

Senior United States Foreign Service and Naval Officer Attitudes toward China

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by

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Cover photo: In October 2016, Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Scott Swift, alongside his wife, Trish, met with the People's Liberation Army Navy of China (PLAN) East Sea Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Su Zhiqian, in Shanghai, China. Pictured alongside ADM Swift are Pacific Fleet N5 desk officer LCDR Jimmy Wang (center) and Pacific Fleet Foreign Policy Advisor Dr. David Greenberg (far left). Photo by the U.S. Navy.

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Abstract

This research investigates the views of senior foreign service and naval officers toward China. The authors conducted surveys of senior foreign service and naval officers in the winter of 2016-17. The results of their survey and research as well as policy recommendations, are included.

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Our sincere thanks go to the hundreds of senior foreign service and naval officers we contacted during our research. All are in high-demand positions of leadership and command and spared some of their precious time to complete our survey. Some went above and beyond our request, sharing additional thoughts, all of which were extremely helpful.

We would also like to thank our respective services and institutions for their time, counsel, and “a clean, well-lighted place” to think, read, discuss, and eventually (after many pertinent discussions over coffee) write. This year has been extremely beneficial to our development, as it will be the last time for many years we will have to think deeply about complex national security topics and strategy before stepping back “into the breach” in operational assignments.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank our wonderful spouses and children for their continual sacrifice and support. We will look back on this year as one of our most fortunate, not only for the academic freedom and time to reflect on strategy but also for the time we spent with our young families, who see far too little of us when we are in the field.

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Background and Introduction

The authors had the great pleasure of working together at the US Pacific Fleet, directly supporting the fleet's commander and accompanying him on his travel overseas. In internal meetings and in dozens of engagements with foreign counterparts, we found a preoccupation with China's rise and behavior, particularly with its conduct in the maritime realm. We met high-ranking military officers who, if not convinced that the United States eventually would fight a war against China, at least felt a need to be prepared for that possibility. Meanwhile, many civilian policy makers spoke of a desire and need to work cooperatively with China.

Clearly, the U.S.-China relationship was important and complex. Managing the relationship required enormous attention and energy. It was less clear, however, whether the US military and diplomatic corps could agree on an approach to China, even as the Obama administration pursued a whole-of-government policy of "rebalancing" to the Pacific.

The US Navy and the US Foreign Service have vastly different cultures. We wanted to examine how much common ground our organizations could find in their views on China, even as we knew diverse viewpoints existed within each service. ("What are you guys doing out there," cried a senior captain who was working in a navy budget shop, "you really think we are going to need a dry dock in Guam? We aren't going to war with China!")

We decided to do a survey of senior foreign service and navy officers to answer key questions on China. Where did China rank in terms of bilateral importance? Was the threat from China likely to lead to war? Could China be trusted? What should the United States policy toward China be in the future?

Fortunately, our organizations sent us from the Pacific Fleet to fellowship positions in Honolulu and Stanford, giving us an opportunity to reach out to senior officers with experience in and knowledge of the Indo-Asia-Pacific area of responsibility. We found enlightening results that provide reason for optimism; despite their cultural differences, the navy and foreign service have basically similar (largely pragmatic, fairly skeptical, but also internally diverse) outlooks on China. From these results flow some simple and clear recommendations.

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Summary of Findings

Questionnaires completed by dozens of high-ranking US Foreign Service and US Navy officers with professional experience relating to East Asia show that

- Both the Foreign Service and the Navy have diverse views on China within their organizations, but, where there is an internal consensus, the perspectives of the upper ranks of the foreign service and the navy are quite similar.
- A majority of foreign service and navy respondents believe that military conflict between the United States and China is unlikely, but a strong majority from both services sees China as a threat to its neighbors.
- More than three-quarters of foreign service and navy respondents expressed distrust of China. The most common term high-ranking officers from both services selected to describe China, vis-à-vis the United States, was “competitor.” Not a single respondent described China as a “friend.”
- Approximately 60 percent of both foreign service and navy respondents rated the economic dimension as the most important aspect of the US-China relationship.
- More than 80 percent of respondents from both services believe the United States needs Chinese cooperation on global issues.
- A majority of respondents from both services envision China as a hegemonic country in the Western Pacific within twenty years.
- More than two-thirds of foreign service and navy high-ranking officers believe that the United States can have friendly relations with a China led by the Communist Party.
- A majority of foreign service and navy officers believe cooperative military-to-military engagement with China provides net benefits to the United States.
- A majority of respondents from both services felt that the United States does not take a comprehensive, long-term approach toward relations with China.

- There was no consensus within either service on the best future policy toward China, although only one-quarter of high-ranking foreign service officers and virtually no high-ranking navy officers recommended continuing without change the China policy in effect at the end of President Obama's administration. Of those expressing an opinion on how to change China policy, more respondents (from both services) favored a more confrontational approach than favored a more cooperative approach.

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Methodology and Timeline

We formulated nineteen questions to elicit respondents' views on China. Most questions presented a statement on China and asked the respondent to rate his or her agreement or disagreement, using a 7-point scale ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (7). We sent the questionnaire to high-ranking navy and foreign service officers on December 1, 2016. We continued collecting responses until early February 2017. The vast majority of foreign service officers' replies were received by the end of December, as were a majority of the navy officers' replies. Most respondents replied anonymously using Google Forms; some sent a Microsoft Word document via e-mail.

Significant China-related events during this time frame included

- On December 2, President-elect Trump spoke by phone with President Tsai Ing-wen, generating significant media commentary on US government policies regarding the status of Taiwan.
- On December 16, personnel on a Chinese navy ship in the South China Sea seized (and soon thereafter returned) a US Navy unmanned underwater vehicle.
- Throughout our data collection period, US media provided commentary on the likelihood of a US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the implications of this for the US and Asian economies. On January 23, President Trump signed an executive order directing the US Trade Representative to withdraw the United States as a signatory to the TPP.

The foreign service sample

We sent our questionnaire to 127 foreign service officers with the rank of FS-1 (equivalent to a navy O-6) or higher.¹ All were serving (or in the past three years had served) either in East Asia or in positions with responsibilities focused largely on East Asia. Seven of the Washington-based officers held positions of deputy assistant secretary or higher. Another twenty of the officers were serving as or had previously served as ambassadors. Political and economic officers were disproportionately represented in our sample. We received sixty-two replies, of

¹ An additional respondent turned out to be an FS-2 (O-5 equivalent) officer, although holding a position of significant responsibility of the sort commonly given to FS-1s.

which twenty-nine had served (or were serving) a tour of duty in mainland China; four others had not served on the mainland but had been posted in Hong Kong or Taiwan.

The navy sample

We sent our questionnaire to more than 130 naval officers with the rank of captain (O-6) or higher. All the navy officers had operational experience in the Indo-Pacific-Area as defined by tours on the West Coast of the United States, Hawaii, Guam, Japan, Korea, or other western Pacific deployment. All of the major operational bases that send units on deployment to the Pacific were represented. Of those sampled, there were more than forty officers with the rank of flag officer (O-7 to O-10). Our sample included eight three- or four-star admirals. Surface, subsurface, aviation, intel, and foreign area officers were well represented on the survey. We received forty-four replies.

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Survey Results

China's Importance

We asked navy and foreign service officers, “Of all the United States’ bilateral relationships, what ranking in importance do you give to the US relationship with China?” A plurality of both samples ranked the relationship with China as the United States’ most important, although more foreign service officers than navy officers gave China top priority. Their replies were as follows: ²

Q: Ranking of the US-China Relationship	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
#1	34 (55%)	18 (40%)
#2	7 (11%)	10 (23%)
#3	10 (16%)	6 (14%)
#4 or lower	11 (18%)	10 (23%)

We asked respondents to identify the most important dimension of the US-China relationship, suggesting either “cultural,” “diplomatic,” “economic,” or “security” aspects. We also provided an opportunity to name any other dimension the respondent might want to suggest. Nearly identical majorities of both the foreign service and navy samples identified the economic dimension as the most important. By a small percentage margin, more foreign service officers than navy officers gave top priority to the security dimension. Responses were as follows:

Q: Most Important Dimension	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Economic	37 (60%)	26 (59%)
Security	17 (27%)	10 (23%)
Diplomatic	7 (11%)	7 (16%)
Other	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

² In some tables, percentages don’t add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

As another way of assessing China’s importance, we asked respondents’ views of the following statement: “**Within 20 years, China will be a hegemonic country in the Western Pacific.**” A majority of both samples agreed with the projection of China as a regional hegemon.

Q: China as a Future Hegemon	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	2 (2%)	1 (2%)
Disagree (2)	8 (13%)	5 (11%)
Slightly disagree (3)	8 (13%)	5 (11%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	5 (8%)	4 (9%)
Slightly agree (5)	14 (23%)	13 (30%)
Agree (6)	16 (26%)	13 (30%)
Strongly agree (7)	9 (15%)	3 (7%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 4.7; navy: 4.7)

We also asked views on the US. dependence on Chinese cooperation, presenting the statement, “**The United States needs Chinese cooperation on global issues.**” Overwhelmingly, both foreign service and navy officers agreed that Chinese cooperation is essential.

Q: United States Needs Chinese Cooperation	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Disagree (2)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)
Slightly disagree (3)	2 (3%)	2 (5%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Slightly agree (5)	12 (19%)	15 (34%)
Agree (6)	30 (48%)	21 (48%)
Strongly agree (7)	16 (26%)	3 (7%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 5.8; navy: 5.3)

China as a Threat

We elicited respondents' views on the likelihood of a clash with the United States, asking their views on the statement “**Military conflict between the United States and China is likely.**” A majority of both samples disagreed with that statement.

Q: US-China military conflict is likely	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)
Disagree (2)	21 (34%)	9 (20%)
Slightly disagree (3)	15 (25%)	14 (32%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	8 (13%)	7 (16%)
Slightly agree (5)	13 (21%)	9 (20%)
Agree (6)	3 (5%)	3 (7%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 3.3; navy: 3.6)

Despite a consensus view that a US-China military clash is unlikely, strong majorities of both samples (89% and 93%) agreed with a related statement: “**China poses a threat to its neighbors.**”

Q: China Is a Threat to Neighbors	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Disagree (2)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)
Slightly disagree (3)	3 (5%)	0 (0%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)
Slightly agree (5)	20 (32%)	9 (20%)
Agree (6)	27 (44%)	26 (59%)
Strongly agree (7)	8 (13%)	6 (14%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 5.5; navy: 5.7)

To identify views on China’s coerciveness or “bullying” in interactions with other countries, we presented the following statement “**In its foreign interactions, China usually favors using ‘carrots’ rather than ‘sticks.’**” We found no consensus on this statement—both foreign service officers and their navy counterparts were evenly split. A handful of people claiming to be neutral or not to hold an opinion precluded majority agreement or disagreement with the carrots-over-sticks statement.

Q: China Favors Carrots over Sticks	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Disagree (2)	10 (16%)	9 (20%)
Slightly disagree (3)	18 (29%)	9 (20%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	4 (6%)	5 (11%)
Slightly agree (5)	12 (19%)	14 (32%)
Agree (6)	13 (21%)	5 (11%)
Strongly agree (7)	4 (6%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 4.1; navy: 3.8)

To better understand respondents’ overall impressions of China, we asked them to identify the term that best characterizes China as it relates to the United States. We offered the following options: friend, partner, competitor, rival, and adversary. Our form allowed respondents to select “Other” and then provide a term of their own choosing, or they could say that “The U.S.-China relationship is too complex to be categorized.”

The most popular term (by far) was competitor. No respondent from either sample identified China as a friend of the United States. Nevertheless, few selected the most antagonistic option of adversary. (More foreign service officers than navy officers chose that term.) The results appear below; the navy column omits data from one respondent who said that China fit each of our listed categories except friend. (That response was the only one that categorized China as a partner of the United States.)

Q: Term for China	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Competitor	31 (50%)	18 (41%)
Rival	12 (19%)	8 (18%)
Adversary	3 (5%)	1 (2%)
Cannot categorize	16 (26%)	16 (36%)

Trust of China

To elicit views on China’s trustworthiness, our questionnaire included a direct statement for consideration: “China can be trusted.” Overwhelmingly, respondents of both services disagreed:

Q: China Can Be trusted	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	8 (13%)	6 (14%)
Disagree (2)	22 (35%)	20 (45%)
Slightly disagree (3)	17 (27%)	9 (20%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	6 (10%)	5 (11%)
Slightly agree (5)	6 (10%)	3 (7%)
Agree (6)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 2.8; navy: 2.6)

Our questionnaire provided two other statements intended to explore ways in which people did or did not trust China. These were “For the most part, China abides by international standards of behavior,” and “China usually honors international agreements.” A majority of both foreign service and navy officers disagreed with those statements. Nevertheless, 39 percent of foreign service respondents agreed that China honors international agreements, compared to only 19 percent of foreign service officers who felt that China abides by international standards. This difference implies a degree of belief within the foreign service that formal international agreements can have a positive influence on Chinese behavior.

Q: China Abides by International Standards	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	6 (10%)	4 (9%)
Disagree (2)	23 (37%)	27 (61%)
Slightly disagree (3)	21 (34%)	7 (16%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)
Slightly agree (5)	10 (16%)	4 (9%)
Agree (6)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 2.9; navy: 2.4)

Q: China Honors Agreements	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	3 (5%)	3 (7%)
Disagree (2)	9 (15%)	18 (41%)
Slightly disagree (3)	21 (34%)	13 (30%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	5 (8%)	5 (11%)
Slightly agree (5)	15 (24%)	5 (11%)
Agree (6)	9 (15%)	0 (0%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 3.8; navy: 2.8)

We asked officers to respond to this statement: “[The United States should welcome China growing stronger.](#)” We found a wide range of views, with only slightly more people in each sample negatively inclined toward the prospect of a stronger China.

Q: United States Should Welcome Stronger China	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	3 (5%)	3 (7%)
Disagree (2)	14 (23%)	9 (20%)
Slightly disagree (3)	15 (24%)	9 (20%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	8 (13%)	5 (11%)
Slightly agree (5)	15 (24%)	8 (18%)
Agree (6)	7 (11%)	9 (20%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 3.6; navy: 3.8)

This finding may appear discordant: most officers distrust China and assess it is a threat to its neighbors, and yet a meaningful number welcome China’s growing strength. Our respondents may have been reflecting US policy makers’ oft-repeated public statements welcoming the rise of China.³

³ For example President Obama said in 2012: “I have always emphasized that we welcome China’s peaceful rise, that we believe that a strong and prosperous China is one that can help to bring stability and prosperity to the region and to the world.” (Quoted in “Obama, Xi Jinping Pledge Strengthened Ties, Candor,” by Dan Robinson, in VOA news, February 13, 2012, retrieved on March 7, 2017, from www.voanews.com/a/chinas-xi-begins-us-visit-139242748/152027.html.)

Outlook for US-China Relations

Given a consensus view that China is not trustworthy, it is sensible to wonder whether there is hope for positively influencing Chinese behavior. We asked respondents' views on the following statement: “Chinese government behavior can be shaped through cooperative engagement.” This was one of only a few areas where we saw meaningful disagreement between foreign service and navy officers: 63 percent of foreign service respondents believed engagement could shape China’s behavior; 61 percent of navy officers disagreed.

Q: China Can Be shaped through Engagement	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	2 (3%)	5 (11%)
Disagree (2)	3 (5%)	14 (32%)
Slightly disagree (3)	14 (23%)	8 (18%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	4 (6%)	3 (7%)
Slightly agree (5)	23 (37%)	12 (27%)
Agree (6)	15 (24%)	1 (2%)
Strongly agree (7)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 4.5; navy: 3.2)

We asked also about the value of military engagement with China. The statement we provided was “Military-to-military cooperative engagement with China provides net benefits to the United States.” Although more foreign service officers than navy officers viewed military engagement positively (81% and 64%, respectively), the number of navy officers favoring military engagement was larger than the number that had expressed faith in the US ability to shape China’s behavior through engagement, as described above (64% vs. 31%). This implies that navy officers believe the benefits of military engagement lie not solely in shaping Chinese behavior but also in deepening US understanding of China’s military.⁴

⁴ For example, Pacific Fleet Commander admiral Scott Swift, discussing Chinese participation in the rim of the Pacific exercise, said, “I think we have a much higher probability of understanding what Chinese goals are by interacting with their sailors on a regular basis as we do throughout RIMPAC.” (Quoted in “The U.S. and India Are Deepening Military Ties—and China Is Watching,” by Dan Lamothe, in the *Washington Post*, March 2, 2016, retrieved on March 7, 2017 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/03/02/the-u-s-and-india-are-deepening-military-ties-and-china-is-watching/>.)

Q: Military Engagement Benefits the United States	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)
Disagree (2)	3 (5%)	7 (16%)
Slightly disagree (3)	4 (6%)	5 (11%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	4 (6%)	2 (5%)
Slightly agree (5)	20 (32%)	14 (32%)
Agree (6)	24 (39%)	12 (27%)
Strongly agree (7)	6 (10%)	2 (5%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 5.2; navy: 4.4)

We also asked for a long-term outlook, suggesting that “**In twenty years, US-China relations will likely be friendly and cooperative.**” More than a quarter of both samples selected “neutral / don't know,” but clear majorities of those who did have views on the long-term relationship were pessimistic.

Q: US-China Friendly in Twenty Years	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	3 (5%)	4 (9%)
Disagree (2)	9 (15%)	9 (20%)
Slightly disagree (3)	22 (35%)	11 (25%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	16 (26%)	14 (32%)
Slightly agree (5)	9 (15%)	4 (9%)
Agree (6)	3 (5%)	2 (5%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 3.5; navy: 3.3)

To determine whether ideology might be a fundamental cause of US-China friction, we solicited a reaction to this statement: “[The United States can have friendly, cooperative relations with a China led by the Communist Party.](#)” Clear majorities of both samples agreed with the statement, indicating that, whatever difficulties exist between the United States and China, they are not seen as intrinsically tied to China’s ruling party.

Q: United States Can Be Friendly with Communist China	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Disagree (2)	4 (6%)	5 (11%)
Slightly disagree (3)	13 (21%)	2 (5%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	3 (5%)	5 (11%)
Slightly agree (5)	19 (31%)	17 (39%)
Agree (6)	21 (34%)	15 (34%)
Strongly agree (7)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 4.6; navy: 4.8)

Policy Satisfaction

Neither foreign service nor navy officers appeared satisfied with overall US policies toward China at the time of the survey. We presented two statements on this topic. The first asked respondents their view on the statement, “[The U.S. government takes a comprehensive, long-term approach toward relations with China.](#)” A majority of both samples disagreed with that statement; disagreement was particularly strong among navy officers (85 percent). The data are as follows:

Q: US China policy Is Comprehensive	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	6 (10%)	10 (23%)
Disagree (2)	16 (26%)	17 (39%)
Slightly disagree (3)	16 (26%)	10 (23%)
Neutral / don’t know (4)	1 (2%)	4 (9%)
Slightly agree (5)	15 (24%)	2 (5%)
Agree (6)	7 (11%)	1 (2%)
Strongly agree (7)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 3.5; navy: 2.4)

Our second policy-related question asked officers to complete the following sentence: “[Under the next president, it would be good for the US approach toward China to...](#)” We offered the following options: “continue as is,” “be more cooperative with China,” “be more confrontational toward China,” and “be different but I’m not sure how.” Additionally, recognizing the sensitivity of foreign service and navy officers opining on US policy, we offered another option: “I prefer not to respond.”

A plurality of respondents from both services favored a more confrontational stance toward China. Dissatisfaction with the existing policy appeared particularly high in the Navy, as only one respondent advocated continuing the US-China policy as it existed at the time of our research, although relatively more navy officers than foreign service officers advocated a more cooperative approach with China. The data are as follows:

Q: Policy Recommendation	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Continue as is	16 (26%)	1 (2%)
Be more cooperative	3 (5%)	10 (23%)
Be more confrontational	20 (32%)	19 (43%)
Be different (unsure how)	15 (24%)	13 (30%)
Prefer not to respond	8 (13%)	1 (2%)

Assessments of Agency Views

Although our findings indicate that foreign service and navy officers have few areas of disagreement on China, our respondents tended to believe that the two communities saw China differently. We presented the statement “[The US State Department and the US Navy share a common view of China.](#)” A plurality of respondents from both services expected divergent views:

Q: State and Navy Have a Common View	Number of Foreign Service Responses	Number of Navy Responses
Strongly disagree (1)	4 (6%)	4 (9%)
Disagree (2)	11 (18%)	13 (30%)
Slightly disagree (3)	14 (23%)	10 (23%)
Neutral / don't know (4)	16 (26%)	8 (18%)
Slightly agree (5)	8 (13%)	7 (16%)
Agree (6)	9 (15%)	2 (5%)
Strongly agree (7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

(Average reply: foreign service: 3.6; navy: 3.2)

Impact of Foreign Service postings in mainland China

Our questionnaire also enabled us to compare foreign service officers who had been posted in mainland China with those who had no such assignments. We found no significant differences between the views of the two subsets of foreign service officers.

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Recommendations

We are confident that our sample is representative of the upper levels of the US Navy and US Foreign Service, but we recognize there are far more stakeholders in the US-China relationship than just our two organizations. Therefore, although we consider our respondents' views significant, we recognize US policy must take many other perspectives into account. Nevertheless, our research supports the following recommendations to improve our strategic relationship with China and with the United States' allies, friends, and partners in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

1. The top ranks of the foreign service and navy believe that China is important to the United States and could become the hegemonic power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. We cannot ignore China's historic rise and potential dominance over a strategic region that encompasses US treaty allies and is critical to the US economy. The current administration has stated that its predecessor's "rebalance to the Pacific" is now over, at least under that specific name. **But US interests in Asia remain vital, and we must replace the rebalance with a new policy.** The US government should develop, publish, and promote a long-term, comprehensive policy that addresses our relationship and goals with China. This all-encompassing policy (and accompanying strategies) should address the economic, diplomatic, military, and other dimensions of the relationship.
2. Our respondents' perception that China is a threat to its neighbors underlines the need to manage relations with China in a regional context, not only bilaterally. **The United States should continue to engage intensively with other countries in the Indo-Asia-Pacific diplomatically, militarily, and economically, always cognizant of China's impact on the regional environment.** If China is going to drive other countries in the region toward the United States, we should be prepared to capitalize on this by continuing to build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.
3. Our respondents felt the most important aspect of the US relationship with China was economic, even as many advocated a more confrontational US approach. **Although the United States and China will remain economically intertwined for the foreseeable future, the US government may want to reduce economic dependency on China, as such dependency constrains the US ability to respond to Chinese threats against US allies and partners.** The United States should expand economic engagement with other countries in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, particularly with those that prefer engagement in accordance with

the rule-based order that has helped to provide prosperity since the end of World War II. If other governments share our respondents' perception that China is untrustworthy and does not abide by international standards of behavior, this indicates one area in which the United States has a competitive advantage over China.

4. Although most of our respondents distrusted China, they also felt that the United States needed Chinese cooperation and also needed to continue to military engagement. **Military engagement, like diplomatic interaction, needs to continue regardless of where the US-China relationship goes.** To put a slight twist on a saying often attributed to ancient Chinese General Sun-Tzu, "keep your friends close and your competitors closer." Continued engagement with China enables a better understanding of China's motives and capabilities.

5. The finding that foreign service and navy officers believe the United States can have cooperative relations with China while the Communist Party remains in power should reassure Chinese officials that US officials are not secretly focusing on "regime change" in China. **Nevertheless, Chinese officials should recognize US officials' deep distrust of the Chinese government and, accordingly, should undertake extra efforts to demonstrate sincerity and build trust with US counterparts.**

6. Finally, we are encouraged by the similarity in US Navy and US Foreign Service attitudes toward China, despite our respondents' expectations of divergent views. **Recognition of the two services' concordant beliefs, and of each service's understanding of the equities that may seem to be in the traditional sphere of the other, should predispose naval officers and diplomats toward viewing the other service as a partner rather than as a rival or adversary in managing US-China relations.**

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Conclusion

The US relationship with China is complex but crucial to US prosperity and security. China could become a hegemonic power in a critical region that encompasses many of our allies, friends, and partners. We need to get this relationship right.

With that in mind, we surveyed senior diplomats and naval officers who have been operating in and thinking about the region for many years. We conducted this survey in the final months of President Obama's administration, with the idea of informing the conversation as the new administration develops its policy toward China and the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

Most of our respondents believed that our most important bilateral relationship is that with China. Most felt that the most important dimension of our relationship was economic. Most assessed that China will be the hegemonic country in the Western Pacific and that the United States needs to cooperate with China. US military conflict with China appeared unlikely, but most respondents thought China posed a threat to its neighbors, many of which are longtime allies and trading partners of the United States. China, which was characterized by most as a competitor, was found not to be trustworthy and appears not to honor international standards or agreements. Respondents believed that we should continue military-to-military engagements, even though many did not think our relationship would be friendly and cooperative in the future.

Although the United States has a long history in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, there is a need to develop a new, improved grand strategy that will address America's long-term interests in Asia. If it continues the type of assertive, confrontational behavior that has been increasingly common in recent years, China may continue to push its neighbors in our direction, and we should welcome them. The United States may be able to benefit from new economic arrangements with the other countries in the region that value the established international rule-based order. Military engagement with China should continue, to ensure we understand intentions and prevent miscalculations that could be costly. Chinese officials should undertake extra efforts to build trust with US counterparts. Foreign service and navy officers should be predisposed toward viewing the other service as a partner in managing US-China relations.

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