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CHINA'S NEW STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

China's New Security Initiatives Under Xi Jinping: Competing and Completing Visions of Asia

by

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**China's New Security Initiatives Under Xi Jinping:
Competing and completing visions of Asia**

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Introduction:

China's new security initiatives under Xi Jinping present a vision of Asia that challenges the existing Asian security order. The Asian security concept Xi Jinping announced at the CICA meet and the later extension of the Chinese Dream into the Asia Pacific Dream are expansive regional constructs with implications for global geopolitics. They present a vision of Asia that competes with others from across Asia, but also completes them in significant ways. Asia's ambivalence in accepting Xi's vision in its totality is the real challenge for Xi. For a while Asia has accepted the notion of dual leadership in the region with the economic and security split between China and the United States. Many Asian states are unwilling as of now to accept the People's Republic as leading in both areas. This reluctance threatens the larger Chinese agenda of the Chinese Dream, of the coming of China to great power status by mid-century.

Asia's ambivalence over Chinese leadership could move Chinese foreign policy either to harden its position on security linked "core interests" or keep Asia on side by a positive use of its economic and political influence and power.¹ Both directions are posited on the use of China's increasing power and influence. One could lose China friends in the region and undermine its vision for Asia, the other could become the real foundation for an Asian "community of destiny." Finally, China will have to decide if its security and development policy will be calibrated to saving its vision of Asia and, in consequence, its second centenary goal of becoming a strong, prosperous and leading power by mid-century.

China's foreign policy: the "trend of the times"

Both of Xi Jinping's new security initiatives indicate the present regimes' understanding of "the trend of the times".ⁱⁱ Chinese policy makers have for long felt that regionally and globally, despite no radical shifts in power, there are "kaleidoscopic changes that make the world constantly different" where existing hegemonies may be challenged.ⁱⁱⁱ Global and regional changes create significant policy options for the People's Republic. While there is the oft repeated statement that "no country or group of countries can dominate world affairs singlehandedly" there is also the view that China must take on the role of a responsible power thrust upon it by the world and its own core and expanding interests.^{iv} Its economic growth has translated into political influence in bilateral and multilateral relations. Taking up Asian leadership during this window of opportunity is likely to ensure the agenda of the China Dream: the growth of China's economy and power by mid-century.

Given the concerns over the destabilizing effects of rising powers for established world orders and over its own more assertive positions on territorial disputes in the neighbourhood China's rhetoric has been both aggressive and reassuring. It has mounted a critique of the US pivot/balance to Asia as an effort to combat China's rise and interests in Asia, it has reiterated its territorial claims in its maritime and continental neighbourhood and where possible moved to control these, but it has also attempted to reassure Asian states about the revival of its power. One instrument of reassurance has been the recourse to civilizational values and economic connectivities, such as the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, which echo historical linkages. These, it has been argued, provide an alternative to the realist agenda of the "Cold War mentality" in international affairs. Thus, what started with Hu Jintao as an appeal for a harmonious society and world has been extended with Xi Jinping to an argument for a "community of common destiny". This last generally links Chinese cultural values to a view of interstate relations, both political and economic, as one that is more equitable, democratic and non-hegemonic.^v

The end of year assessment of 2013 suggested a readjustment of China's foreign policy. Given China's development agenda it would need to reorient its economic focus from the developed economies to more dynamic emerging markets and developing economies. Clearly the American strategy in the Asia Pacific, the rebalancing/pivot and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, undermined China's interests with Japan as well as a China centric multilateral system in the Asia Pacific. But an economically dynamic Asia Pacific, the congruence of China's development interests with those of the developing world, in reshaping global financial institutions and supporting alternative multilateral institutions and Russia's rising Eurasian ambitions provided China a window of strategic opportunity for a leadership role.^{vi}

China's essentially optimistic view of the international context is one in which it seeks to balance the "destabilizing" American dominance in the region with a "new model of international relations". This model keeps the focus on accelerating economic globalization and cooperative, collective and common security to be reinforced through a China centered multilateral and interdependent order.^{vii} In this order China's security and development objectives come into play equally.^{viii} There is little evidence that China sees a contradiction between its security and economic agendas.

The sense of China's new coming, its growing voice in regional and global affairs, its decision to take on leadership and its capacity to provide public goods has also given it a sense of entitlement.^{ix} This is in sharp contrast to its "victim" discourse in the past. Consequently, there is a recurring view of the respect owed to a "large country" by a "small country",^x equal treatment as signified by its "major power relations" initiative and the moral justification for the use of coercion with neighbours who needlessly provoke China over territorial issues.^{xi} More, there is the conviction that China now has the right and the ability to lead through regional multilateral institutions to create an order that challenges the nature of existing global institutions. China has for long seen an engagement with multilateral institutions in a narrower way as furthering its domestic economic reforms and supporting growth and allowing it to influence the direction of the regional order to create an enabling regional environment for its economic and political rise.^{xii} But it has shied away from a more assertive leadership role until recently. The recent transition to leadership ambitions transforms the level at which China now interacts with

the world, the message it sends out and the constituency to which it speaks. China's sense of entitlement, more strident on social media is, however, tempered among policy makers by the reality that the world remains interdependent, not the least China whose economy grew on the back of economic globalization, and that China is still some distance from meeting its second centenary goal of becoming a strong and powerful world leader.^{xiii}

Xi Jinping's New Security Initiatives:

The new security initiatives in the past year speak to Xi's vision of Asia and China's role in it as a great power. Yang Jiechi gave us a hint of these "strategic, overarching and innovative" initiatives as early as the end of 2013.^{xiv} He noted that "in the light of new conditions and new tasks" Xi has "focused on China's long-term and strategic agenda with a keen appreciation of the evolving global environment and trends of development at home."^{xv} Yang further noted that while the world still offered China strategic opportunities the time had come for China to "give greater play to the leading role of leadership diplomacy."^{xvi} This leadership diplomacy was on display in 2014.

China's New Asian Security Concept:

Xi Jinping's speech at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA, 2014) was the first salvo in a concerted effort by China to play a new leadership role in Asia and a challenge to its security order. Before him Hu Jintao stayed, for the most part, well within the parameters of the foreign policy orientation set down by Deng Xiaoping, despite the growing opinion among influential Chinese analysts that China must "do something".^{xvii}

While the speech was based on an optimistic view of China's claims to leadership it also came on the heels of a period of confrontation in East Asia and South East Asia over territorial issues and the increasingly complicated security balance in Asia which tested China's ability to provide that leadership. Chinese assertion of its security interests defined the red lines in Asia but also lost China valuable goodwill, encouraged smaller states like the Philippines to revive

partnerships with the US, the ASEAN in general to reiterate its support for US presence in Asia and perhaps most important, Japan to rethink its role in Asia.

Cautioned by Asian reactions, by November of 2014 Xi was looking for a more “enabling environment for China’s peaceful development”. At a major speech to his foreign policy establishment he encouraged the projection of China’s security and development agenda and the global significance of the Chinese Dream, as enabling not just China’s development but also that of the world as well as China’s entitlement as a major power to insist on its core territorial and maritime interests. More, he spoke about developing a foreign policy with “salient Chinese feature(s): and a “Chinese vision” and “a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting (China’s) role as a major country”.^{xviii}

The CICA speech reflected all these concerns: the need to confront the increasing US involvement in Asia, as a major great power to claim a leadership role for China in managing Asian security, to define a Chinese vision of Asian security based on Asian values, and at a more functional level an attempt to create security partnerships and a regional security architecture and the mechanisms through which this would be implemented. By announcing that “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia” Xi pronounced China’s version of the Monroe doctrine, an anomaly in a world where, according to Chinese assessments, both security and development are increasingly globalised. By including organisations across Asia, ASEAN, SAARC and the League of Asian States (LAS) as partners in Asian security he highlighted the inter-regional and multilateral nature of security dialogues and processes thus offsetting anxieties over China’s dominant role in the new security structure and building bridges to the rest of Asia as well.

The CICA speech is especially significant for Chinese policy makers use of foreign policy to meet national objectives.^{xix} The speech was sophisticated in its criticism of US military alliances in the region which threaten China’s security, managed to cast Asia and Asian aspirations in support of the position that Asian security was regrettably dependent on external forces, linked China’s destiny to that of Asia and announced a roadmap for a multilateral security organization which spoke to Asian concerns about creating an Asian security system.^{xx} An appeal to Asian states was made not just on the appeal to anti-Americanism but also on the basis of a set of

principles already enshrined and accepted in earlier multilateral processes, for example, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence from the Bandung Conference and the notion of cooperative security from the ASEAN process. The speech also gave a strong indication of Xi Jinping's security oriented approach to international affairs. Development issues were to be balanced by China's security concerns and its foreign policy was to be a reflection of the application of its power albeit under the rhetoric of Asian diversity and interdependence.

Xi Jinping's Asia Pacific Dream:

Unlike the New Security Concept, Xi Jinping's Asia Pacific Dream (APD) can be viewed as part of China's development agenda and an extension of the China Dream. If the Chinese dream is to be fulfilled and China's rise to be sustained China will the growth of the Asia Pacific will contribute to it. Domestic reforms in China's economy since the global economic slowdown have placed an emphasis on innovation in science and technology and increasing market competitiveness, deepening market reforms and opening up further to foreign investments and making investments abroad to connect China to global markets and future manufacturing hubs. An important aspect of China's economic plans is the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, an expansive project of connectivity over land and sea which connects modern trade routes. Clearly China stands to gain from interaction and integration with the world but more particularly with an economically dynamic Asia-Pacific. Since the global economic slowdown China has been critical of protectionist barriers in affected economies, especially the US and the EU. It also fears barriers to trade, investment and integration by conditions set by regional institutions like the US led Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Until recently China has been well served by an ASEAN led economic integration process in the Asia Pacific but increasing rifts over leadership and membership in regional multilateral initiatives like the East Asia Summit and the TPP and China's growing economic heft have shifted the focus to exercising its leadership role in the regional integration process. Hence, China managed to announce the official launch of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and the approval of the *Roadmap of the APEC's Contribution to the Realization of an FTAAP*. Getting a consensus on this over the opposition of the US was an expression of its dominant economic position in

Asia and the support of APEC members who benefit from integration in a China centered regional trading system.

It is significant that Xi's remarks on the APD and the roadmap for Asia Pacific economic development were presented as a consensus at the closing of the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders Meeting.^{xxi} The statement outlined the future of the Asia Pacific as an "open economy" which would build "cooperative platforms and interconnected growth". It also expressed its reservations on the stalling of the Doha round of negotiations and faith in the WTO, clearly a message about exclusionary regional multilateral institutions like the TPP.

China's sense of responsibility in creating an Asia Pacific Dream is part of the sense that as China's economic strength and its ability to invest in Asia increases it would have a stake in "new initiatives and visions for enhancing regional cooperation."^{xxii} China has currently mandated USD 1.25 trillion to be invested abroad over the next ten years. It has also contributed USD 40 billion to the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank for investment mainly on infrastructure projects on the OBOR. This leadership role was lauded by the *People's Daily* as a power shift from West to East. It can also be viewed as the culmination of China's leadership ambitions through multilateral, regional and pan-regional institutions. As a vision for Asia's future it is also unrelenting. Xi has often said that the new Chinese initiatives are in keeping with the times and that those who do not keep pace will perish.

The strategic imperatives and how Asian states respond

China new model of international relations supports the PRC's two centenary goals of becoming a moderately prosperous society by 2021 and a strong socialist power by mid century, thereby fulfilling Xi Jinping's China Dream. It enables China to take advantage of a strategic opportunity for China's growth and development. As with Deng Xiaoping, Xi Jinping is aware of the challenges to China's rise, both domestic and external. Domestically, difficult and deep reforms in the Chinese economy have to be balanced with domestic growth to sustain employment and social equity. While Xi Jinping focuses on weeding out the "tigers and the insects" in his anti-corruption drive, reforms in China's governance structure to deal with the political economy of corruption still need to be undertaken to create a credible state system.

Externally, China has to fight off anxieties about its rise from its neighbours and the other leading world power, the United States. It has to deal with securing its “core interest” in the neighborhood and further without losing the much needed support for regional leadership. Yet, it also finds that regional and global conditions are conducive to its rise. The US and the EU are in relative decline, the fate of the global economy rests on the growth of the Chinese economy, its own comprehensive national power is growing along with its economic strength, regional economic integration has created reasons for dialogue and cooperation over confrontation and multilateral processes serve as a safety valve for potential conflict.

The issue before China is how to balance the challenges to its twin centenary goals with the opportunity to exercise a leadership role. Chinese analysts often debate the rise of great powers and the role they are entitled to play especially in relation to the rise to power of the US after the II World War.^{xxiii} What they tend to forget is the context in which the US took on a leadership role after the War. Europe was in disarray and the US with its resources stepped in to rebuild it. The role was supported by Western Europe which went on to build regional institutions around America’s security agenda. The “clear and present danger” of the erstwhile Soviet Union bound Europe to America during the Cold War. Since then the trans-Atlantic alliance and multilateral institutional interests have held them together. Asia, on the other hand, is not in disarray, does not have a common enemy and has actually been instrumental in China’s economic rise. Asia has a host of states which have current and potential economic strengths, stable national systems and military power with aspirations to leadership in the region. The issue in Asia is not to create stability but to maintain it. Given China’s recent assertive behaviour in the region many Asian states may view China’s rise as logical but not many are likely to fully support its leadership role in China.

If at all Asian states fear anyone it is more likely to be each other. During the 1940s they feared Japan, since the end of the last century, China. As China rises to great power status, begins to emphasize its security interests in Asia and uses its power more assertively the neighbourhood has begun to recalibrate its policies towards the presence of the US. Since the last two decades at least Asian states have been open to a redefinition of the boundaries of Asia.^{xxiv} This has meant that many of the dominant notions of Asia as being South East Asia or East Asia have

now been collapsed into larger definitions such as the Indo-Pacific and now in functional ways to the Asia Pacific. The idea of Asia, expanded to the notion of the Asia-Pacific, includes many non-Asian states as well as the US. Hence for Beijing to use the term Asia-Pacific and then seek to exclude the US from it seems unrealistic. Therefore, for the moment at least Chinese aspirations to leadership coexist uncomfortably with an Asia which recognizes China's economic weight but looks to the US as a security provider.

More specifically, Asian states have reacted to China's leadership ambitions in a variety of ways. States which have been most directly affected by Beijing's military assertion and economic coercion have begun to look elsewhere for security and economic investment and trade. Smaller states like Vietnam and the Philippines have done what small states historically have done when confronted by asymmetrical power: create new sets of relations, or revive older ones, to pressure China to ease punitive policies and raise the costs to China of assertive behavior. Thus, Vietnam has encouraged Indian exploration in its energy sector over Chinese objections. Chinese reassurance came on the heels of this in the form of the "peripheral diplomacy" initiative, the inclusion of Southeast Asia in the OBOR and the refrain of Asia as a "community of common destiny", but the harm had been done.^{xxv} The Philippines has gone back on a historic political decision to sever military ties with US over a decade ago to sign the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with it. The return of the US to the region was established.^{xxvi}

Japan has begun to introduce "greater balance" to its relations with the US by strengthening its self defence capabilities and its military ties with the US. The US and Japan have moved towards revising their defence plans last year to deal with "new threats" in the region. A result of this is the increase in US ballistic missile defence capable destroyers in Japanese ports, and Japan's decision to increase its fleet of BMD destroyers by 2018 and add submarines and helicopters to its fleet.^{xxvii} More, Shinzo Abe has presented his version of the Japanese dream with the "Beautiful Country" slogan. Abe has decided to take seriously the critique of Japan as a pocket book player without political influence. In an effort to create that political influence and look for a leadership role in Asia Abe will now "proactively contribute to peace", work towards "open and stable seas" and "align itself with democratic states" like India, the Republic of Korea and Australia.^{xxviii} Japan's position, as Christopher Hughes argues, has now explicitly shifted from

the view that economic integration creates stability to one that sees economic integration as creating risks.^{xxix} Japanese investments in China fell by 38.8 per cent in 2014.^{xxx}

As an emerging power which has conflict issues with Beijing, India is reluctant to bandwagon with China. More, India for long has held its own vision of Asia. It was a vision that lay behind the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi the year after India gained independence. While the politics of the post war period has changed dramatically the basic idea that India had a role to play in Asia has not. Therefore the redefinition of India's interests as stretching from Aden to the Asia Pacific, its Look East and now Act East Policy place India securely in Asia. The second phase of its Look East policy has also positioned it in the Asia-Pacific with an outreach to the Pacific island states through the Forum for India Pacific Islands Cooperation. Its increasing naval visibility through joint naval exercises with the US and Australia and the projection of its navy into the region are markers of its stake in the region. India's Indo-Pacific construct, built on the notion of partnerships with Asia Pacific states competes with Xi's Asia Pacific Dream of integration with China's development and security agenda. The Modi-Obama Joint Vision Statement for Asia earlier this year was an indication of a more proactive policy in Asia.^{xxxi} India's Indian Ocean diplomacy was also intended to secure its maritime domain with new dialogues to offset China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean region.

Hence, for now, India has been less than enthusiastic in its support for Xi's pet schemes. At half a dozen seminars on the OBOR in India the dominant view is that the initiative needs to be treated with caution and that India's response to the OBOR will be "synergy driven".^{xxxii} Many analysts view China's maritime silk road as effectively containing India in the maritime domain. The expansive interconnectivity through the two arms of the OBOR are also viewed as integrating Asian economies into China's economic sphere and giving China control over maritime assets in the region. What is even more troublesome is that two of the important projects of the OBOR involve a USD 46 billion investment in territory in Pakistan which is under dispute between India and Pakistan and the other is aimed at overland connectivity which could affect the status of Arunachal Pradesh which China considers as Chinese territory.

India is all too aware that Xi Jinping's policy of constructive engagement and diplomacy on economic policy is all too easily balanced by assertive moves on security as happened during

Xi's visit last year. During Modi's visit there was no change in the statement on the disputed border between the two from the usual reiteration of the need to extend CBMs and fine tune the mechanisms for border management. The display of a map on China's national television showing Arunachal Pradesh and Kashmir outside national boundaries was not lost on India.

However, India's economic agenda also demands a more open view of regional and global investments and economic integration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to China this year and Xi Jinping's visit last was mostly about trade and investment. Modi said nothing to endorse China's ambitious geopolitical plans but a great deal about India as an economic destination.

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Yet, New Delhi is committed to a multilateral framework as in the BRICS and the ASEAN and to the notion of a multipolar world structure. Therefore, despite the caution about China's increase in power and influence it has supported the BRICS Development Bank and is a founder member of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank which will bankroll the infrastructure projects of the OBOR. While this may seem contradictory on the surface, given that China's monetary reserves are the foundational strength for both these structures, the principle of democratic burden sharing has meant that China does not necessarily direct policy in the BRICS Bank. In the AIIB reports suggest that China and India will likely be the largest contributors to the Bank's reserves. India has moved to punch above its weight for now but the projections of its economic growth provide the rationale. But there is a view that the fulfillment of India's economic and security agendas do not necessarily involve a full endorsement of Chinese leadership in the region. China's reiteration of its commitment to its territorial claims while profession a democratic security architecture does not create confidence in a resolution of security issues. China's growing economic heft also raises questions about China's commitment to multilateral approach to re-writing the rules of global institutions. China's bilateral agreement with the US on climate change on the sidelines of the APEC Summit is one recent example of how it works outside the multilateral process when its own interests are involved.

Conclusion:

Xi Jinping's new security initiatives are an important indication of China's assessment of its present strength and the future leadership role it will play in Asia. Many of the initiatives are a break from the past where China kept its head low and bided its time. It's time has now come as far as Xi is concerned. The new initiatives expand the "geographical scope" of China's foreign policy activism. China's economic reach and its translation into political influence ensure that it gets a hearing across Asia and the Pacific. Its more sophisticated use of foreign policy also ensures that it wins support by speaking to Asia's desires and fears and through its ability to shape local economies. In many ways China's new initiatives complete the vision that many Asian states have for themselves, as prosperous, economically stable nation states. Yet, these same initiatives, combining as they do activist economic and security policies, also compete with other and string visions of Asia and other national dreams. Given this, the Chinese optimism about Chinese leadership as a "trend of the times" seems to be mislaid. If China aspires to true leadership in Asia it must redefine what it means to be democratic and tolerant and the very meaning of coexistence.

Endnotes

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ⁱⁱ This is a term Chinese policy makers often use to contextualize their foreign policy in the regional and global environment and to define their policy choices and the trajectory of policy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Xi Jinping, "Follow the Trend of the Times and Promote Global Peace and Development." *The Governance of China*, Beijing: Foreign Languages press, 2014, p. 298.

^{iv} Huang Huaguang and Luan Jianzhang, *The Roadmap of the 18th CPC National Congress and the Chinese Dream*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2013. Pp. 243-45.

^v Huang and Luan, pp. 364-367.

^{vi} Zheng Xiwen, "Features of the 2013 International Situation," *Foreign Affairs Journal*, Winter 2013, 81-91.

^{vii} Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation". Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. 2014/05/21. fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/.../t1159951.shtml.

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^{ix} Zhao Kejin argues that the civilizational discourse is closely linked to China's view of itself as a "returning" power not an "emerging" power. Zhao Kejin, "Guiding Principles of China's New Foreign Policy" *Carnegie-*

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^{xi} *The CIIS Blue Book on International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs* (2013) CIIS, Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2013.

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^{xiii} Two centenary goals Xi Jinping, nov 29, 2012, The Governance of China, p.38. Cui Lei, "China-US Relationship In 2012: Exploring A New Type Of Relationship between Great Powers" CIIS Blue Book, p.375-76.

^{xiv} Yang Jiechi, "Innovations in China's Diplomatic Theory and Practice Under New Conditions," *Foreign Affairs Journal*, Winter 2013, 1-16.

^{xv} Yang Jiechi, p. 2.

^{xvi} Yang Jiechi, p. 15.

^{xvii} Wang Jisi, "China's Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds its Way." *Foreign Affairs*, 90, No. 2 (March/April 2011): 68-79. Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, ed. Daniel Bell and Sun Zhe, trans. Edmund Ryden (Princeton and Oxford : Princeton Univ. Press, 2011.)

^{xviii} "Xi eyes more enabling environment for China's peaceful development." English.news.cn 1 2014-11-30. www.xinhuanet.com/.../c_133822694.htm

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^{xx} Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation". Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. 2014/05/21. fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/.../t1159951.shtml. Also Mu Chunshan, "What is CICA (And Why Does China Care About It?)" *The Diplomat*, May 17, 2014. www.thediplomat.com/2014/05/

^{xxi} "Closing Remarks by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China At the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting ." 2014/11/11. fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/.../t1210451.shtml. p.1.

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^{xxiii} Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China and Its Power Status." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol 1 No. 1, pp. 5-33.

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^{xxix} Ibid.

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^{xxxi} Joint Statement during the visit of President of USA to India " - "Shared Effort; Progress for All" <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/>

^{xxxii} [SushmaSwaraj lays silk road for PM Modi's China visit in May](http://www.hindustantimes.com/india...to...swaraj.../article1-1312494.aspx)
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^{xxxiii} Joint Statement between the India and China during Prime Minister's visit to China

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