

Xi Jinping's Address to the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs: Assessing and Advancing Major-Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics

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Xi Jinping's speech before the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs—held November 28–29, 2014, in Beijing—marks the most comprehensive expression yet of the current Chinese leadership's more activist and security-oriented approach to PRC diplomacy. Through this speech and others, Xi has taken many long-standing Chinese assessments of the international and regional order, as well as the increased influence on and exposure of China to that order, and redefined and expanded the function of Chinese diplomacy. Xi, along with many authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese observers, presents diplomacy as an instrument for the effective application of Chinese power in support of an ambitious, long-term, and more strategic foreign policy agenda. Ultimately, this suggests that Beijing will increasingly attempt to alter some of the foreign policy processes and power relationships that have defined the political, military, and economic environment in the Asia-Pacific region. How the United States chooses to respond to this challenge will determine the Asian strategic landscape for decades to come.

On November 28 and 29, 2014, the Central Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership convened its fourth Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作会)—the first since August 2006.¹ The meeting, presided over by Premier Li Keqiang, included the entire Politburo Standing Committee, an unprecedented number of central and local Chinese civilian and military officials, nearly every Chinese ambassador and consul-general with ambassadorial rank posted overseas, and commissioners of the Foreign Ministry to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Macao Special Administrative Region.

This Foreign Affairs Work Conference (FAWC) followed another important post-18th Party Congress foreign affairs-related meeting: the October 2013 Work Forum on Chinese Diplomacy Toward the Periphery.² Unlike that meeting, however, the FAWC dealt with all aspects of China's foreign affairs in the civilian diplomatic realm. As with the 2006 meeting, this FAWC sought to establish “the guidelines, basic principles, strategic goals and major mission of China's diplomacy in the new era and endeavor[ed] to make new advance[s] in China's foreign relations,” and to summarize and assess Beijing's foreign relations since the 18th Party Congress held in November 2012. These tasks were carried out primarily by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Chinese president, and chairman of

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the Central Military Commission, in an “important” address delivered to the conference.³ Hu Jintao delivered a similar address in 2006.⁴

While Xi also gave important foreign affairs–related speeches at the 2013 Periphery Diplomacy Conference, as well as at the May 2014 international Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the November 2014 22nd APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting,⁵ his address to the FAWC was especially notable, given the rarity, size, and scope of the meeting and the comprehensive nature of Xi’s remarks, which covered: (1) China’s recent diplomatic accomplishments; (2) the key features of the international environment at present and in the future; and (3) the top priorities for Chinese diplomacy going forward. The speech constitutes the fullest authoritative statement yet on the current Chinese regime’s views and policies in the foreign affairs arena.

This article will assess the substance and significance of Xi’s FAWC speech, especially as viewed by Chinese commentators. The first part summarizes the main contents of the speech—as described by authoritative sources—and identifies what is new or different when compared to other speeches and remarks by Xi and senior officials, reports by authoritative sources, and the previous 2006 FAWC. As with all central work conferences, the actual text of the speeches delivered to the FAWC is not released to the public. Accordingly, this article relies on summaries presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Xinhua News Agency.⁶ Although such summaries doubtless omit some elements of Xi’s speech, reliable Chinese sources have indicated that the public summaries are broadly representative of the actual text. The second part of the article examines the authoritative, quasi-authoritative, and non-authoritative Chinese assessments of the speech, based on the definition of those sources utilized in past *CLM* articles.⁷ The final section of the article offers some brief observations on the overall importance of the speech for China’s foreign policy at present and in the future, including its implications for Beijing’s relations with the United States and toward the Asia-Pacific region.

Key Features of the Speech

By way of an introduction, the Xinhua summary of Xi’s FAWC speech listed what the news agency regards as its major elements. These include:

the importance of holding high the banner of peace, development and win-win cooperation, pursuing China’s overall domestic and international interests and its development and security priorities in a balanced way, focusing on the overriding goal of peaceful development and national renewal, upholding China’s sovereignty, security and development interests, fostering a more enabling international environment for peaceful development and maintaining and sustaining the important period of strategic opportunity for China’s development.⁸

Xinhua also points out that Xi states that these diplomatic undertakings were designed to achieve China’s “Double Centenary” goals of: (1) “doubling China’s 2010 GDP and the

per capita income of urban and rural residents and finishing the building of a society of initial prosperity in all respects;” and (2) “turning China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PRC.”⁹ This linkage reinforces the strategic context for China’s diplomacy that Xi provides in his speech, a feature mentioned by various observers (see below).

Accomplishments of Chinese Diplomacy

As noted above, Xi’s speech covers three general topics. The first is a review of the major activities and accomplishments of Chinese diplomacy since the convening of the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. Here Xi provides an overview that links China’s recent diplomatic activities with the pursuit of the China Dream of national rejuvenation and a long-term, strategic approach to peaceful development, covering aspects of Beijing’s recent initiatives relating to both growth and security.

Xi summarizes China’s major diplomatic accomplishments in these two realms as including the following elements:

We have advocated the building of a new type of international relations underpinned by win-win cooperation, put forward and followed a policy of upholding justice and pursuing shared interests and championed a new vision featuring common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. We have endeavored to build a new model of major-country relations, and put forward and practiced a neighborhood policy featuring amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness as well as the guideline on China’s relations with Africa featuring sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith.¹⁰

The concept of building a “new type of international relations” (新型国际关系) draws from the earlier concept of “a new type of great power relations,” (新型大国关系) applied most commonly to U.S.-China relations. In this instance, Xi is stressing the overall need for China’s diplomacy to promote “win-win cooperation” in *every* type of inter-state relations.¹¹

The remaining concepts mentioned in the above-cited paragraph all derive from the speeches Xi gave at the Periphery Diplomacy Conference and at the CICA meeting, as well as earlier remarks.¹² The public summary of Xi’s FAWC address provides no other details on China’s recent diplomatic accomplishments or activities, but other authoritative sources, most notably remarks by Foreign Minister Wang Yi (below), provide further information.

Key Features of the International Environment

The second section of Xi’s speech in Xinhua’s summary, covering the key features of the international environment that shape and motivate China’s foreign relations, now and in the future, is more detailed. Here Xi stresses a combination of several existing and future

trends, along with what appears to be a new (or more greatly stressed) development of particular significance.

Regarding the former, Xi provides a reaffirmation of several long-standing features of the international environment espoused by Chinese officials during the reform era. These include: the overall trend toward a multipolar world; continued economic globalization; peace and development (“the underlying trend of our times”); reform of the international system; and the “general trend of prosperity and stability in the Asia-Pacific.”¹³

While such trends are in every instance coupled with complicating or challenging factors, such as the growing “complexity of the international architecture,” global tensions and struggles, and “uncertainty in China’s neighboring environment,” Xi suggests that each one is dominant and will “remain unchanged.” Hence, for Xi, and earlier Chinese leaders during the reform era, China remains “in an important period of strategic opportunity for its development endeavor in which much can be accomplished.”¹⁴

This fundamentally optimistic, long-standing reform-era assessment of China’s external environment—including most notably the Asia-Pacific region—belies the notion that Beijing sees its foreign relations as dominated by a growing struggle with the U.S for mastery in Asia, or across the globe. Chinese officials have long stressed the overall positive features of the Asia-Pacific region, and in fact the phrase “prosperity and stability in the Asia-Pacific” (亚太地区总体繁荣稳定的态势) appears in Xi’s speech.

The new or more heavily emphasized element of Xi’s view of China’s external environment involves China’s level of interdependence with the outside world. Xi asserts that China is at a “crucial stage of achieving the great renewal of the Chinese nation.” In this stage,

China’s relations with the rest of the world are going through profound changes; its interactions with the international community have become closer than ever before. China’s dependence on the world and its involvement in international affairs are deepening, so are the world’s dependence on China and its impact on China.¹⁵

Because of such growing interdependence, Xi insists that “China must keep abreast with the global development if it is to achieve its development. It is important to have a global perspective and deep understanding of the underlying trend of the times . . . and gain a deep appreciation of long-term trends.”¹⁶

While China’s deepening involvement in the outside world has certainly been mentioned by Chinese officials in the past, Xi here raises the notion that the world is both becoming more dependent on China and able to affect China significantly. This is not only a clear refutation of any idea that China can develop on its own, independently of the outside world, it also clearly suggests that China is developing the ability to appreciably influence the world. Indeed, Xi states, rather boldly, that in its interactions with the world, China’s “biggest opportunity” lies in its “steady development and the *growth in its*

strength” (emphasis added). In other words, China’s growing strength and influence in an increasingly interdependent relationship with the world is a major feature that must be incorporated into Beijing’s diplomacy going forward. This point seems to contrast with the general tone of Hu Jintao’s speech to the 2006 FAWC. That speech was more cautious and conservative. For example, Hu stressed that China is and will remain “for a long time to come” in the initial stages of socialism.¹⁷

Elements of China’s Future Diplomacy

All of these features of the global environment lead logically to the third section of Xi’s speech: the necessary elements of China’s future diplomacy. Based on the preceding trends and features, he calls for China to “develop a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role of [sic] a major country.” This means that China must “conduct diplomacy with a salient Chinese feature and a Chinese vision.”¹⁸ This includes several long-standing characteristics of China’s foreign relations: upholding the CCP’s leadership and socialism with Chinese features; remaining on the existing development path and adhering to the current social system; pursuing an “independent foreign policy of peace”; promoting democracy and equality in international relations; upholding the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; and standing for international justice and the interests of developing countries.

All these elements of China’s foreign relations have been a staple of Chinese foreign policy throughout the reform era. However, in presenting them Xi repeats a basic theme that, while evident in the past (including in Hu Jintao’s address to the 2006 FAWC), has nonetheless been more strongly stressed under the current government: the need to pursue peaceful development while maintaining and protecting China’s “legitimate rights and interests.”¹⁹ Given its repeated use in various other Xi speeches and official PRC statements, this dual stress on development and the protection of national interests has become a hallmark of the Xi Jinping regime (see below for a further discussion of this theme).²⁰

In the remainder of his speech to the FAWC, Xi stresses four related features of China’s future diplomacy that apparently require particular attention: (1) the pursuit of a new type of international relations stressing win-win cooperation; (2) the closely related advancement of reforms in the international order; (3) the proper handling of disputes over sovereignty and maritime issues; and (4) the enhancement of CCP leadership over and the reform of the PRC foreign policy process.²¹

Regarding the first feature, Xi stresses the need to “continue to follow the win-win strategy of opening-up and a win-win approach in *every* aspect of our external relations such as political, economic, security and cultural fields” (emphasis added). Along with a litany of cooperative endeavors, this includes the oft-repeated emphasis on the “peaceful resolution of differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation” and an opposition to “the arbitrary use or threat of force.” Equally important, and more distinctively for Xi, the new type of international relations includes efforts to “seek other countries’ understanding of and support for the China Dream, which is about peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes.”

Another significant aspect of this feature is an emphasis on promoting “neighborhood diplomacy.” As he did in his 2013 speech to the PDC, Xi stresses the need to

turn China’s neighborhood areas into a community of common destiny, continue to follow the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness in conducting neighborhood diplomacy, promote friendship and partnership with our neighbors, foster an amicable, secure and prosperous neighborhood environment, and boost win-win cooperation and connectivity with our neighbors.²²

Beyond this reaffirmation of China’s “good neighbor” policy, Xi also stresses the need to

manage well relations with other major countries, build a sound and stable framework of major-country relations, and expand cooperation with other major developing countries. We should strengthen unity and cooperation with other developing countries and closely integrate our own development with the common development of all developing countries.²³

None of these emphases on developing cooperative relations with different types of nations is new. In his 2006 FAWC speech, for example, Hu Jintao also mentioned the need to adhere to a mutually beneficial, win-win strategy for China’s foreign relations, as part of his general theme of developing a harmonious world.²⁴ However, Xi’s overall stress on the application of the win-win approach to every aspect of China’s foreign relations, and the need to strengthen relations with other developing nations in particular, is notable.²⁵

In promoting a win-win approach to international relations, Xi also emphasizes the need for China to “advance multilateral diplomacy, work to reform the international system and global governance, and increase the representation and say of China and other developing countries.” Again, this is certainly not a new theme, but the speech reflects the importance it receives under Xi.

Apparently as part of his stress on multilateral diplomacy, Xi also noted the need to “actively advance the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, work hard to expand the converging interests of various parties, and promote win-win outcomes.” These initiatives have also become an important hallmark of the Xi administration.

As suggested above, alongside these very positive themes in China’s diplomatic work, Xi also singles out the need to

firmly uphold China’s territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests and national unity, and properly handle territorial and island disputes. . . . We should protect China’s overseas interests and continue to improve our capacity to provide such protection.²⁶

This statement obviously follows Xi's emphasis on the need to promote development and defend China's key national interests. Moreover, this is probably what Xi means by his declaration in the speech of the need to "take an overall approach to national security," although this term is not defined in the Xinhua summary.²⁷

Finally, in highlighting the need to improve the foreign affairs process, Xi states:

we must enhance the central and unified leadership of the Party, reform and improve institutions and mechanisms concerning foreign affairs, step up their coordination among different sectors, government bodies and localities, increase strategic input, ensure well-regulated foreign affairs management, and strengthen the ranks of officials managing foreign affairs, so as to provide strong support for opening up new horizon [sic] in China's diplomacy.²⁸

Chinese Assessments

Authoritative

The most notable and detailed authoritative Chinese assessments of Xi's speech were provided by Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying.²⁹ Wang referenced Xi's remarks in a year-end speech on China's diplomatic accomplishments in 2014 that he delivered at the opening ceremony of the Symposium on the International Development and China's Diplomacy in 2014 and in a related article published in the *People's Daily* following the symposium.³⁰

In his speech, Wang characterizes Xi's emphasis on the pursuit of win-win outcomes in international relations as "a synthesis of the new diplomatic theories and practices we have developed in our relations with major countries, neighboring countries and developing countries," adding that "China is the first major country to make win-win cooperation the fundamental goal of international exchanges."³¹ Although Xi's espousal of win-win international relations seems bland and platitudinous, Chinese officials have repeatedly contrasted his concept with the competitive realist notion of inter-state relations expounded by many Western observers and analysts. Indeed, Wang states that Xi's concept constitutes "a new approach to managing state-to-state relations in the contemporary world."³²

Wang similarly praises Xi's advocacy of the construction of a global network of partnerships as: "another major diplomatic vision expounded by President Xi Jinping." He contrasts this notion to the traditional alliance concept, and terms it "an incisive summary and enrichment of China's successful diplomatic practices over the past two decades and more." Wang states:

What makes such a partnership different from a military alliance is that it does not have any hypothetical enemy nor is it targeted at any third party, thus keeping relations between countries unaffected by military factors. It aims to handle state-to-state relations with a cooperative rather than

confrontational, and a win-win rather than zero-sum approach.³³

This emphasis on partnerships over alliances certainly predates the Xi Jinping regime, but, as with other concepts mentioned above, it is being stressed and apparently expanded in a notable manner under Xi.

Another theme of Xi's FAWC speech that Wang mentioned was the emphasis on developing "a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role as a major country, so that China's diplomacy will show salient Chinese features, Chinese style and Chinese confidence."³⁴ As mentioned above, Xi's linkage of China's diplomacy with its rising importance in the world, and the need to use its growing strength to advance its interests as a major country while pursuing specific Chinese features, is a relatively new facet of Chinese foreign relations under Xi.³⁵

In his *People's Daily* article, Wang largely repeats the points of his earlier speech, praising and providing details regarding the win-win approach to international relations and the special characteristics of Chinese "major-power" diplomacy.³⁶

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Hua Chunying provided further affirmation of the features of Xi's FAWC speech, including, in particular, what she termed the "six persistences" of China's major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics: (1) to uphold the leadership of the CCP; (2) to continue peaceful development without sacrificing legitimate rights and core interests; (3) the democratization of international relations; (4) to pursue win-win cooperation as a new type of international relationship; (5) to maintain a correct balance between justice and profits (particularly with developing countries); and (6) to continue the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of others.³⁷

Quasi-authoritative

The most notable quasi-authoritative Chinese statements on Xi's FAWC speech are found in a Xinhua commentary published shortly after the conference and in a series of three *People's Daily* commentaries on "Implementing the Spirit of the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference," appearing in succession on the first three days of December 2014.³⁸

Perhaps most notable was the Xinhua commentary of November 29 entitled "Create a New Phase in Foreign-Related Work."³⁹ The author(s) stressed Xi's remarks on the new situation facing China in the world and the critical need for Beijing to advance its objectives on the basis of a clear and correct understanding of long-term global trends, particularly the increasingly close relationship between Chinese development and the outside world. They suggest that Xi's speech presents imperatives for Chinese foreign policy to advance China's interests *on the basis of its growing strengths in the global arena* (emphasis added). To achieve this, "China needs to have its own major-power diplomacy with its own characteristics." Finally, the author(s) summarize what they apparently take as the major functions of Chinese diplomacy as presented in the FAWC:

There is a need to win understanding and support from various countries in the world for the Chinese dream, resolutely maintain territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, safeguard development opportunities and development space, strive to bring about a deep convergence and mutual beneficial cooperative network. At the same time, we need to raise our soft power and tell good stories on China's development.⁴⁰

The three *People's Daily* commentaries stress: first, the contrast between major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics (as defined above) and "traditional" power-oriented and competitive major-power diplomacy; second, the successes of Xi Jinping's innovative foreign policy concepts and diplomatic practices since the 18th Party Congress; and third, the development of closer relations with the international community.

The first commentary again stresses the importance of the "five persistences" mentioned above, while the second lists China's diplomatic accomplishments as: (1) the introduction of new diplomatic theories (including the introduction of the Chinese dream, the new type of great power relationship, and the emphasis on peripheral diplomacy); (2) progress in major projects (such as the initiation of an Asia-Pacific free-trade zone, the BRICS Development Bank, the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Silk Road fund); (3) the extension of relations with important peripheral, Western, emerging market, and developing countries; (4) protecting China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests; and (5) developing and advancing foreign affairs mechanisms (such as the peripheral diplomatic work forum and the central foreign affairs work conference) and standardizing foreign affairs work.⁴¹ The second commentary also emphasizes the maintenance of China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, adding, somewhat aggressively, that Beijing will "effectively strike back at provocation and acts of violation of rights by a small number of countries" while nonetheless promoting "resolution of contradictions and disputes with relevant parties through negotiation and consultation."⁴²

The third commentary took up Xi's theme of China's growing interdependence with the outside world, stressing the need for Beijing not only to ensure national economic development through such ties, but also

to make diligent efforts to find the convergence of the interests of all parties and to seek a permanent solution for the common development and progress between China and the world. China's diplomacy must adhere to a win-win concept. . . . Whether it is diplomacy with the neighboring countries, the major powers, or the developing countries, or it is multilateral diplomacy, we will work for greater common interests for all. We want development, and we need to also let other people develop; we want to safeguard our own security, and *we also need to let other people have a sense of security.*⁴³

This commentary confirms the importance placed by Xi in his FAWC speech on the need to work harder to improve relations with other countries. The author(s) link this effort with Chinese culture, stating, “in foreign relations, we need to *better demonstrate* the excellent traditional Chinese cultural values such as equal treatment, harmony with diversity, integrity, and justice, and benefitting others as well as oneself” (emphasis added).

Non-authoritative

The non-authoritative commentary on Xi Jinping’s FAWC speech is relatively sparse, consisting of a mere handful of articles. These are generally very positive (with some notable exceptions), with several sources pointing out the new elements of the speech in a systematic manner.

An article appearing in *Duowei News* at the end of December explicitly compares the 2014 FAWC with those of 2006 under Hu Jintao and 1991 under Jiang Zemin.⁴⁴ The author(s) assert that the 2014 conference marks a clear change in Chinese foreign policy in several respects: first, the scope of the work conference is expanding with more attendees than before, suggesting that the meeting has now become a countrywide conference rather than just an internal party meeting. This development indicates the growing importance of China’s foreign policy to its development and security.

Second, while Hu Jintao’s address to the 2006 FAWC was more conservative and focused primarily on the role of foreign policy in promoting continued economic development and reform, the article states that Xi’s remarks were more innovative and broad-ranging, involving new concepts (such as diplomacy with Chinese characteristics) and objectives (such as the linkage of the double centenary strategic aims with foreign policy). This largely confirms the comparison points mentioned above.

Third, the other senior-level speakers at the 2014 FAWC (Li Keqiang and Yang Jiechi) simply reaffirmed and repeated the contents of Xi’s speech, without analyzing it (as Wen Jiabao allegedly did with regard to Hu’s speech in 2006). To the author(s), this indicates that Xi has more power in the foreign affairs arena. Although this seems like a rather slim reed upon which to rest such a significant conclusion, it does reflect the common view of many Chinese observers that Xi is indeed a more dynamic and powerful leader than Hu.

Another notable non-authoritative commentary, by Chen Xiangyang, a research fellow and deputy director of the Institute of World Politics at the influential China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) (中国现代国际关系研究院) attached to the Ministry of State Security, similarly identified the most important aspects of Xi’s address. The author states that, overall, “many” have characterized the speech as “a diplomatic manifesto to secure the ‘Chinese dream.’”⁴⁵

Chen points to four key takeaways. First, Xi “redefined the aims and role of diplomacy for China” by stating “for the first time” that “development and security are ‘two major priorities’ equally high on the Party agenda.” Xi also explicitly linked diplomacy with the

attainment of the “double centenary” goals and the Chinese dream, thus providing it with a clear strategic purpose. This again confirms the similar points made above.

Second, Xi’s assessment of the international environment centered on the continuing process of major change involving: “waning western dominance in world affairs, the collective rise of the emerging markets and developing countries, China’s emergence as the second largest economy, and enormous interdependence between China and the world economy.” According to Chen, Xi pointed to the need for China’s foreign policy to fully reflect and make use of these fundamental trends.

Third, as with the previous source, Chen extols the importance of Xi’s notion of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, involving the features outlined above (i.e., CCP leadership, the pursuit of an independent foreign policy of peace while defending vital interests, democracy and justice in inter-state relations, win-win cooperation, and “zero interference in other countries’ internal affairs, respect for a people’s own choice of a country’s development path and social system and negotiated solutions to inter-state disputes”). According to Chen, with this concept, “Xi is saying to the world that China, a socialist developing country, has already become a major country ready to assume its place in the world.”

Fourth, in listing seven supposed diplomatic priorities for China, Xi places neighborhood diplomacy first. To Chen, this is “a sign of China’s willingness to commit itself to peace and amicable relations with its neighbors and its genuine desire to work with countries in the region toward a “community of common destiny.” Equally important, Chen points to three of the remaining six priorities (advancing concrete multilateral cooperative endeavors such as the Silk Road concept, exercising principles in foreign policy, and strengthening capacity-building and investment abroad) as a further demonstration “to the world that China’s diplomacy is ready to take on a bigger role for China and for the world.”

A final non-authoritative commentary of note by Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Center for International and Strategic Studies at the China Institute of International Studies (中国国际问题研究) attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, again focuses on the elements of major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics covered in Xi’s speech.⁴⁶ Su presents the various features of those characteristics (mentioned above) as an expression of several key traits: first, confidence, derived from China’s successful development and its resulting “continual rising of national strength and of international influence;” second, moral integrity, centered on a resolve to “persist in the country’s development path, social system, cultural tradition, and value concepts” (including the independent foreign policy line, policies of nonalliance, noninterference and the democratization of international relations, the defense of sovereignty and national dignity, etc.); and third, magnanimity, involving win-win cooperation and inclusiveness, the latter identified as “one of the basic contents of China’s peripheral diplomatic idea.”

While all of the above non-authoritative commentaries by foreign policy analysts and scholars extol the many positive benefits and innovative aspects of Xi's FAWC address, other analysts and Chinese netizens presented a more varied assessment of the speech.

Many netizens generally praised Xi's remarks as an important response to China's changing external environment and developing needs and interests. Some pointed to the emphasis on win-win economic development and the necessary incorporation of a long-term, strategic approach to China's foreign relations as a welcome and necessary move.⁴⁷

Other netizens argued that in formulating a more activist leadership role for China in the international community, Xi's speech confirmed that Beijing has indeed discarded Deng Xiaoping's guiding advice to "hide our capacities and bide our time, but also get some things done" (韬光养晦, 有所作为). For some netizens, this is a welcome development, demonstrating that Beijing is becoming more proactive or assertive in world affairs. In fact, some observers argued that Beijing should totally repudiate the concept and become far more assertive in many foreign policy areas. For some, this extends to a use of force to conquer Taiwan!⁴⁸

In contrast, however, other netizens argued that Beijing should not become more active in foreign relations, but should instead focus on advancing the domestic reform agenda. Some even characterized Xi's foreign policy approach as a waste of money and a mere show of strength, while others stressed the need to resolve diplomatic problems and address conflict by improving China's domestic political scene, and applying the rule of law.⁴⁹

Concluding Observations

Xi Jinping's November 2014 FAWC address is significant for several reasons. First, in a manner similar to the speeches given by Xi's predecessors at the previous three work conferences, it stands as the most authoritative, comprehensive statement on China's foreign relations and diplomacy under the current administration. However, in this instance, the unprecedented size and scope of the 2014 conference suggests that the Xi-led leadership wanted to use the forum to convey the growing importance of foreign policy to achieving the most critical objectives of the party and government.

Indeed, the second notable feature of Xi's speech derives from the definition he presented of China's place in a changing world order and the unprecedentedly critical role Chinese foreign policy must play in advancing and protecting China's most vital interests at home and abroad. In particular, Xi emphasized (again in an unprecedented manner) not only China's growing influence in an increasingly multipolar, globalized, and development-oriented world, but also the fact that China is increasingly dependent on external events for the success of its long-term, reform-driven development program, and for its national security.

Although this pattern of growing interdependence with the outside world has been noted by other Chinese leaders in the past, Xi's remarks were notable for both the degree of emphasis placed on this trend and the specific manner in which he defined the resulting

opportunities and challenges facing Chinese foreign policy. An increasingly dispersed pattern of global economic power combined with the deepening involvement of a stronger and more influential—yet increasingly dependent—China apparently means for Xi that Chinese foreign policy must become more sophisticated, strategic, and dynamic in order to advance Chinese interests. Beijing must employ diplomacy not only to promote economic development, but also to minimize the threats and maximize the benefits presented by a more complex and challenging environment.

The concept of “major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,” first coined in the first half of 2013 and clearly reflected both in Xi’s speech and explicitly in Wang Yi’s subsequent authoritative commentary, encapsulates this more ambitious form of Chinese foreign policy.⁵⁰ Although, according to Xi, China is still a developing country, it now has both the strength and the influence within the global order to conduct the foreign policy of a great power. Indeed, Xi explicitly stresses the need for Beijing to more effectively use its strength in achieving its developmental goals. And he now defines these foreign policy goals in a more long-term, strategic manner, connecting them explicitly with the so-called “double centenary” objectives of creating a rich and powerful nation by 2049. Moreover, these goals are a concrete expression of Xi’s “Chinese dream” concept (i.e., a central part of China’s “rejuvenation”). As noted above, these general features of Xi’s foreign policy were not a central part of Hu Jintao’s diplomatic line as presented in the 2006 FAWC.

A third important feature of Xi’s FAWC address involves his emphasis on the Chinese aspects of Beijing’s major-power foreign policy (i.e., the “Chinese characteristics”). Since the Chinese government has historically denied that it pursues traditional “great power politics,” Beijing’s brand of great power diplomacy must include opposite and, by implication, unique traits. These include, for example, upholding socialism and the CCP leadership, an independent foreign policy of peace, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, peaceful coexistence, reason and justice, and the reform policies. Although these traits have purportedly characterized Chinese foreign policy for many decades, Xi’s variant, as expressed in his FAWC speech, places an unprecedented emphasis on the pursuit of a “new type of international relations” centered on a positive sum (or “win-win”) approach to *every* type of international activity.

The high level of attention given to this trait by Xi and other authoritative and non-authoritative commentators on the FAWC reflects the Chinese leadership’s clear awareness of the need to counter the growing image among many outside observers—largely resulting from maritime disputes with Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and other nations—that China will use its growing power to bully or intimidate others. This attempt to reassure the outside world regarding China’s foreign behavior was also evident in Hu Jintao’s address to the 2006 FAWC.⁵¹ At that time, however, Hu placed a strong stress on harmony in international affairs in large part in response to criticism of the recently inaugurated “Go Abroad” policy that encouraged Chinese business entities to compete more aggressively in the global arena. That policy had generated widespread allegations of Chinese economic misbehavior, including dumping, unfair trade practices, and the mistreatment of foreign citizens and workers.⁵² In the 2014 case, the concern is less

focused on China's economic behavior (although that remains an important issue) and more focused on its security behavior.

This leads to the fourth notable (and particularly new) feature of Xi's FAWC speech: the emphasis on both development and security as twin goals for Chinese foreign policy, with the latter goal involving the defense of sovereignty and territorial rights in particular. That said, the security dimensions of China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping certainly go beyond these somewhat narrow issues to include the overall effort to fashion a network of partnerships with important countries in Asia and beyond, as well as the proposed development of a new "regional security cooperation architecture." Both concepts are associated with the overall development of positive-sum relations with other countries. Moreover, both are intended in part to stand as a contrast with traditional security alliance relationships.

As shown above, a focus on development was specifically mentioned by Xi in his FAWC address as an important part of the new type of major-power diplomacy Beijing is seeking to promote, especially with regard to relations with neighboring states. It was also a major element of his speech to the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. Wang Yi explicitly contrasted the concept of partnerships with military alliances, as also indicated above. This contrast is by no means new; it has been mentioned by Chinese officials on various occasions for years. However, it takes on greater significance when combined with the broader, more integrated diplomatic goals presented in Xi's FAWC speech, and because of China's growing overseas economic clout, which provides the major attraction the concept holds for most other nations.

The security concept was not specifically mentioned in Xi's FAWC address, but was a central part of his short CICA address and is certainly implied by the "win-win" cooperative elements of Chinese diplomacy showcased in the FAWC address. The concept is often described in terms of a string of four adjectives: "common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable." In his CICA speech, Xi in effect defined the basic meaning of each term. He stated that the new security structure must include all Asian nations, not only as recipients but also as contributors to security (i.e., common); convey respect for and allow accommodation of the "legitimate" security concerns of all participants (cooperative); perform both traditional and non-traditional security functions (i.e., comprehensive); and address not only immediate security challenges, but also potential future ones, in a "multi-pronged and holistic" manner (i.e., sustainable).⁵³ Xi also explicitly contrasted his new security architecture concept with any effort to "beef up and entrench a military alliance targeted at a third party," an obvious reference to the United States.⁵⁴

Overall, Xi's FAWC speech marks the full enunciation of a more activist, involved, and security-oriented approach to Chinese diplomacy and foreign relations. Through this speech and other relevant remarks, Xi has arguably taken many long-standing Chinese assessments of the international and regional order, as well as the increased influence on and exposure of China to that order, and redefined and expanded the function and purpose of Chinese diplomacy. He has presented it as an instrument for the more

effective application of growing Chinese power and influence in support of a more ambitious foreign policy agenda.

While seeming on the surface to contain endless platitudes about partnerships and win-win outcomes, Xi's speech in fact represents a fundamental challenge, both conceptually, and operationally, to what many Chinese perceive as the hypocritical, self-serving, and tension-producing approach to foreign relations and security of traditional great powers, and in particular of the current U.S.-led alliance system operating in Asia and other parts of the world. Whether this viewpoint of the Xi administration signifies a genuine commitment to a new approach toward diplomacy and security that might produce positive outcomes for all, or a mere tactical gambit intended to weaken international support for supposed U.S.-led efforts to restrict China's power and influence, remains to be seen. But in either case it suggests that as Beijing becomes more deeply engaged in the regional and global order and acquires more capabilities, it will almost certainly attempt—far more credibly than in the past—to alter some of the key foreign policy processes and power relationships that have defined the post-WWII order, especially in Asia. How the United States responds to this challenge will largely determine the strategic landscape in the Asia-Pacific region for decades to come.

Notes

¹ The first two work conferences were held in 1971 and 1991. I am indebted to Alice Miller for providing this information.

² For discussion of the Periphery Diplomacy Conference, see Michael Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 44 (Summer 2014).

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing," November 29, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml. "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment for China's peaceful development," Xinhua, November 30, 2014.

⁴ "PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing," Xinhua, August 23, 2006.

⁵ See: Xi Jinping, "Diplomacy with Neighboring Countries Characterized by Friendship, Sincerity, Reciprocity and Inclusiveness," remarks at the Conference on the Diplomatic Work on Neighboring Countries, October 24, 2013, in Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014), 325. 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, May 21, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml. Xi Jinping, president of the People's Republic of China, remarks delivered at the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, Beijing, China, November 11, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1210451.shtml.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing." "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment."

⁷ The definition of the three categories of sources examined are based on the views of Alice Miller, to whom the author is deeply indebted.

Several types of PRC sources are considered *authoritative* in the sense of explicitly "speaking for the regime." They generally include MFA and MND statements and briefings and remarks by senior civilian and military officials appearing in the leading Chinese Communist Party Central Committee (or CCP CC) and military (People's Liberation Army or PLA) newspapers: *People's Daily* (人民日报) and *Liberation Army Daily* (解放军报). Authoritative statements include, in descending order of authority, PRC government and CCP statements, MFA statements, MFA spokesperson statements, and MFA daily press briefings. Authoritative commentaries in *People's Daily* and *Liberation Army Daily* include, in descending order, "editorial department articles," editorials, and commentator articles.

Several types of usually homophonous, bylined articles appearing in the *People's Daily* are considered *quasi-authoritative* in the sense that, although indirect and implicit, they are intended to convey the view of an important PRC organization. A major example of this is articles using the byline "Zhong Sheng" (钟声), which is an apparent homophone for "the voice of the Central," and appears to be written by the editorial staff of the *People's Daily* International Department. Other quasi-authoritative homophonous bylines include "Ren Zhongping" (任仲平, homophonous with "important *People's Daily* commentary"), "Zhong Zuwen" (仲组文, homophonous with "CC Organization Department article"), and "Zhong Xuanli" (钟轩理, homophonous with "CC Propaganda Department commentary").

Many types of low-level commentary and signed articles appearing in a wide variety of PRC and Hong Kong media convey notable yet decidedly *non-authoritative* views. Such articles appear in the PRC government news service (Xinhua), CCP and PLA newspapers, the Hong Kong-based (and *People's Daily*-owned) *Global Times* (环球时报), and many minor PRC and Hong Kong newspapers and academic publications. Despite the view expressed by some pundits, nothing published in the *Global Times* is "authoritative" in any meaningful sense, "because the newspaper is a commercial vehicle and doesn't stand for the *People's Daily*, even though it is subordinate to that organ." Alice Miller, personal correspondence, June 27, 2012.

⁸ "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment."

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Xi Jinping, "Diplomacy with Neighboring Countries Characterized by Friendship," 325. Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation."

¹³ These are now referred to by some outside observers as the "five unchangeables." See: D. S. Rajan, "China: Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Strategy Under New Conditions—Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, December 4, 2014.

¹⁴ Many of the basic themes regarding the international environment are also found in Hu Jintao's 2006 FAWC speech. "PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing."

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was Held in Beijing." "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing."

¹⁸ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was Held in Beijing." "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment."

¹⁹ In his speech at the 2006 FAWC, Hu Jintao referred to the need to work hard to "safeguard the interests relevant to our national sovereignty, security, and development" adding:

we must concentrate on enhancing the party's ability to protect national sovereignty, security, and development interests and effectively strengthening and improving party leadership in foreign work at a time when the international situation is complex and ever-changing and at a time when China is opening up to the outside world in an all-round way.
—"PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing."

²⁰ See: Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation." Xi Jinping, "Diplomacy with Neighboring Countries Characterized by Friendship," 325. Xi Jinping, "Work Together Towards Deeper Cooperation and Sustained Development," remarks at the 9th China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit and 2012 Forum on China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, September 21, 2012, <http://la.chineseembassy.org/eng/news/t972614.html>. Xi Jinping, remarks delivered at the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting.

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was Held in Beijing." "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment."

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing."

²⁵ In his 2006 FAWC speech, Hu Jintao referred more generally to the need to "marry the vital interests of the Chinese people with the common interests of the peoples of all nations. " However, he also called for "a peripheral environment that is neighborly and friendly."

²⁶ While Hu Jintao also referred to the need to defend China's national sovereignty in his 2006 FAWC speech, he did not mention the defense of maritime rights and the proper handling of territorial and island disputes. These specific issues rose to prominence in China's foreign relations in subsequent years. "PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing."

See Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views Regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 41 (Spring 2013); and Michael D. Swaine, "The 18th Party Congress and Foreign Policy: The Dog that Did Not Bark?" *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 40 (Winter 2013).

²⁷ It is possible that the 2012 creation of a new CCP National Security Committee to coordinate domestic and external security policies, along with Xi's leadership of several other foreign affairs-related policy bodies, are part of this effort to take an overall approach to security issues.

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was Held in Beijing." "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment."

²⁹ "Full Text Of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Speech On China's Diplomacy In 2014," Xinhua, December 25, 2014. Wang Yi, "Open up a New Phase in a Turbulent World," *People's Daily*, December 26, 2014. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Transcript of Regular News Conference by PRC Foreign Ministry on 1 December 2014 hosted by Spokesperson Hua Chunying," December 1, 2014.

³⁰ "Full Text Of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Speech On China's Diplomacy In 2014."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Wang echoed the key features of China's specific approach to diplomacy presented by Xi Jinping. They include an emphasis on upholding: socialism and CCP leadership, an independent foreign policy of peace, non-interference, and peaceful coexistence, reason and justice, and the reform policies. "Full Text Of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Speech On China's Diplomacy In 2014."

³⁶ Wang, "Open up a New Phase in a Turbulent World."

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Transcript of Regular News Conference by PRC Foreign Ministry on 1 December 2014 hosted by Spokesperson Hua Chunying."

³⁸ "Create a New Phase in Foreign-Related Work," Xinhua, November 29, 2014.

"China's Diplomacy Must Have Its Own Characteristics—First Commentary on Implementing Spirit of Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference," *People's Daily*, December 1, 2014. "Constantly Open up a New Realm in Diplomatic Theories and in Practice Innovation—Second Commentary on Implementing the Spirit of Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference," *People's Daily*, December 2, 2014. "Close Ties Between China and the World Show Bright Prospects for China's Diplomacy—Third Commentary on Implementing the Spirit of the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference," *People's Daily*, December 3, 2014.

³⁹ "Create a New Phase in Foreign-Related Work."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ "China's Diplomacy Must Have Its Own Characteristics."

⁴² "Constantly Open up a New Realm in Diplomatic Theories and in Practice Innovation."

⁴³ "Close Ties Between China and the World Show Bright Prospects for China's Diplomacy" (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ 七常委超规格开外事会 三大反常信号酿变动, *Duowei News*, November 30, 2014, <http://www.wenxuecity.com/news/2014/11/30/3829173.html>.

⁴⁵ Chen Xiangyang, "A Diplomatic Manifesto to Secure the Chinese Dream," *China-U.S. Focus*, December 31, 2014.

⁴⁶ Su Xiaohui, “Diplomacy Requires Distinctive Chinese Style,” *People’s Daily*, December 2, 2014.

⁴⁷ For example, see: Sina Weibo account of user “Gao Cheng,” November 30, 2014, <http://www.weibo.com/u/1239095877>; Sina Weibo account of user “Chen Qiulin,” November 30, 2014, <http://www.weibo.com/u/1059232211?topnav=1&wvr=6&topsug=1>; Sina Weibo account of user “Lu Ge,” November 30, 2014, <http://www.weibo.com/bjluge>.

⁴⁸ QQ Weibo account of user “wg80306,” December 3, 2014, <http://t.qq.com/wg80306>; QQ Weibo account of user “Zhang Changjiang,” December 2, 2014, <http://t.qq.com/zhangchangjiangsun>; Sina Weibo account of user “Crazy Bike,” December 1, 2014, <http://www.weibo.com/crazybike>.

⁴⁹ QQ Weibo account of user “Li Xiaowen,” November 30, 2014, <http://t.qq.com/asd5325165>; QQ Weibo account of user “Yang Dongdong,” November 30, 2014, http://t.qq.com/yangdong_love; QQ Weibo account of user “Xuan Yuan Zhu Hun,” December 1, 2014, <http://t.qq.com/EJ-166>; Sina Weibo account of user “Zhu Shen Shan Dai Min Ke Zu,” November 30, 2014, <http://www.weibo.com/u/1731009587>.

⁵⁰ “Xi eyes more enabling int’l environment.” Wang Yi, “Open up a New Phase in a Turbulent World.” For a discussion of the term, see Bonnie S. Glaser and Alison Szalwinski, “Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” *China Brief*: 13 Issue: 16, The Jamestown Foundation, August 9, 2013.

⁵¹ “PRC President Hu Jintao Addresses Central Foreign Work Meeting in Beijing.”

⁵² Bonnie S. Glaser, “Ensuring the ‘Go Abroad’ Policy Serves China’s Domestic Priorities,” *China Brief*, The Jamestown Foundation, April 30, 2007.

⁵³ Xi Jinping, “New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation.”

⁵⁴ Ibid. Wang Yi made a similar contrast in his speech of December 2014. He added that the security concept “shows China’s eagerness to take a more constructive part in Asia’s security affairs and provide public security goods.”