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China's "Wolf Warrior" Diplomacy:
A New Kind of American Exceptionalism?

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Professor Tian

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China's rise to global prominence has created a new challenge for American primacy. The fundamental differences between China and the cultures of the United States and its European allies continue to clash. In a world with enough nuclear power to destroy itself 10 times over, diplomatic approaches to conflict resolution have never been more important. Diplomacy is an art, a way of speaking and conveying national interests without offending foreign counterparts. Trustworthy allies are essential for securing economic growth, national security, and spheres of influence. As the number one global superpower since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has enjoyed certain economic and diplomatic privileges. Now, the US faces a new adversary in China. Americans in general lack any understanding of Chinese culture and society. Its diplomats and foreign policy reflect a long history of lasting insecurities and vulnerabilities. China has been burned many times by foreign invaders and been bullied into submission by more powerful overseas threats. As a country that has now reached superpower status, its behavior is viewed under a different lens by the US and Europe. What the West sees as an unpredictable, unstable country is far from reality.

Peter Martin and other American political theorists see Chinese diplomacy as a product of rising nationalist sentiment. It is true that Xi Jinping has been pushing China in a more authoritarian direction, as he has abolished term limits and cleared a way for him to effectively remain in power for life. Therefore, Chinese diplomats have no choice but to stay on Xi's good side and have devout loyalty for the CCP. Martin argues that, "China's political system sets severe limits on the performance of its diplomats. Ultimately, it's a system that's better at silencing critics than persuading others to share its point of view, a system that leaves the Party

with tremendous international influence but few true friends.” (Martin 9) There is some validity in this statement, as China’s relationships with other countries are typically solely a result of ensured mutual economic growth. The US and its European allies all share similar cultural beliefs and ideologies. There is a certain degree of uniqueness in the longevity of Chinese civilization that is not shared with its allies in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Subsequently, Martin and US politicians have tried to understand China’s diplomatic efforts from an American perspective, causing confusion and anger on both sides. Walking out of international meetings, shouting at foreign counterparts, insulting foreign leaders on Twitter, these are just some of the aggressive and strident attitudes of modern Chinese diplomats. (Martin 1-4) Due to these instances and others, Chinese diplomats have been dubbed “wolf warriors”. The name was inspired by two Chinese action movies of the same name that depict Chinese heroes battling foreign invaders at home and abroad.

For China and many others, this is just another slanderous attempt by foreigners to portray China as the world’s biggest threat. Martin acknowledges that Chinese diplomats are extremely disciplined and well educated. However, he fails to see the big picture of international relations in an age of globalization. China has achieved regional primacy and is sitting right behind the US in world power rankings. What he sees as “wolf warrior” diplomacy is eerily similar to American exceptionalism. China has become so big that it can and should be afforded the same privileges as the US. When the US engages in regime change and attempts to interfere in the domestic politics of Latin America and the Middle East, it is seen as only natural for such

a massive superpower. From a realist perspective, the US has an obligation to pursue its national interests in every way possible. Why is there a double standard now when it comes to China?

If America wants to compete with China in the 21st century, then it should stop throwing out words and pointing fingers at China. The US's greatest enemy is itself, acknowledging this will help to solve the problems that plague its political system. In the post 9/11 era, the US is struggling to come to terms with the liberal world order it worked so hard to create. US politicians wonder why developing countries choose to side with a bully nation of "wolf warrior" diplomats. Meanwhile, the US is hypocritically ignoring international agreements and delegitimizing international organizations. Gaining the favor of emerging markets will be crucial for continual economic growth. Most of these emerging markets are countries like Brazil and Argentina in South America, Indonesia and the Philippines in Southeast Asia, and other Middle Eastern states. "It is estimated that there are over 600 million middle class consumers in emerging markets with spending power expected to reach US \$20 billion by 2025. India is expected to become the world's largest middle class consumer market by 2030, surpassing not only China, but also the total population of the developed West." (Javalgi and Grossman)

Considering the history of US imperialism in these regions, it should come as no surprise when these economies choose to give its business to China. The future is not certain, the US has more than enough time, resources, and strategic intelligence to retain its number one position. America need only stop making excuses for itself, and realize that the bipartisan, long-term strategies during the Cold War are what allowed the US to win in its power struggle with the Soviet Union and come out on top.

Since China's reforming and opening-up in 1978, the US did well to integrate China into the era of globalization. Politically, economically, and culturally, China has been a key player in a number of international organizations and performed on a level that the US once found mutually beneficial. However, "in recent years, that strategy produced complications and complexities—helped usher in a new, more powerful China that did not conform to Western expectations." (Mahbubani 50) Once championed as the leader of globalization and a liberal world order, the US has been sharply declining in terms of global influence due to its arrogance and unwillingness to create a bipartisan, comprehensive plan to deal with China. As other countries have begun to have closer relations with China instead of the US, Americans are left wondering where they went wrong. The answer is quite simple. A strategic long-term plan is required in order to compete with China, however politicians in the US are unable to ever admit that there may come a day when China has more global influence than the US. Recognizing this as a probable outcome would be political suicide for any US politician. Ignoring the continuous rise of China will never lead to a discussion or push for a comprehensive plan to deal with China.

It is quite difficult to look back on Donald Trump's presidency for a number of reasons. His blatant disregard for US soft power and reverting back to unilateral approaches for foreign policy put the US significantly behind China. It is even more puzzling, then, to look back at the beginning of his presidency when Democrats were cheering on his trade and technology war against China. Both Senator Chuck Schumer and Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi agreed that China's "unfair" trade policy are crippling the US economy and job opportunities for Americans. (Mahbubani 50) In an ironic twist, despite the support for being

tough on China, President Trump's policies actually ended up serving Chinese interests. While the trade policies succeeded in angering Chinese politicians, the simple fact is that China was provided with many long-term dividends. Not only that, but what President Trump should have focused on was multilateral trade deficits. Economist Joseph Stiglitz puts it best, "A tariff against China simply diverts trade to some other developing country or emerging markets. Production will not, for the most part, come back to the US. And when it does come back, it will not bring back the jobs that were lost." (Stiglitz 136) Additionally, countries know how to retaliate to tariffs in ways that have political effects. Certain goods are politically sensitive and are more impactful in certain counties within US states. China can target goods that are important in Republican heavy counties to target Trump supporters and their standards of living. Multilateral trade has long demonstrated that it improves standards of living on a level that would've taken extraordinarily longer with bilateral trade. Thus, tariffs and trade wars will only lower US standards of living and create more opportunities for the Chinese economy and other emerging markets.

President Trump's chaotic and uncoordinated attacks are not limited to China. He imposed and threatened tariffs on friends and foes alike, including the EU, Canada, and Mexico. The Trump administration tariffs on steel and aluminum on its neighbors and friendly EU states also resulted in retaliatory tariffs against the US. (Lynch et al.) President Trump seemingly ignored the basic principles of economics and believed that arbitrarily imposing tariffs would create job opportunities and alleviate trade deficits. He failed in both these areas and has done irreversible damage to American prestige in global politics. Consider that it was American

economists who preached free trade and multilateral cooperation. In the aftermath of WWII and the Cold War, the US helped establish the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade and later the World Trade Organization. The world is now in consensus that protectionism has a negative effect on both economic growth and economic welfare. Whereas free trade enables mutually-beneficial economic growth and is especially important for developing economies in the Global South. Protectionist policies by the US are angering allies, enemies, and even neutral states from wanting to cooperate with the US. The US is losing soft power from all angles and China is picking up the pieces.

Donald Trump's presidency has caused even further erosion of trust in America's institutions of governance. This erosion of trust is extremely dangerous as it could expose America's biggest vulnerability: the US dollar. Because the dollar is the global reserve currency, Americans are able to enjoy the highest standard of living and fund a lifestyle well beyond their means. The same is true for the US government and its fiscal and trade deficits. These twin deficits are paid by borrowing money, which is not abnormal at all. However, once a country can no longer borrow money due to lack of trust in repayment, that country will face an economic crunch. On the other hand, "America can fund its twin deficits and pay for its excess expenditures by printing Treasury bills. The US Treasury only has to pay for the cost in paper...the rest of the world send real money (hard-earned cash) to buy the US treasury bills." (Mahbubani 58) The rest of the world buys these Treasury bills because most world trade is carried out in American dollars. The US dollar has been indispensable for the global economy and its resilience as the global reserve currency has not been overlooked. The world has placed

an enormous amount of trust in the US government to make well-informed decisions on the US dollar that benefit Americans as well as the 7.2 billion people outside America.

In recent decades and in particular the Trump presidency, this trust has begun to erode because of the weaponization of the US dollar. Mahbubani points out two examples of this and both are related to American efforts to isolate Iran. “In 2021, a British bank, Standard Chartered, was fined \$340 million because it had used the US dollar to finance a trade transaction with Iran” (Mahbubani 59) In this case, Standard Chartered hadn’t broken any British laws or any sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council by trying to trade with Iran. Since the US dollar is used in almost all international financial transaction, the US government was able to fine and punish the British bank. The second example is President Trump’s decision to pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which the 5 permanent members of the UNSC and Germany had agreed to with Iran. It is important to note that this agreement had been endorsed by the UNSC and thus became a binding agreement that all states had to comply with under international law. By deciding to pull out, President Trump violated international law and, once again, went against his EU allies. President Trump did not stop there, he also announced that if countries decide to continue trading with Iran, they would face sanctions. For European corporations with close ties to Iran, continuing to do business there could lead to heavy fines from US courts. (Regencia)

The EU realized that to solve this legal dilemma, it would have to set up a new financial system for non-dollar world trade. France, Germany, and the UK set up the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) for non-US dollar financial transactions. Although

INSTEX has only been used once for purchasing medical equipment to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains as a symbolic act of defiance against President Trump and a shift in the status quo of international financial transactions. (“INSTEX Successfully Concludes First Transaction”) The US dollar has never been more vulnerable as the global reserve currency. By sowing doubts of the US dollar and its government to act responsibly, the US is handing China another strategic win on its journey to become number one. It is not impossible to believe that one day the US dollar will no longer be the world’s global reserve currency.

The RMB will certainly never replace the US dollar, however technology has provided an interesting solution: cryptocurrency and blockchain technology. Although this is highly speculative, the rise in popularity of cryptocurrencies is no secret. Bitcoin and Ethereum both reached peak values in 2021, Facebook announced its own cryptocurrency in 2019, and China now has a Digital Yuan (not a cryptocurrency, but a digital version of the RMB controlled by the People’s Bank of China). (Samek and Vlasta) This sharp rise in recognition of cryptocurrencies in the public and private sector has granted it new levels of legitimacy. Ultimately, these types of currencies are not stable, and no countries have used alternative blockchain technology for international trade. However, this is just another opportunity for China to step in and offer alternatives to dealing with the US dollar.

Americans would like to believe that there are a small number of countries that would trust a Chinese alternative to the US dollar. In general, American remains ignorant of the fact that many countries trust and enjoy doing business with China, rather than the US. Currently, there are over 130 countries that have signed agreements with China on the BRI. As a global

endeavor, this is proof that China cooperates with other countries, even US allies such as Italy and Greece. (Sacks) Another example of US allies going against its wishes is the AIIB, an alternative to the IMF and World Bank. The UK, Germany, India, and Vietnam all joined as founding members. At one point it was the US creating multilateral institutions and agreements to help developing countries, now China is taking the helm and the rest of the world is ready to join in. The point is that even though the US dollar will remain the global reserve currency for the foreseeable future, it is under threat. And China is ready and willing to create an alternative that other countries will agree on. It is up to US politicians to not be complacent and realize that this great privilege should not be squandered by weaponizing the dollar.

If the US is going to work out a thoughtful and comprehensive long-term strategic plan to deal with China, then it has to do so on realistic assumptions about the future. The reality is that, the rest of the world is turning to China for aid while simultaneously realizing that the US has been abusing its privileges for too long. "If American thought leaders work out a comprehensive global strategy for America on the assumption that America is perceived by the world to be an inherently virtuous society, wouldn't this comprehensive strategy be flawed from its very inception?" (Mahbubani 77) Should America remain stagnant by not acknowledging a future where it may become number two, then it will completely blunder its geopolitical contest with China. Democracy should allow for more flexibility and open discussions, but the current political atmosphere in the US does not represent this. American politicians that want to successfully challenge China are doomed from the start if they admit that the US is in danger of becoming number two to China. Although politicians share most of the blame, a change in the

American public's psyche is required in order to begin the process of creating a long-term strategic plan to challenge China's rise.

American exceptionalism has long been the justification for American imperialism. The notion that the US occupies a special position amongst the rest of the world's nations is not without reason. After the Cold War, the US was at the height of its hegemonic power. At this point in time, US foreign policy was extremely well thought out and strategic. Rather than acting aggressively to get whatever it wanted, the US became more involved in multilateral negotiations and used its diplomatic powers to full effect. This, however, is simplifying and ignoring the true nature of American exceptionalism and its implications for building an American empire. The post WWII era saw two different sides to American foreign policy: one that was interested in building law-based multilateral institutions, and the other one that would do anything to secure narrow US national interests. The US engaged in what is now referred to as "neo-colonialism". Although it did not directly colonize other countries, it leveraged enormous military and economic might for brutal regime change operations, US-led invasions, and CIA-supported coups.

"In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States supported military coups throughout Latin American to bring down democracies deemed by the US strategists to be too far to the left. In the 1980s, the United States funded wars against left-wing governments in Central America and the Caribbean. From the 1990s to the 2010s, it fought several wars in Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa against Russian allies or other governments it disfavored (e.g., Iraq, Syria and Libya)." (Sachs 162)

It is therefore clear that the US is expansionist in nature and even without direct colonization, it has found new ways to interfere with the domestic politics of other countries. The exploitation of other countries has always been a part of American foreign policy. The War on Terror has only

exacerbated this issue and states have begun to realize that the US doesn't play by the same rules. It is absolutely true that no world superpower, even China, follows every international law all the time. However, developing countries are fed up with American exploitation and are ready to try their luck with China.

Despite what most Americans and even Europeans might believe, China has shown itself to not be an expansionist power. China has had the military means, technology, and regional primacy to engage in similar forms of neo-colonialism as the US. Yet, has chosen not to expand and upset regional peace and security in Asia. Chinese civilization is not inherently militaristic. Over the past two thousand years, China has never conquered overseas territories, as the European powers and US did. A great example of this is Australia, which was conquered by the far more distant British empire. Not only is Australia geographically much closer to China, but the Chinese navy was once the strongest in the world. This is often overlooked because of the Portuguese and Spanish dominating policies of colonization. However, Admiral Zheng He, a legendary Chinese explorer, led expeditions as far as East Africa on ships significantly larger than any other European counterpart. Some of his treasure ships, "were about four times bigger than the 'Santa Maria', the ship Columbus sailed to America on behalf of the Spanish crown." (Lorenz) Zheng He's voyages took place more than 200 years before Columbus sailed to North America. Even with an incredible naval advantage, China did not conquer or occupy any overseas or distant territories.

China's claims over neighboring territories, such as Taiwan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang are much more complicated. Most of China's territorial expansion took place during the

Yuan and Qing dynasties. The Yuan Dynasty was part of the Mongol empire, foreign invaders that took over China and expanded its borders with regions now known as Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. Tibet was also conquered by China under the Mongols and different Chinese governments have struggled over its status. The Qing Dynasty, ruled by the Manchu ethnic minority, formally recognized Xinjiang as a province of China. Mongols and Manchu people no longer hold the same power in China that they once did. About 91% of China's population is Han Chinese people. ("China's 2010 National Population Census") Thus, it is fair to say that in China's extremely long and complex history, Han Chinese have not been militaristic or expansionist. They have avoided going too far into the steppes and Western mountainous regions. In America's much shorter-lived history, it has created its own empire and engaged in colonialism on a level unfamiliar to Han Chinese people. American's see Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia as examples of Chinese imperial nature, when history proves that this is not the whole truth.

American culture values strong, militaristic figures that when confronted with a strategic challenge, favor militaristic options. When a leader is in power and threatens US influence, they must be removed by use of force. The US has proven this time and time again as previously mentioned with aggressive interventions in Latin America and the Middle East. There are no such examples with modern China. The legendary historical figure Sun Tzu is never praised for his military feats, but instead for being a skilled strategist. Other philosophical figures such as Confucius continue to have great influence in modern Chinese society. He too favors careful and thoughtful approaches to adversity. "The Master said, 'Those who fight tigers with their bare

hands, wade across rivers, and are willing to die without regret—I would not want their company. I would certainly want those who approach affairs with fearful caution and who like to lay careful plans for success.” (Confucius)

The one exceptional trigger for China to engage in a military conflict is Taiwan. The island presents numerous challenges to both China and the US. First, it is important to establish some facts about the history of Taiwan and its current relationship with China. Most Chinese people today are well aware of the century of humiliation that China suffered as a result of the Opium Wars and Japanese invasion. After WWII, much of what China had lost to Japan had been returned, along with the end of the ‘unequal treaties’ imposed on it during Manchu rule. Taiwan was the only lasting reminder of this century of humiliation. Even worse, Western allies have deceived China on more than one occasion about the status of Taiwan and other Chinese territories.

“Under the treaty [of Versailles], Germany had to give up its territories on Chinese soil. Along with all its other colonies around the world. The Chinese assumed that the territories would be restored to the young republic, as a reward for the efforts of the nearly 100,000 Chinese workers who had been sent to the Western Front in Europe to assist the British and French. But the territories were awarded instead to Japan. The Western Allies turned out to have made simultaneous secret agreements with both China and Japan in order to bring them both in on the Allied side.” (Mitter 77)

China had been promised the return of Shandong, the birthplace of Confucius, and the Western Allies failed to deliver. This ultimately led to massive protests and the May Fourth Movement.

Similarly, America has been inconsistent with its stance on Taiwan and any effort to support its complete independence brings back painful memories for Chinese people. “The U.S. side declared: The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan

Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.” (“Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China”) President Nixon acknowledged almost 50 years ago that a peaceful solution must be settled between China and Taiwan, any interference by the US would be going back on this promise. It has become increasingly apparent, especially with President Trump, that America can and will walk away from treaties and agreements if it within national interest to do so. What, then, is China supposed to do if threatened by US military action? John Bolton, former national security advisor to President Trump, said that “It is a big mistake for us to grant any validity to international law even when it may seem in our short-term interest to do so—because, over the long term, the goal of those who think that international law really means anything are those who want to constrict the United States.” (Nast) It seems that American exceptionalism is still quite prominent in the rhetoric of people in Washington. Such attitudes show China that there is real danger of the US getting too involved with the status of Taiwan. Any Chinese leader that is weak on Taiwan is politically vulnerable, just as American politicians are who float the idea that China is going to overtake the US. Therefore, Bolton and others that believe the US to be above international law, especially in regards to its agreements with China on Taiwan, will be the driving force in China taking military action.

It is completely understandable that the US has a strong desire for democracy to prevail in Taiwan. It is an experimentation of how Chinese culture and society interacts with democracy, rather than authoritarianism. American actions that provoke military responses of China are

within neither nations' interests, and it is the Taiwanese people that will suffer the most. Should the US act nobly in its ambitions to protect Taiwan and Chinese democracy, then it must leave Taiwan alone. Taiwan is still a strategic ally of the US and close relations should of course be maintained, but to provoke China on this issue in any way would be a massive mistake.

There are two major constraints on an unprovoked invasion of China. The first is the Taiwan Relations Act, which explicitly says that the US, "shall maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan." ("H.R.2479 - 96th Congress (1979-1980): Taiwan Relations Act") If China decides to invade Taiwan without provocation, then the US is obliged to protect it. A strong American stance against interfering with the politics of China and Taiwan would reduce tensions in the South China Sea. Additionally, it is actually in China's national interest to see how the Chinese democracy experimentation will play out. America could want nothing more than Beijing picking up on the advantages of democracy. This is a perfect test for American politicians to practice patience and long-term strategic goals.

There are some recent examples of China overstepping its boundaries, particularly in the South China Sea. The Paracel and Spratly Islands are highly disputed maritime features which are cause for concern. China has engaged in land reclamation and constructed new features in the area in order to claim the territorial waters around them. "Under international law, China is wrong to claim that the waters surrounding those features are territorial waters, and America is right in insisting that they are international waters." (Mahbubani 103) There are diplomatic solutions to solving this difference of views. One being the Permanent Court of Arbitration in

The Hauge. China is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which makes it illegal for it to claim these waters. The US then is faced with the option of parading American naval vessels to prove that they are international waters, or settle this dispute on more peaceful terms. Unfortunately, the US routinely carries out naval patrols twelve miles off Chinese shores. Under international law, the US Navy is perfectly justified in doing so, but why waste military resources when international agreements exist to facilitate peaceful resolutions. When China oversteps its boundaries, the US must take the diplomatic approach, and show the world that it respects international law better than China.

China's newfound confidence makes it seem as if the term "wolf warrior" diplomacy is warranted. It continues to be aggressive with its policies in the South China Sea and has ignored its fair share of international law. However, when countries are asked to pick a side in this geopolitical competition, China is becoming the more popular choice. How can Middle Eastern countries ever side with the US on issues after the events of the War on Terror? Abu Ghraib, torture in Guantanamo Bay, and other US human rights abuses will not be forgotten. The US's ability to seek out diplomatic options in the Middle East has weakened significantly since 9/11. More recently, the US has left Afghanistan in shambles, refusing once again to take responsibility for its actions and help rebuild a nation it destroyed. This sentiment extends to the African continent as well, where the US has engaged in similar atrocities. The US can't even maintain close relations with its South American neighbors, of course due to military interventions and political meddling. Disregarding US warnings, many Latin American countries including Argentina, Cuba, Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay are joining the BRI. These countries

are placing their trust in China to provide infrastructural guidance, without getting involved with domestic politics.

Even with a complicated regional history, China has worked towards fostering closer ties with Southeast Asia. As China moves towards regional primacy, Southeast Asian countries trust that China will remain a powerful ally for economic growth. The founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was a major stepping stone for regional peace and security. Such an organization would certainly anger a country that is trying to take over the entire region. Contrarily, China has participated more and more with ASEAN and shown sincerity and good will. China partakes in multiple ASEAN Regional Forums and has granted full dialogue partnership with the organization. Even during times of crisis, China steps up to help Southeast Asia, “In the wake of the [Asian Financial] crisis, China adopted a proactive fiscal policy and pledged not to devalue the RMB. This decision put China under huge pressure. However, the pressure and hurt to China also won applause and confidence from its vulnerable and vacillating neighbors. China's risk-taking decision successfully built up a positive image. It was a major event that help[ed] trust-building between China and ASEAN countries, which showed that China would like to shoulder burdens, to provide public goods, and to be a responsible partner to the region.” (Haitao) China and ASEAN came out of this crisis stronger and more secure. Following the financial crisis, the continued cooperation ushered in incredible economic growth in the first decade of the 21st century. ASEAN's trust in China, and vice versa, is the result of deliberate diplomatic strategies that have allowed the region to exist peacefully next to an international super power. Why is this not the case with the US and Latin America? The US has

been the dominant power in North and South America since the end of WWII. Yet, it spent an enormous amount of time and resources into trying to enact regime changes in Latin America. Had China went down the same path and supported guerilla groups in Southeast Asia, the close ASEAN and China relationship would be nonexistent today.

ASEAN faces new challenges as China is no longer rising towards, but has achieved superpower status. Economic prosperity in the region is tied to its trade with China. On the other hand, China's aggression in the South China Sea is a growing national security concern. This presents the region with an interesting dilemma: relying on China for economic growth, while relying on the US for national security. From a realist perspective, ASEAN is obliged to doubt the true nature of China's good neighbor policies. The anarchic international system is full of deception, it is logical of great powers to expand exert influence over a wider range. As previously mentioned, it is not within Chinese political culture to colonize overseas territories or seek military action. However, regardless of how benevolent China may be, rising distrust of a state that is growing evermore powerful and wealthy is only natural. Regardless of any harsh behavior from Chinese diplomats, "to maintain a peaceful and stable environment is still the highest priority of China's foreign policy. China's approaches to the territorial and maritime disputes are conditioned by and contingent on several factors, such as the national goal of rejuvenating the Chinese nation, the US pivot to Asia and the interaction between China and other claimants. Therefore, it's not so clear yet to identify which one is the cause and which one is the result." (Haitao) What is viewed by the US and other Western nations as threatening is simply China protecting its own national interests. If China appears weak on maritime disputes,

then it will lose prestige and respect, features that the Chinese highly value. Efforts to show that China is any more aggressive than the US are difficult to find truth in. As a new world superpower that has every right to protect and preserve its power, China is acting accordingly, while also facilitating economic growth and a harmonious relationship with ASEAN.

Taking into account military spending, lobbying, and operations, it would appear that the US is the greater threat to regional peace in Southeast Asia. In theory, a country which has the largest strategic thinking industry in the world should be able to immune to the problem of groupthink. American politics is the most polarized it has ever been and yet it has the highest percentage of social science publications in the world. (White) How can a country with so much academic support around political science and economics fail to come up with bipartisan strategic solutions to challenge China? The answer lies in the lobbying efforts of greedy politicians and military contractors. Stephen Walt remarks that:

“Threat inflation also prevails because individuals and groups with an interest in exaggerating threats are more numerous and better funded than those who seek to debunk them, and they often enjoy greater political prestige. The entire military-industrial complex has obvious incentives to overstate foreign dangers in order to persuade the body politic to give it additional resources. Hawkish think tanks get generous support from defense contractors and individuals; by comparison, groups offering less frightening appraisals are generally less well-funded and less influential.” (Mahbubani 114)

The problem of groupthink has shown itself on several occasions to influence US foreign policy. The most obvious being the Iraq War, when nearly every US ally warned that such a war would be disastrous for the entire Middle East. In the end, the US decided to ignore these warnings and proceeded to disregard international law because of a threat that it had blown out of proportion. And just as Walt stated, the profits for certain American businesses and politicians, such as

Halliburton, its subsidies, and former Vice President Dick Cheney were tremendous.

(Rosenbaum) China does not have a military complex that rewards threat inflation in order to gain profit. ASEAN should therefore be cautious of trusting the US for national security purposes.

“Wolf warrior” diplomacy is based on ignorance. Not only for the values of Chinese civilization, but for the changing world order. Every nation views itself as exceptional in one way or another, but what makes American exceptionalism unique is its dangerous use in the justification of regime change and imperialism. Both of which China has not engaged in on the same level. In the end, the US has more than enough time, resources, and strategic intelligence to retain its number one position. Begin with ending the regression of international law, embrace globalization and the liberal world order that the US was once committed to. Maybe then, America will stop gifting China free strategic advantages and start taking them for itself. Second, realize that China’s rise is not something that can be stopped. Learn what values are most important to Chinese culture and society, as these values are also prevalent in its foreign policy. Only then can the US formulate effective strategies to impede China’s challenge for its number one position.

Ultimately, it is the entire world that will benefit from the US and China gaining a healthier level of understanding. The US and China need to get along for collective action problems like global warming, wealth inequality, peace and security, etc. Neither country will survive if they cannot acknowledge each other’s differences and respect the desire for expanding influence without imperialism. There is always the potential for deceit and cheating, but that is

why international organizations and multilateralism are essential. They are the only proven way to reduce global conflicts and facilitate cooperation in an otherwise disconnected world. China would be wise to take a step back and realize that there is some truth in the criticism of its “wolf warrior” diplomacy. Recognize the damage that will come from being too aggressive in diplomatic efforts and in sensitive areas such as the South China Sea. Should the US continue its streak of degenerative strategic thinking, disregard for multilateralism, and ignorance of the history of Chinese civilization, it will hand China the win. For China, this is a test of patience and restraint, values already ingrained in the hearts and minds of China.

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