to improve the PLA's human capital
- The desire to build "new type operational forces," i.e. key assets or units which are characterized by cutting-edge technologies and are deemed essential for prosecuting modern campaigns
- Defense R&D, acquisition of advanced weaponry and equipment, and improved "civil-military integration" that better allows civil education and technological systems to support defense priorities
- Improvement of Chinese logistics capabilities

- Improvement of the defense mobilization system, including the reserve force
- Improving the PLA's institutional management capabilities
- Adjustments to China's national military strategy
- Improvement of internal discipline and reaffirmation of Party control over military
- The establishment of a "national security commission," with Xi Jinping at the head, presumably aimed at improving the centralized management of civilian and military national security actors.

These changes are going to entail pain for many parts of the PLA. Unlike past PLA reforms, which have been announced by the Central Military Commission, these were announced at an important *Party* meeting, and Xi Jinping is at the head of the organizations apparently tasked with overseeing and pushing forward the reforms. In other words, these are not changes that are internally generated. David Finkelstein of CNA has called this the PLA's "Goldwater-Nichols moment," noting that "just as it took an act of Congress in 1986 to force the U.S. military to forge a joint organization, it would seem that the force of Xi Jinping and the Central Committee [of the CCP] are going to be leveraged to impel the PLA to do what it has long known must be done but which has proven too bureaucratically difficult without external catalyzing forces."<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. Implications for the United States

China's attempts to become more capable of securing its identified national interests present opportunities for the United States, but also many challenges. A key question to ask in assessing these opportunities and challenges is: *How can the U.S.-China relationship manage China's insecurities in a manner that is convergent with U.S. interests?*

Many of China's stated security interests are potentially convergent with those of the United States. Counter-piracy, peacekeeping, non-combatant evacuations, and issues in non-military domains such as climate change, are all broadly compatible with U.S. interests and provide opportunities for cooperation that can help to reassure China that the U.S. does not seek to block its progress in these areas. Cooperation in geographic areas outside the Asia-Pacific could be particularly fruitful, because historically China's existential anxieties do not revolve around regions outside Asia.

China's government has also been amenable to forms of cooperation that show that the United States regards China as an equal partner in the international arena. A good example is the recent signing of two U.S.-PRC memoranda of understanding, one on establishing rules of behavior for the safety of maritime and air encounters, and the other on notification of major military activities. These sorts of agreements are important not only because, if properly implemented, they can help manage the immediate danger of misinterpretation or miscommunication, but also because they show that the U.S. takes China seriously as an

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<sup>14</sup> David M. Finkelstein, "2015 Should Be an Exciting Year," *Pathfinder* 13:1 (Winter 2015), p. 10.

international actor. Similarly, China's government and public have often reacted more favorably toward U.S. military activities when they include China.

However, many of the PRC's security interests as currently defined by China's leadership are not convergent with those of the United States. China's territorial and jurisdictional disputes are an obvious example. The U.S.'s declared interests are in the peaceful resolution of these disputes, but unfortunately the actions of many of the claimant states do not seem to trend in that direction. If China's confidence in its ability to secure its interests in the South China Sea is growing, it seems likely that we will see more civilian and military maritime activity in the region, more close encounters and an increased likelihood of conflict. China's historical narrative about the importance of its territorial claims make it unlikely that PRC leaders would be able to (or want to) walk back China's claims once it has established greater *de facto* control over these features.

On these issues, a better path for the U.S. is to show China that its own security interests are at cross-purposes. For example, China cannot in the longer run simultaneously maintain stable relations with its neighbors while aggressively pursuing its territorial claims. Nor can it expect other countries in the region and beyond to accept *prima facie* that China's military modernization is not a threat without engaging in greater and more credible transparency about the PLA's capabilities, intentions, and aspirations.

In the longer run, U.S. policy makers need to ask themselves: Which is better for the U.S.—a secure China, or an insecure China? Presumably the answer is a China that is secure about its ability to cooperate on issues where the interests of the two countries converge, and a China that is sure that it *cannot* prevail on issues where they diverge.

Overall, the U.S.-China relationship is going to continue to revolve around a messy and interwoven web of issues. Many of these issues compel the U.S. to cooperate with China out of our own national interest. But there are also issues on which U.S. national interest cannot support Chinese security interests as they are currently constituted. The challenge for U.S. policy makers is to recognize and manage the areas of convergence and divergence.