PART I
INTEREST AND IDENTITY IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY
Vulnerability to threats is the main driver of China's foreign policy. The world as seen from Beijing is a terrain of hazards, stretching from the streets outside the policymaker's window to land borders and sea lanes thousands of miles to the north, east, south, and west and beyond to the mines and oilfields of distant continents.

These threats can be described in four concentric circles. In the First Ring—across the entire territory China administers or claims—the Chinese government believes that domestic political stability is placed at risk by the impact of foreign actors and forces. The migrant workers and petitioners who crowd the streets of Beijing and other major cities have been buffeted by the forces of the global economy, and their grievances have become issues in the West's human rights criticisms of China. Foreign investors, managers, development advisers, customs and health inspectors, tourists, and students swarm the country—all with their own ideas for how China should change. Foreign foundations and embassies give grants and technical support to assist the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Along the coast to the east lie maritime territories, large swathes of which Beijing claims but does not control and which are disputed by its neighbors. These territories include islands and adjacent waters in the East China and South China seas. The most significant island is Taiwan, seat of the Republic of China (ROC). Located a hundred miles off the coast, Taiwan is a populous, prosperous, and strategically located island that China claims but does not control. The island has its own government and military force, formal diplomatic recognition from twenty-odd states, strong defense ties with the U.S., and political and economic relations with Japan and other countries around the world. To the far west, dissidents in Tibet and Xinjiang receive moral and diplomatic support and sometimes material assistance from fellow ethnic communities and sympathetic governments abroad.

Although no country is immune from external influences—via migration, smuggling, and disease—China is the most penetrated of the big countries, with an unparalleled number of foreign actors trying to influence its political, economic, and cultural evolution, often in ways that the political regime considers detrimental to its own survival. These themes are further explored in this chapter and chapter 10.

At the borders, policymakers face a Second Ring of security concerns, involving China's relations with twenty immediately adjacent countries arrayed in a circle from Japan in the east to Vietnam in the south to India in the southwest to Russia in the north. No other country except Russia has as many contiguous neighbors. Numbers aside, China's neighborhood is uniquely complex. The contiguous states include seven of the fifteen largest countries in the world (India, Pakistan, Russia, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and
Vietnam—each having a population greater than 89 million); five countries with which China has been at war at some point in the past seventy years (Russia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and India); and at least nine countries with unstable regimes (including North Korea, the Philippines, Myanmar/Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan). China has had border disputes since 1949 with every one of its twenty immediate neighbors, although most have been settled by now.

Every one of these Second Ring neighbors is a cultural stranger to China, with a gap in most cases larger than that which the U.S., Europe, India, and Russia face with their immediate neighbors. Although Japan, Korea, and Vietnam borrowed some parts of their written and spoken languages and some Confucian beliefs from China, they do not consider themselves in any sense Chinese. The other neighboring cultures—Russian, Mongolian, Indonesian, Indian, and others—have even less in common with China. None of the neighboring states perceives that its core national interests are congruent with China’s. All the larger neighbors are historical rivals of China, and the smaller ones are wary of Chinese influence.

Complicating the politics of the Second Ring is the presence of Taiwan (which is also part of the First Ring). The overriding goal of its diplomacy, as we discuss in chapter 8, is to frustrate China’s effort to gain control. In doing so, it seeks support from other countries within and beyond the Second Ring. Taiwan is thus a major problem for Chinese diplomacy and counts as a twenty-first political actor on China’s immediate periphery.

Finally, the Second Ring includes a twenty-second actor whose presence poses the largest single challenge to China’s security: the U.S. Even though the U.S. is located thousands of miles away, it looms as a mighty presence in China’s neighborhood, with its Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu; its giant military base on the Pacific island of Guam (6,000 miles from the continental U.S., but only 2,000 miles from China); its dominating naval presence in the South and East China Seas; its defense relationships of various kinds around China’s periphery with South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan; and its economic and political influence all through the Asian region. If the vast distances that separate the United States from China prevent China from exerting direct military pressure on it, the same is not true in reverse.

All in all, China’s immediate periphery has a good claim to be the most challenging geopolitical environment in the world for a major power. Except for China itself, Russia faces no contiguous country that is anywhere near its own size; its demographic and economic heartland in the European part of the country is buffered from potential enemies by smaller states; it has invaded its neighbors more often than it has been invaded by them; and it has not been attacked by a direct neighbor since the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–1905. Even more striking is the comparison of China’s situation with that of the U.S., a country that has only three immediate neighbors, Canada, Mexico, and Cuba, each much smaller, and that is separated by oceans from all other potential enemies.

Also unlike the U.S., China seldom has the luxury of dealing with any of its twenty-two neighbors in a purely bilateral context, a fact that brings into play a Third Ring of Chinese security concerns, consisting of the politics of six nearby multistate regional systems.
Beijing’s policies toward North Korea affect the interests of South Korea, Japan, the U.S., and Russia; its policies toward Cambodia affect the interests of Vietnam and Thailand and often those of Laos—as well as the interests, again, of the U.S.; its policies toward Burma affect India, Bangladesh, and the nine states that are comembers with Burma in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—and again, the U.S. Because of such links, China can rarely make policy with only one state in mind and can almost never make policy anywhere around its periphery without thinking about the implications for relations with the U.S. The map of Asia is too crowded for that.

This Third Ring of Chinese security consists of six regional systems, each consisting of a set of states whose foreign policy interests are interconnected. The memberships of some of the systems overlap. The six systems are Northeast Asia (Russia, the two Koreas, Japan, China, and the U.S.), Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, twelve Pacific island microstates, China, and the U.S.), continental Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, China, and the U.S.), maritime Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, China, and the U.S.), South Asia (Burma, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Russia, China, and the U.S.), and Central Asia (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, China, and the U.S.) (see frontispiece map). The aggregate number of states in the six systems is forty-five.²

China is the only country in the world that is physically part of such a large number of regional systems. (If the U.S. and Russia are engaged in even greater numbers of regional systems, it is not by the dictates of geography, but by choice.) Some issues are pervasive across all six systems (for example, China faces the U.S. presence in all of them, and in all systems its neighbors are wary of its rising influence), whereas some are distinctive to particular systems (such as the North Korean nuclear weapons issue in Northeast Asia and Islamic fundamentalism in Central, South, and maritime Southeast Asia). Each system presents multifaceted diplomatic and security problems.

These first three rings of security—from the domestic to the regional—thus present a foreign policy agenda of extreme complexity, which absorbs most of the resources China is able to devote to foreign and defense policy. Yet these three rings cover only about one-quarter of the globe’s surface if one leaves out the vast watery region dotted with the microstates of Oceania. The rest of the world—including eastern and western Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and North and South America—belongs to an outer, or Fourth Ring, of Chinese security.

China has entered this farthest circle in a big way only since the late 1990s and has done so not in pursuit of general power and influence, but, as we argue in chapter 7, to serve six specific needs: for energy resources; for commodities, markets, and investment opportunities; for diplomatic support for its positions on Taiwan and Tibet; and for support for its positions on multilateral diplomatic issues such as human rights, international trade, the environment, and arms control. Not only its goals but its tools of influence in the Fourth Ring are limited: they are commercial and diplomatic, not military or, to any significant extent so far, cultural or political.

To be sure, China’s weight in this wider global arena is enhanced by its demographic
and geographic size, its trajectory of economic growth, its independence of the U.S., and its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. But in contrast to the U.S., Europe, and even to some extent Russia, and in common with regional powers such as Japan, India, Brazil, and Turkey, China seldom endeavors proactively to shape the politics of distant regions to its own preferences. Instead, it must deal with whomever it finds in power, and if that regime is overthrown, it seeks relations with its successor. China has arrived in the Fourth Ring as a dramatically new presence, but not in the role of what we would call a global power—at least not yet.

Within each of the four rings, China’s foreign policy agenda is seldom its policymakers’ free choice, as can sometimes be the case when the strongest powers take an initiative to oust a government or force a peace settlement in a region far from their own shores. Chinese foreign policy instead responds defensively to a set of tasks imposed by the facts of demography, economics, geography, and history.

### DEMOGRAPHY: HUGE, POOR, CONCENTRATED, AGING, AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

The problematic nature of China’s situation begins with its demography. China’s territory is about the same size as that of the U.S., but at 1.3 billion its population is more than four times as large. Three-quarters of the population is concentrated on about one-quarter of the territory, leading to intense pressure on both urban and rural living space. The demographic heartland is located in a 600-mile band along the eastern and southern coasts, with an outcropping along the Yangtze River reaching onto the Chengdu Plain in Sichuan (see the map showing the demography of China). It is roughly the size and shape of the American East Coast from Massachusetts to Florida, including Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Alabama, but contains five and a half times as many people as those states. The most heavily populated eighteen of China’s thirty-three province-level units have a combined population of 957 million, more than the cumulative populations of China’s eight most populous neighbors, not counting India.

The heartland produces 83 percent of the country’s GDP. It contains sixteen of the world’s twenty most polluted cities. Population is so dense that 70 percent of China’s rivers and lakes are said to be polluted, and the World Bank estimates that pollution reduces the value of China’s GDP by as much as 12 percent annually.

Even after decades of stellar economic growth, China’s people are relatively poor. In 2009, the country ranked 128 out of 227 in GDP per capita. Moreover, income is unevenly distributed: a strong share of the increased wealth has gone to a new class of the rich and ultrarich. Many urban residents are dissatisfied because of job insecurity, low wages, unpaid benefits, and land disputes. Rural residents—57 percent of the population by official government classification—resent their second-class political and economic status. An estimated 160 million rural people have migrated temporarily to the cities to do factory and construction work. Facing all these dissatisfied social groups, the government needs to
improve incomes and welfare benefits to maintain political stability, but it can do so only gradually because of the huge cost.

For the longer term as well, the demographic structure of the heartland population is full of latent threats. Because the regime enforced a policy of one child per family starting in the late 1970s, there are now more old people and fewer young people than in a normal population distribution. By 2040, retired people will make up nearly one-third of the population, worse than the ratio in Japan today, and the number of children and elderly will nearly equal the number of working-age men and women. The burden on the working population will hold back economic growth and may create a shortage of military manpower. Even if the government were now to relax the one-child policy, as it has begun to do, the shortage of people in the reproductive ages will continue to create a shortage of children, causing the population to peak at about 1.5 billion around 2030 and then decline. As this happens, India will overtake China as the country with the world’s largest population and will enjoy the economic benefits of more workers and a lower ratio of dependents. China’s population-planning program also produced an imbalanced sex ratio because some families aborted female fetuses or in some cases even killed or abandoned baby girls. By 2030, China is expected to have 25–40 million surplus males, with unknowable consequences for social stability.

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF CHINA

Above and beyond the heartland towers a second China, remote and high, stretching as far as 1,500 miles farther to the west. The western thirteen of China’s provinces occupy three-quarters of China’s land surface but contain only a little more than one-quarter of its
population and produce less than one-fifth of its GDP. These provinces contain most of China’s mineral resources and the headlands of its major rivers. Most of this area is mountainous or desert, and most of its people are poor.

Even though China’s fifty-five officially recognized national minorities constitute only about 8 percent of the country’s total population, several of the minorities living in the West have weak commitments to the Chinese state, strained relations with the central government, and active cross-border ties with ethnic kin in neighboring countries. This is especially true of two groups: the Tibetans, who live not only in the Tibet Autonomous Region, but also in parts of four other contiguous provinces; and the Uyghurs, who form the largest population group in the vast region of Xinjiang. These two populations occupy the extensive buffer area that has historically protected the heartland from the political storms of Inner Asia. Beijing nominally gives what it calls “autonomy” to 173 minority-occupied areas ranging from province-size regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang to counties, but these areas are in fact controlled by ethnically Chinese (that is, Han) administrators and military garrisons. The government invests major resources to assure its control over this far-flung domain, a topic we explore further in chapter 8.

ECONOMICS: FROM AUTARKY TO GLOBALIZATION

China made a strategic turn from autarky to globalization in the 1980s and 1990s that fundamentally altered its relations with the outside world. The turnabout generated new power resources but also new security challenges.

China traditionally was an economic world unto itself. The premodern economy did not support power projection beyond the borders, nor did it require initiatives in international trade or diplomacy. It produced little that could be sold abroad, needed little that was produced abroad, saved no money to invest abroad, and offered no skills to attract investors from abroad. After World War II, when other parts of Asia that started out with agrarian economies and Confucian cultures similar to China’s registered growth rates of 8–10 percent a year by producing consumer goods for the West, China did not have the same option of export-led development. For one thing, levels of global trade were too small both in absolute terms and as a proportion of world gross national product to accommodate China. Second, even had international markets been more inviting, China’s entry into them was barred by a trade embargo which the West imposed at the start of the Korean War and which it maintained later as part of the effort to drive a wedge between China and the Soviet Union (see chapter 3). The Soviet Union for its part—China’s ally in the 1950s—was recovering from World War II and gearing up its defense forces for the Cold War. It could give China only limited, although crucial, assistance, and this assistance came to an end with the Sino–Soviet split in 1960. For all these reasons, China in the 1960s and 1970s was the one major country whose domestic economy was completely isolated from the international economic system.

China’s leaders had to look inward for a solution to the country’s economic problems. To
get the country to develop self-reliantly, Mao Zedong and his colleagues devised a strategy modeled on Stalinism but with a number of unique features. They created large communes with no private ownership of land, restricted the migration of rural residents to the cities, used ideological campaigns instead of material incentives to mobilize human energies, and applied political terror and indoctrination to make people accept low living standards. The population found itself organized into work units—communes, factories, offices, and schools—that controlled all aspects of daily life. The ruling party deterred opposition by mobilizing mass persecutions of designated “class enemies.” This totalitarian model produced industrialization at a rapid pace, but at a huge human cost.

Mao left his successors to face a crisis that was both economic and political. China had made itself self-sufficient in nearly all resources and technologies but lagged twenty to thirty years behind world technical standards, with low labor and capital productivity. Living standards did not exceed the levels of the 1930s. Most Chinese lived in cramped quarters with poor food and clothing, few comforts, and no freedoms. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong enjoyed levels of GDP per capita that were five to seventeen times greater than China’s. Chinese in the post-Mao era were no longer willing to tolerate frozen living standards in pursuit of a grotesque utopia. Pro-reform policymakers reckoned that the economy had to grow at 6 to 10 percent a year to improve living standards enough to prevent an economic and social breakdown, nor, they thought, could China protect itself militarily or diplomatically with such a weak economy.

When Deng Xiaoping came to power in late 1978, he therefore announced a policy of “reform and opening.” “Reform” meant liberalizing the domestic economic and administrative systems; “opening” meant abandoning autarky in relations with the rest of the world. The two were linked. Opening gave China access to foreign markets, investment, and technology; reform made room for more efficient, competitive enterprises that could survive the encounter with the world market.

The embrace of globalization enhanced China’s security in some ways and threatened it in others. Rapid economic growth helped the regime survive as it relaxed totalitarian controls, although it was not the only factor. The plunge into the world economy generated the financial resources needed to modernize the military and created the technological infrastructure to support a modern military. And economic clout translated into diplomatic clout and soft power (chapter 10).

At the same time, the embrace of globalization required China to compromise its autonomy in numerous ways. In the First Ring, globalization opened China to penetration by foreign people, media, institutions, ideas, norms, and values. It required China to alter its domestic legal, administrative, banking, and judicial systems; subjected China to deep surveillance and adverse judgment by and pressure from foreign organizations and governments; and created sharp competition for state enterprises in their own markets. Globalization generated disruptive changes throughout Chinese society, including the rise of a new middle class, the growth of economic inequality, and the influx of foreign ideas and values.

In the Second Ring and Third Ring, China needed peace and stability in order to pursue economic ties. It abandoned antiregime movements it had supported in neighboring
countries, normalized ties with neighbors with whom it had broken either state-to-state relations (South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia) or party-to-party relations (Vietnam), and resolved most of its boundary disputes. It worked to develop economic complementarities with neighboring states—in some cases involving resource extraction and in others involving the development of global supply chains in which intermediary products produced in neighboring countries were shipped to China for assembly. China engaged with—in some cases helped create—regional security institutions such as the SCO in Central Asia, the Six-Party Talks on Korea, ASEAN+3 in Southeast Asia, and the ASEAN Regional Forum in the Pacific region. We discuss these developments further in chapters 5 and 6.

In the Fourth Ring, China joined and in large part complied with most of the international regimes by which states regulate their interactions in the interdependent world of today. It joined the WTO, signed the main arms control and disarmament treaties, and ratified the main international human rights treaties, and joined other treaties and organizations (chapters 10 and 12).

China came through the reform and opening process with a net strengthening of both the regime’s and the country’s security, but it did so by giving up much of the autonomy it had exercised under Mao. To enjoy the benefits of globalization, it subjected itself to international rules. To be sure, China abides by the rules in differing degrees depending on how compliance with any given set of international norms suits its security needs. In some cases, compliance is substantive; in other cases, it is formal. In some cases, China seeks to reinforce existing rules; in other cases, it tries to use its place at the table to change those rules. But overall it has become a status quo power in a system designed by the West.3

AT THE HINGE BETWEEN THE GREAT POWERS

A country’s geographical position is less malleable than its economic strategy, but it too produces a distinctive combination of security advantages and vulnerabilities. The great gift bestowed on the People’s Republic of China (PRC) by geography was its strategic location as a vast territory on the mainland of Asia located between the spheres of influence of the two Cold War superpowers. This position gave it special prominence in international politics throughout the period of the Cold War and beyond.

In Europe, except for a few small neutrals, every country was on one side or other of the Cold War line and was threatened by one but not the other of the two superpowers. Asia was divided as well between the Soviet and American blocs. Two countries were divided across the middle, Korea and Vietnam. China alone aligned permanently with neither of the two superpowers. For a decade, it stood on the Soviet side but then broke away. Without formally joining the Western camp, it tilted to the West after 1971. It became what theorists call a “weak pole” in the international system, giving North Vietnam and North Korea a way to balance against the Soviet Union and for a time giving Cambodia and Burma an alternative to alignment with either of the two superpowers.4
As the only major country at the intersection of the two camps, China found itself in the uniquely influential yet also dangerous position of being alternately wooed and threatened by both. When China allied with the Soviet Union, the U.S. responded with a strategy of pressure designed to break the alliance. When China shifted out of the Soviet camp, the Soviets responded with similar pressures. Any expansion of China’s influence—for example, in Korea and Vietnam—brought it into conflict with the sphere of influence of either the Soviet Union or the U.S. China is the only country to have been threatened with nuclear attack by both superpowers—the only country that had to deter and defend itself from both.

The only development more dangerous to China than superpower rivalry during the Cold War would have been superpower collusion. That possibility took shape in the late 1950s when the American “wedge strategy” to separate China from Russia led the Soviets to push for coexistence (chapter 3). Had the Soviet–American duopoly that Chinese strategists feared ever taken shape, it would have exposed China to potential diktat in any area the superpowers wished.

China did not seek to overcome its isolation by joining existing blocs or constructing its own. It instead sought to encourage fluidity and multipolarity wherever it could. From 1958 onward, Chinese diplomacy aimed at countering emergent U.S.–Soviet cooperation on arms control, European stability, and the Middle East. China’s diplomacy in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America aimed at breaking rather than constructing alignments. Mao once said, “The world is in chaos, the situation is excellent.” But his diplomatic goal was not literally chaos, which might have threatened China in other ways, but loosening the superpower vise that constricted his freedom of maneuver.

The ability to seesaw between the two powers, however, eventually enabled China, alone among all countries during the Cold War, to extract security benefits from the U.S.–Soviet rivalry by creating and manipulating a “strategic triangle” during the period from 1972 to 1989 (chapter 3). And when the Soviet–American military confrontation eased starting in the mid-1980s, China was able to deal on favorable terms with both former enemies at once.

This orientation continues today. Of all the large powers, China is the most free to maneuver, shift alignments, and flexibly pursue national interest. This freedom of maneuver magnifies its importance to other major powers and its influence over smaller states. Its size and situation continue to make it “a critical independent factor in the balance of world forces.”

AN EXPOSED GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION

The downside of China’s geographical position is its exposure in all directions to instability, pressure, and even invasion.

Potentials for conflict are everywhere around China’s periphery. Its nearly 14,000 miles of land borders are the longest in the world. The 4,000-mile boundary with the Soviet Union was for twenty-five years the longest unfriendly frontier in the world. At one point, nearly
1.5 million troops were ranged closely along the two sides of this line, and some on the Soviet side were armed with nuclear weapons. The two sides began to demilitarize the border and restore local cross-border trade in the late 1980s. But the breakup of the Soviet Union gave rise to a new set of neighbors that was in some ways even more complicated than before: Russia plus five Central Asian states (three of them directly contiguous to China) and a Mongolia set free from Russian domination and committed to democracy and relations with the West. The new states’ internal troubles have the potential to weaken Chinese control of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, and their foreign policies create tension with China over ethnic, trade, and security issues.

Along the eastern and southern sides of the Chinese landmass are sea borders ranging for 9,000 miles. All along this coastline, the Han heartland lies exposed. Set back from the coast by distances ranging up to only about 600 miles, most of the heartland consists of fertile, well-watered lowland plains and valleys that grow wheat and rice. Only a small part of the heartland is protected by coastal mountains from seaward attack. When Japan invaded in 1937–1938, it occupied most of this area in a year of fighting; in today’s era of precision-guided munitions, ballistic missiles, satellite technology, and nuclear weapons, the heartland’s population is even more exposed to attack.

Most of China’s borders are easier to invade than to defend. The long coastline was invaded repeatedly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The inland border regions are mountainous and cold, difficult to garrison and defend, and open to subversion by outside powers who might appeal to the resident ethnic minorities. Facing the U.S., Russia, Japan, and India, China’s defenders do not benefit from the presence of buffer states on most of the likely invasion routes.

During the twentieth century, China engaged in military conflicts with Japan, the U.S., South Korea, India, Russia, Vietnam, and Taiwan. Even though relations have improved greatly with each, in the long view all remain potential military rivals. The armies of these seven states rank in the top twenty-five of world armies by size. China’s army, even though it is the biggest in the world, suffers a net two and a half to one disadvantage of troop strength compared to the aggregate militaries of its six main regional neighbors, even leaving aside the more distant U.S., which is likely to get involved in almost any conflict that involves China. By way of comparison, the U.S. enjoys a more than three to one manpower advantage in troop strength over the combined armed forces of its immediate neighbors Mexico, Canada, and Cuba, with whom military conflict is in any case almost unthinkable today.

The PRC inherited a variety of territorial disputes along the entire length of its land and sea borders. During the 1960s, it concluded boundary treaties with Mongolia, Burma, Bhutan, Sikkim (subsequently annexed by India), Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In the 1990s, it signed boundary treaties with Laos, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. In 2004, it resolved the last details of its formerly disputed borders with Russia. China still has unresolved boundary or territorial disputes with Bhutan, North Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei.

Even though war today looks unlikely, Chinese defense planners can never rule out the possibility of war at almost any location along China’s long borders. China’s potential
battlegrounds are not overseas, but on its own administered or claimed territory. This strategic situation is the opposite of that faced by American defense planners, whose home territory is so far from all conceivable enemies that invasion is not a concern in defense planning. The vulnerability to invasion was the reason why for decades Beijing’s planners left undeveloped the southern coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, with their combined populations of 50 million at the time, in the expectation that China’s own air force would have to bomb them in the event of an invasion by the U.S. or the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT). After the 1965 Gulf of Tonkin Incident increased tensions between the U.S. and North Vietnam, Mao Zedong decreed with the Third Front policy the removal of already-developed industrial projects and infrastructure from urban concentrations in the North and Northeast to remote mountain valleys in the West and Southwest. From 1965 to 1971, two-thirds of state industrial investment was spent to disperse and hide industrial assets so the enemy could not destroy them from the air. Productivity dropped, and transport costs rose, imposing huge costs on the already struggling economy.  

China is surrounded by smaller countries that fear Chinese domination. Throughout the Cold War, China had neither the strategic power to coerce its neighbors nor the dynamic economy to attract them. Thailand moved closer to China when it lacked strong support from the U.S., and North Vietnam did so when it lacked strong support from the Soviet Union, but these alignments were temporary, based on expediency rather than on long-term common interests. China has enjoyed formal alliances with only two of its neighboring countries, the Soviet Union and North Korea, and long-term alignments with two others, Pakistan and Burma. Of these four relationships, the one with the Soviet Union turned to enmity, and the defense treaty was not renewed. The defense commitment to North Korea was weakened by China’s opening to the U.S. and by the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with South Korea. Pakistan and Burma remain China’s friends, but both are troubled states, diplomatic liabilities as much as assets. For the rest of its neighbors, fear of China has not yet been fully counterbalanced even today by the kinds of forces that sometimes draw nations together—common economic or security interests or cultural sympathies. 

Finally, geography leaves China more exposed than any other major power to damage from global climate change. The densely populated North China Plain, which uses a great deal of water for industry, agriculture, and daily living, has suffered since the early 1980s from a water shortage, and that shortage is growing steadily more severe. In response, the government in 2002 started to build the massive South–North Water Transfer Project, comprising three separate canal systems totaling more than 2,000 miles in length. As global warming proceeds, the North will need even more irrigation to help crops survive, yet northern aquifers are on track to dry up within thirty years. At the same time, climate change will reduce the flow in the southern rivers that Beijing looks to as its source of water for the North by melting the Tibetan glaciers that feed the rivers. Climate change will also increase the frequency and severity of droughts, floods, and cyclones, threatening farmers and the residents of poorly built cities. Along the coast, Chinese scientists estimate, a twelve-inch rise in sea level would inundate more than 31,000 square miles of coastal lowlands, an area far greater than the area expected to be similarly impacted in the U.S.,
Of all the features of China’s geopolitical situation we have described, only one can truly be called permanent, the location in Asia. Yet the significance even of being in Asia has never been fixed. Asia was once outside the European-based world system; in the nineteenth century, it became part of it; in the age of globalization, it has become an economic and strategic pole of its own. The map of Asia evolved with the rise and decline of colonialism, the start and end of the Cold War, and the coalescence and splitting of nations. Five territories—Annam, Cochin China, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos—became French Indochina in the nineteenth century, then split into four states in the 1950s, and became three countries after the unification of Vietnam in 1975. Indonesia and Malaysia were created from princedoms, sultanates, and tribal territories by Dutch and British colonialists and then survived as states in the postcolonial era, making some adjustments in their own boundaries and creating their own national myths. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian Empire became a union of fifteen soviet-socialist republics, and in the 1990s the Asian part of the Soviet Union was replaced by Russia and five independent Central Asian states. As technology shrank the world in the twentieth century, America became part of geopolitical Asia, with alliances and troops in the region and with extensive economic and cultural ties.

The boundaries and populations that Chinese policymakers have to defend—the entity known as “China”—is likewise not a fixed or natural object, but an uneasy amalgam of lands and peoples created by history. In ancient times, the term zhongguo, today translated as “China,” meant “the states of the central plain,” referring to various cities, states, and regions in what is now central China. Only later did this word come to mean the Middle Kingdom or what we think of today as China. The first unified Chinese state, the Qin (221–206 B.C.E.), occupied a territory only about a quarter of the size of today’s country. Over centuries, the primary Chinese ethnic group, who referred to themselves as “Han,” took shape from various regional cultures and expanded from the central plain by conquest and migration to the south, west, northwest, and northeast, incorporating the territories of ethnic groups living around them and assimilating many of the inhabitants. The Han territory in turn was conquered five times by Inner Asian nomads, who made themselves part of China and thus expanded it. By the early nineteenth century, under the conquest dynasty of the Manchus (the Qing dynasty, 1644–1911), China was larger than ever before or since.

Traditional China did not see itself as a nation-state or even as an empire with separate subject peoples, but rather as the center of civilization. In Chinese eyes, other kingdoms and tribes were more or less civilized depending on how close they were to the Han people culturally and politically. The Koreans and Vietnamese were the most civilized among the non-Han because they followed Confucian ethics and used Chinese characters as their written languages. Others were less so. China’s cultural and political influence stretched from the core provinces through more remote southern and western provinces, to garrisons

India, Korea, or Japan.
in territories dominated by non-Han peoples, to northern and northwestern tribes and
kingships extending as far as the edges of Tashkent and Samarkand in present-day
Uzbekistan, to a penumbra of other societies with their own governments, such as Korea,
Vietnam, Burma, and Nepal, and finally to barbarians so remote that some of them were
mythical.

Toward all peoples, the Qing practiced a policy of “impartial benevolence.” They viewed
fights among barbarians of different degrees of closeness to China as adjustments of
relations among cultural inferiors, not as the transfer of territory from one empire to
another. So in the nineteenth century Beijing did not perceive a threat to its security in
growing British influence over its own tributary states of Nepal, Sikkim, and Tibet. The
supremacy of Chinese moral and cultural influence seemed intact, and Britain was too small
and far away to be seen as a rival. Beijing was also willing to grant special rights to non-
Chinese authorities around the periphery to administer and tax trade and to discipline their
own people living in Chinese territory, as in the Sino–Kokand accord of 1835. This type of
arrangement fit into the Qing worldview, but it also later provided precedents for
extraterritoriality—the application of Western rather than Chinese law—in the Western-
dominated treaty ports.\(^\text{10}\)

In the nineteenth century, Chinese dominance in the regions farther from the capital
became insecure. In the Northeast, the Qing dynasty’s Manchurian homeland had come to
be inhabited mostly by Han Chinese, had been incorporated into the regular administrative
system in the form of three provinces (today Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning), but was
threatened by Russian and Japanese pressure. In the West, Qing garrisons maintained a
tenuous supremacy in Xinjiang, where Chinese settlers were recent arrivals among a host
of oasis states and nomadic tribes. Here China was but one of many cultural influences,
political forces, and trading partners, no more important than India, Persia, or Russia. Tibet
was formally still part of China but had coalesced into a loosely constructed theocratic state
as recently as the eighteenth century and maintained informal ties across the Himalayas to
Nepal, Sikkim, and parts of India. A rising British India in the South and a rising Russia in
the North promoted their influence there at Chinese expense. Only in Inner Mongolia, where
nomadic tribes were overwhelmed by Chinese settlers, did the Qing exercise firm control of
the border regions.

When the military forces of the expanding Western powers reached the perimeter of the
Chinese Empire, they forced China to define its physical borders in Western conceptual
terms, starting with the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689. This meant giving up claims to varying
kinds and degrees of paramountcy over parts of Central Asia and Siberia, outer Mongolia,
Korea, the Ryukyu Islands, Vietnam, and Burma—and even in a sense over Russia and
Britain themselves, for although the Chinese emperor had at one time unsuccessfully
demanded that both countries’ envoys kowtow to him as vassals, now China had to
recognize them not just as equals, but as victors in war. China ceded Hong Kong to Britain
in perpetuity, then leased away additional territory to enlarge the colony, ceded Macao to
Portugal, and ceded other pieces of territory to Russia, Japan, French-ruled Indochina,
British Burma, and British India. The most difficult legacy of territorial loss was Taiwan. This
island was incorporated into the Chinese Empire in 1683, then ceded as a colony to Japan
in 1895, then returned to Chinese control under the Nationalist regime in 1945. But after 1949, when the Communist Party took over the mainland, Nationalist-ruled Taiwan remained separate, posing a major continuing problem for PRC diplomacy (chapter 8).

The PRC denied the legitimacy of many of these Qing territorial losses, leading to territorial disputes with all of its neighbors, most of which have been settled by now. All of China’s remaining unrealized territorial claims—the island of Taiwan, 45,000 square miles of territory in three parcels disputed with India, smaller border claims with other neighbors, and several sets of islands in the East China and South China seas—are based in this history of one-time possession or exploration. In Beijing’s official rhetoric, maps, and history books, we see no signs of preparations to lodge claims to additional irridenta. In this sense, China is not an “expansionist” power with elastic territorial ambitions. Its claims appear fixed. Nevertheless, those claims are large and important, and Beijing has been consistently assertive about them, especially when it perceives challenges (chapters 5, 6, 8). If the concept of “China” undergoes any further historical evolution, it most likely will involve the loss of territory (potentially, for example, Taiwan), not the addition.

Besides defining its borders, modern China had to define its citizens’ legal status. In 1909, it adopted its first law of nationality, defining as “Chinese” the children of Chinese fathers anywhere in the world. This principle of jus sanguinis (determining nationality status by bloodlines) was consistent with traditional thinking about the meaning of being Chinese, but it placed China at odds with most countries’ modern view of citizenship as a territorial rather than an ethnic concept and put China in the position of treating other countries’ ethnically Chinese citizens as Chinese subjects. Despite claiming the Overseas Chinese as citizens, China found itself unable to extend protection to them. Chinese were victims of racial riots and the Chinese Exclusion Acts in nineteenth-century America and of discrimination in Japan and Southeast Asia. Claiming as citizens tens of millions of ethnic Chinese concentrated in Southeast Asia and scattered throughout the rest of the world was ultimately more a liability than an asset.11

The PRC began to extricate itself from this dilemma in 1955, when Premier Zhou Enlai announced at the Afro–Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, that Overseas Chinese should voluntarily adopt the citizenship of their host country and give up Chinese citizenship. During the 1950s, China reached agreements with North Vietnam and Indonesia that renounced the principle of dual nationality. The same model was applied in the 1970s when China normalized relations with other countries in Southeast Asia. In 1980, it resolved the problem once and for all with a new nationality law under which Chinese who take citizenship abroad automatically lose their citizenship in China.

Within China’s borders as well, the comfortable ambiguity of tradition on the subject of ethnicity was replaced by problematic clarities. In premodern times, the emperor’s subjects included people of many tribes, religions, and ethnic or subethnic groups. Broader labels such as Mongol, Tibetan, and Kyrgyz actually covered people from scores of culturally distinct groups.12 The Han “Chinese” majority itself was a mix of people with a broad spectrum of physical characteristics, speaking eight major and many minor dialects that are as different from one another as Italian and French and treating one another with varying degrees of subethnic prejudice.13
Modern social thought, influenced by Darwinism, wanted sharper definitions of ethnic and national identity. Late-nineteenth-century nationalists intent on overthrowing the Manchus were the first to create a clear sense of Han ethnicity by labeling the Manchus as “alien.” They defined the Chinese state that came out of the 1911 revolution as multiethnic, thus creating a national (or civic) identity that incorporated several distinct ethnic identities. The first flag of the new Chinese republic in 1912 accordingly consisted of five differently colored stripes symbolizing a unified state of five “races,” as they were called at the time (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim).

But the PRC soon decided that it had more than five ethnic groups among its citizens. The new regime in the 1950s assigned anthropologists to count and classify the people. It eventually officially recognized fifty-five national minorities (who by virtue of recognition became eligible for certain political and cultural privileges) plus the majority Han. The process was more administrative than scientific: some once-extant groups that had adopted Han identities were resurrected and given government assistance to revive or even create minority-group languages and rituals, and certain actually existing cultural communities were folded into the fifty-five accepted categories or classified as part of the majority Han.  

In any case, the classifications stuck, and the idea of dual national and ethnic identities continues to shape the Chinese state’s relations with its citizens and the outside world. Several of the officially recognized national minorities are sizable groups with developed cultures, occupying strategically important territories and maintaining connections with non-Chinese populations across China’s borders. They include the Tibetans; the group of interrelated Muslim peoples, mostly Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz, who live primarily in Xinjiang; the Mongolians, who make up a significant part of the population of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region; the Koreans who live on China’s border with North Korea; and the Dai, who occupy parts of China across from Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. Only after 1949 did the central government begin to have the ability to impose tight control over these regions. Local populations have resisted Han rule in a variety of ways, violent and nonviolent, sometimes threatening national security on strategic borders. Control over the minority regions is an interstate issue because of the native populations’ ethnic and political ties across national borders (chapter 8).

CULTURE: A REPERTOIRE OF OPTIONS

As China’s leaders manage their security problems—bestowed by demography and geography, shaped by economics, and inherited from history—they possess a range of options for action. Some analysts see culture, ideology, and nationalism as factors that limit possible strategies of action. We see these forces more loosely, as shaping not so much the actions themselves as the ways in which the actions are framed, understood, and justified.

Culture is a repertoire of possible patterns of behavior, some more and some less relevant to a particular problem that actors face at a given time. Habits of behavior,
inherited attitudes and beliefs, and memories of how things used to be done provide in their aggregate a series of precedents for nearly any pattern of action that social actors select. They do not tell an actor exactly what to do, but they help him interpret his adversaries’ and allies’ interests and actions in order to decide how to act.

For example, scholars have described Chinese culture as both peaceful and warlike. The country was created by conquest, both when the Han invaded neighbors’ territory and when Inner Asian neighbors conquered the Han. China conquered but was ultimately expelled from Vietnam and Korea; its settlements but not its rule extended into what later became Russia and the Central Asian republics. It expanded when there was population pressure on the land and room to expand. It stopped when it met insurmountable geographic obstacles or was turned back by other armed peoples. In the twentieth century, Chinese troops fought mostly in civil wars or near the country’s borders in wars that were primarily defensive. Chinese society has been violent internally when weak government, economic disorder, or social dislocation has made violence attractive, but peaceful when it has been well governed and prosperous. For Chinese, as for Americans and others, violence is apparently not a matter of culture, but of need and opportunity. Like any other people, the Chinese are capable of both peace and war, and cultural precedent does not tell us which they will prefer.

Chinese culture similarly contains elements of both realism and moralism. Chinese view the historical epic The Three Kingdoms as a template for thinking about the role of human relations in international affairs. The legend tells of the struggles among three rulers who sought to reunify China in 168–265 C.E. The tales are told by village storytellers, enacted in operas and movies, and illustrated in almanacs, calendars, and pictures posted on doors. Some of the heroes have become gods worshiped in temples. Every literate Chinese has read the novelized version written by Luo Guanzhong in the late 1300s. Chinese diplomats and military officers often describe their maneuvers in terms of these stories. The very language is full of references to it.

The opening line of the book states the theme of balance of power realism: “Empires wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce.” In a world in which power is evanescent, the book glorifies the use of “stratagems” (ji), deceptions designed to win battles against greater forces, if possible without placing one’s own forces at risk. In the “borrowed arrows stratagem,” for example, the military adviser Zhuge Liang is ordered to prepare a hundred thousand arrows within three days for a coming military action—an apparently impossible mission. He mystifyingly does nothing for three days. Then on the third evening he sends twenty boats filled with straw across the river in a fog. The frightened enemy shoots the straw full of arrows, and Zhuge brings them back to camp to use in the coming action. The “defecting with a secret stratagem,” also called the “personal injury stratagem,” a loyal general purposely accepts a cruel beating at the hands of his own commander to create the pretext for him to defect to the enemy’s side so he can spy on it. Stories like this praise mirrors-within-mirrors deceit. People with steel nerves and quick wits disarm others’ suspicions, only to betray them. Leaders lose their power because they trust others. Intended treacheries are secretly perceived and turned against their perpetrators.
But the cynicism in this classic work is counterbalanced by a stress on loyalty and legitimacy. Perhaps its best-known scene is the “Peach Garden oath,” where two of the main heroes pledge fealty to one of the contenders for power, Liu Bei. Nothing shakes their commitment through the rest of the book, and the novel is full of inspiring examples of self-sacrifice for the common mission. Liu Bei inspires devotion not because he is the most able general—in fact, that distinction belongs to the evil Cao Cao—but because he is the legitimate heir to the empire and therefore morally worthy. That is why he can recruit an adviser such as Zhuge Liang, who has a supernatural understanding of what the Chinese consider the decisive forces in war and politics: *shi, di*, and *shi* (time, place, and the correlation of forces). Both realism and idealism are strains in Chinese culture, and neither one automatically provides the key to understanding a given policy decision.

Chinese tradition emphasizes the importance of giving and getting “face,” or favorable personal recognition. Face has long been a central consideration in interpersonal relations in China. At the same time, the exchange of face can be a practical bargaining tool. The norm of face can be used instrumentally to warn other countries not to shame Chinese leaders by demanding humiliating compromises, lest tension escalate and cooperation become difficult. If China can convince its counterpart that its flexibility is constrained by concern for face, it can force the counterpart to moderate its demands. This strategy is particularly useful for the weaker party in negotiations, which China has often been in its dealings with the West.

But China is not always equally sensitive to giving face to others. By citing the principle that “he who tied the knot should untie it,” China can sometimes extract humiliating concessions from a negotiating adversary. Face may be given afterward as a reward for diplomatic cooperation. Even China’s legendary diplomatic hospitality can be used to demonstrate cultural superiority. When a foreign head of state visits China, Chinese television shows the deferential visitor being graciously received by the Chinese leader and nodding appreciatively as the leader lectures him on the principles of international relations. All this affirms China’s importance. If the foreign visitor says anything negative, the state-controlled Chinese media do not report it. Face is a traditional value that has been usefully adapted to modern diplomacy.

The problem of when and how cultural explanations apply also extends to the idea of China as a “middle kingdom,” whose identity requires neighboring smaller powers to accept a hierarchical relationship. To be sure, imperial China regulated its relations with other states partly by a tribute system, under which some foreign rulers were treated as vassals of the emperor. Historians have argued that this precedent affects Chinese ways of acting in the modern world of nation-states. Because traditional foreign policy was Sinocentric, assimilative, normative, ideological, personalistic, and hierarchical, nineteenth-century China had trouble adapting to the European-organized multistate system, which was egalitarian, nonideological, and contractual.16 Mao’s worldview, too, often seemed Sinocentric as the leaders of pro-Mao Communist parties from around the world trooped to China to receive audiences and pay symbolic tribute. During the period of the strategic triangle, China allowed itself to be courted by the Americans as if they were students coming to learn strategy at the knee of the master. As the triangle faded in the 1980s, China continued to talk about its ties with other countries less in terms of practical cooperation than in terms of
Yet the tribute system was only one form of traditional relations between the center and the periphery. In the heartland, government was bureaucratic. Toward and beyond the northern and western frontiers, one found a mix of military governors-general, Manchu Banner (tribal) garrisons, jasaks (hereditary princes), khans, hakim beys (governors), aksakals (representatives), tribute-paying theocratic and tribal rulers, and, even farther beyond, a few states that were linked to China as tributaries of Beijing’s tributaries, as Sikkim and Ladakh were of the Dalai Lama. Relations with Inner Asia were often pragmatic and egalitarian. Dealings with maritime Asia were conducted according to what scholars have called a “maritime subculture” that was commercial, exploratory, and intellectually realistic.

The tribute system was a way of thinking about political relations that served Chinese interests and those of some of its partners for a certain period of time. Like the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence or the “new security concept” today, Sinocentrism was an idea sufficiently malleable that it could facilitate trade and legitimate a range of diplomatic practices. The maritime subculture provided precedents of pragmatic egalitarianism that China can draw on when it needs to. We have to analyze present realities to explain when and how Sinocentric elements have remained useful in Chinese diplomatic practice and when and how they have not.

IDEOLOGY AND INTERESTS: COMPATIBLE MOTIVES

Ideology also expresses, explains, and justifies policy rather than determining what it will be. Chinese foreign policy is not deduced from formulas but, in our view, responds to interests. The broad concepts and values in terms of which the leadership understands its interests and explains its methods give insight, when properly interpreted, into their goals and methods, however.

Among the most long-standing tenets of Chinese foreign policy are the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. The government first enumerated these principles in 1954 when China was trying to reach out to the non-Communist countries of Asia. At that time, the principles were intended to strengthen relations with neutral countries such as India and Burma and to mollify Southeast Asian governments who were fighting Communist insurgencies and worried about the fifth-column potential of Chinese minorities within their borders. After the Cold War, the Five Principles, with no change in wording, served a new purpose, offering an alternative to the American conception of a new world order in which international regimes and institutions would limit the rights of other sovereign states to pursue policies at variance with American interests and values. China’s alternative design for the world at that time stressed—and continues today to stress—the sovereignty of all states, large and small, Western and non-Western, rich and poor, democratic and authoritarian, each to run
its own system as it sees fit, whether its methods suit Western standards or not. The
texture is moralistic, but the policy behind the words is interest based: to join with others
against American ambitions to control other countries' behavior.

China says it “never seeks hegemony.” This principle dates from the 1960s, when
hegemony was a code word for Soviet expansionism. In the late 1970s and the 1980s,
China extended the concept to Vietnam’s domination of Cambodia and Laos. Chinese
officials use the term today to refer to one-sided American efforts to enforce its will on
other countries in such matters as trade practices, weapons proliferation, and human rights.
By saying it will not seek hegemony, China both sets itself in opposition to certain American
policies and seeks to assure its smaller neighbors that its own economic development and
growing military might will not turn it into a regional bully. But this is a policy of realism
because bullying would create an incentive for local powers to band together to restrict
China’s rise.

Since the 1980s, China has said that it pursues “an independent foreign policy of
peace.” This formula uses ethical language, but represents a realist interest. Independence
means that China does not restrict its freedom of maneuver in relation to the other major
powers; peace means that it seeks regional—and increasingly global—stability so that it
can concentrate on economic development.

China’s official position on most disputes around the world is that they should be solved
by peaceful negotiations. This has been China’s view on the struggle between Israel and the
Arabs, the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the conflicts in the Sudan, the India–Pakistan
dispute over Kashmir, the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait
in 1990, the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis, the Iranian nuclear weapons crisis, and
so on. At the UN, China has usually refrained from voting or voted an abstention on
resolutions that mandated sanctions or armed interventions to reverse invasions, end civil
wars, or stop terrorism (so-called Chapter VII resolutions). In most cases, China has
preferred nonintervention because it sees such interventions as expanding U.S. power, it
does not have the power to lead or profit from such interventions itself, and it needs good
relations with whoever is in power in each of the countries involved in the disputes. Instead
of vetoing such interventions, however, it has usually abstained or cast no vote in order to
avoid angering countries that favor intervention.

Deng Xiaoping in 1989 counseled that China should not create unnecessary
antagonisms with foreign powers, but should “taoguang yanghui” (hide our light and nuture
our strength). Deng’s successor Jiang Zemin expressed a similar idea with his policy of
“zengjia xinren, jianshao mafan, fazhan hezuo, bugao duikang” (enhance trust, reduce
friction, develop cooperation, and avoid confrontation). In the late 1990s, Chinese leaders
introduced the idea of a “new security concept” under which countries should “rise above
one-sided security and seek common security through mutually beneficial cooperation.”
In the early 2000s, China introduced the slogan “peaceful rise” (later “peaceful development”),
under which “the people of all countries should join hands and strive to build a harmonious
world of lasting peace and common prosperity.” All these ideas articulate morally
commendable principles while also advancing the longstanding Chinese practical interest in
dissuading other powers from banding together to hamper China’s rise and justifying
resistance to American unilateralism.

Some tenets that no longer suit China’s needs have been abandoned, such as Mao’s call for worldwide revolution. But as the foregoing list of examples suggest, many key themes in Chinese foreign policy rhetoric have endured as China’s international role has evolved. They have done so for several reasons. First, in contrast to states with globe-spanning interests, China is still mainly a regional power. Only in Asia does China face the sorts of dilemmas America faces everywhere: between conflicting long- and short-term interests, economic and political needs, the incompatible demands of friendly states, historical friendships and new alignments, and old principles and new realities. But in more distant regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, a few simple principles reflect Chinese interests most of the time. To oppose great-power intervention and defend sovereignty and equality among states is not only high-minded but also represents China’s real security interest in regions where it cannot intervene itself and opposes intervention by other states. The farther one gets from China’s borders, the easier it is for China to match rhetoric with interests (chapter 7).

Second, a weaker power strengthens its bargaining position when it insists on the inviolability of its principles. To the extent that Beijing can persuade other capitals that it never changes its mind, foreign diplomats shy away from raising issues Beijing has labeled closed. Even if concessions have to be made, the claim that they are not concessions preserves an appearance of power, which is itself an element of power.

Third, even when there are inconsistencies and trade-offs in Chinese policy, it is easy to hide them from view under the cloak of rhetoric because a handful of top leaders and professionals run Chinese diplomacy (see chapter 2). The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) brought to the fore a group of leaders and diplomats who changed both foreign policy rhetoric and practice, but only for a short time. Even after domestic dissent appeared in the late 1970s, foreign policy has not been a major issue of debate. Dissident and off-the-record views differ from official ones chiefly in more openly acknowledging China’s ambition to be a major power in the twenty-first century.

Fourth, ideology helps the Chinese leaders provide the public with easily understood explanations of what they are doing in world affairs. For both domestic and foreign consumption, officials have explained foreign policy decisions in terms of a limited list of “core interests” (hexin liyi). For example, a white paper called “China’s Peaceful Development,” issued in 2011, includes these core interests: “state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification,” as well as “China’s political system,” “overall social stability,” and “sustainable economic and social development.” Moral principles such as peace and development or mutual respect and equality among states provide an easily grasped summary of a complex foreign policy.

In short, the fact that China’s foreign policy is so often consistent with its rhetoric does not mean that the policy derives deductively from the principles. Instead, the principles draw their meaning in specific circumstances and their ongoing utility from their service to national interests. They are open to interpretation as interests require, even to the point of disguising policy U-turns. Rhetoric and strategy in Chinese foreign policy are ultimately as consistent as they are because both respond to China’s evolving geopolitical situation.
Like culture and ideology, nationalism is a strong presence in Chinese foreign policy discourse, similarly shaping and expressing the understanding of China’s security interests without placing much constraint on the policymakers’ decisions about how to pursue those interests.

Every nationalism is unique. In contrast to the usually self-confident American nationalism of Manifest Destiny, Chinese nationalism is powered by feelings of historical humiliation and wounded national pride, which contemporary policymakers often cultivate and manipulate to advance their agendas. Nationalism gained salience from the experience of imperialism and the perceived tenuousness of China’s territorial, cultural, and, in some minds, even racial survival. The push over more than a century to regain and consolidate national sovereignty gave foreign policy a strong nationalist bent. In order to “save China,” political leaders had to answer the question of what was worth saving.

In a world of political and economic modernity, was China in any sense a great civilization? Was there something in its way of life that should be preserved, or was the search for wealth and power merely about protecting a piece of territory? Would the Chinese have to sacrifice everything that made them different in order to enter the path to development opened by the West? Such issues were reflected in the nineteenth-century debate over the limits of reform and in the intellectual revolution of the early twentieth century when contending groups of thinkers struggled over whether to save China through liberalism, fascism, or Marxism.

Chinese nationalism is built on a contradiction: if the nation’s problems are perceived as coming from outside, so are all the possible solutions. It was Western betrayal of China’s interests at the peace negotiations ending World War I that sparked the 1919 May Fourth Movement to save China by making its culture more like that of the West. The three leading contenders throughout the twentieth century to solve China’s search for a modern political form—liberal democracy, corporatist authoritarianism, and communism—came from the West. All the formulas to modernize China—rule of law, science and technology, Christianity—were Western. In an age of iconoclasm and revolution, what was Asian or traditional was rejected as backward. Where Chinese had traditionally thought of outside cultures as pale versions of their central culture, with its power to transform and civilize others, now the creative forces in China got their power from reacting against while also absorbing elements from a more powerful outside culture.

In 1949, Mao Zedong declared, “China has stood up.” With his “Sinification of Marxism,” he claimed to have combined a national identity with a global one—emulating one of the key claims of Confucianism—and to have forged a world-class model of thought and society that was at the same time distinctively Chinese. If the nineteenth-century German philosopher G. F. W. Hegel had once declared Asia to be outside of history because nothing important happened there, now in Mao’s vision the center of world history had moved to China. China was forging practices that would transform all humankind. But Mao’s death initiated a new period of debate over the cultural roots of his tyranny and the changes
that would have to be made to put China back on the road to modernity.

As China joined the world decisively under Deng Xiaoping, the disagreement between those who favored and those who opposed Westernization (often referred to respectively as “liberals” and “conservatives”) became once again the fundamental cleavage in Chinese politics. In 1988, an officially produced television documentary series, *Elegy for the Yellow River* (*Heshang*), used language almost identical to that of late-nineteenth-century reformers to declare that China’s inward-looking, land-bound civilization was moribund and that China would have to “join the blue sea” of Western culture in order to escape disintegration.\(^{23}\) The authors of *Elegy* went into exile in the aftermath of the pro-democracy demonstrations of spring 1989. The issue of cultural identity was taken over by conservative leaders who were concerned about cultural subversion by the West. Attacking what they alleged were American schemes to promote “peaceful evolution” and “bourgeois liberalization,” they tried to promote a nationalistic mix of Confucian and Sino–Marxist values.

With the fading of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) utopian ideals, nationalism remains the party’s most reliable claim to the people’s loyalty, in part because of nationalism’s protean character and diverse interpretations. As the only important value still shared by the regime and its critics, nationalism unites Chinese of all walks of life no matter how uninterested they are in other aspects of politics. Schoolchildren learn about Treaty Ports and concessions (foreign-governed areas in Chinese cities), foreign leaseholds and spheres of interest, extraterritoriality (by which foreigners in China charged with crimes were judged under foreign laws by foreign judges), “most-favored-nation” clauses that required China to extend low-tariff treatment to all its trading partners regardless of whether they did the same in return,\(^ {24}\) and foreign control over the Chinese customs, salt, and postal administrations. The problem of cultural identity infuses every aspect of China’s foreign relations, including policies toward military security, foreign trade and investment, human rights, international academic collaboration, tourism, and the treatment of foreign news in the domestic press. The memory of “national humiliation” has been a strong element not only in rhetoric, but in Chinese perceptions of strategic realities.\(^ {25}\) Many Chinese see themselves as a nation beleaguered, unstable at home because insecure abroad and vulnerable abroad because weak at home. To them, it seems that China is always ready either to fly asunder or to be torn apart. China’s very vulnerability engenders an urge not only to be secure in the world, but to take a turn at being a great power, capable of contending with any competitor in Asia.

**CHINA’S GRAND STRATEGY**

Geography and history set the agenda for Chinese foreign policy. The policy’s first objective is to restore and maintain territorial integrity: to maintain domestic political stability; block outside support for separatist movements in Tibet, Xinjiang, and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region; reclaim Taiwan; defend maritime claims in the East China and South
China seas; and, in short, defeat subversion and deter intervention or invasion on all fronts. This objective requires improving the capacity for internal security, working the global diplomatic scene to prevent Taiwan from expanding its international space and to cut off support for separatist forces in Tibet and Xinjiang, and improving the military capacity to deter threats from nearby armies and the U.S.

A second goal is to prevent the domination of the Asian region by others while expanding Chinese influence among neighbors. On the one hand, if China’s location at the center of Asia surrounds it with potential enemies and involves it in complicated rivalries, it also gives it great influence in the most dynamic region of the world. Should another nation dominate the region, it might bring pressure on China in many ways. On the other hand, policies that are too assertive may alarm China’s neighbors into thinking that China itself seeks to dominate Asia. A careful mix of military capability, economic power, and diplomatic involvement is needed to influence neighbors without pushing them into a hostile reaction.

Third, Chinese foreign policy seeks to create a favorable international environment for its economic growth. China favors stable world markets, opposes trading blocs, and works for access to foreign markets and foreign sources of energy and other commodities.

Finally, China seeks a voice in the shape of the evolving global order. Its rise has coincided with a period of growth in the international regimes governing trade, finance, nonproliferation, public health, environmental policy, human rights, and more. In all these areas—as well as in the use of the UN Security Council’s powers to authorize military interventions on behalf of international peace and security—China’s interests give it distinctive preferences, which are seldom identical with those of the other major powers. China’s diplomats use both trade-offs and “soft power” to generate cooperation with like-minded states and influence the way these rules evolve (see chapters 7 and 12).

China pursues these goals with a mixture of power and weakness. If size and extended borders render the country vulnerable, they are also advantageous in deterring invasion. The vast hinterland provides room to fall back and defend in depth. That is a major reason why China was not colonized during the era of imperialism. Population is also a mixed liability and asset. Merely by being so numerous, the Chinese affect the fates of the rest of the world whatever they do—when they emigrate, when they purchase grain on world markets, when they build roads and drive cars. Because of China’s demographic size, no global problem can be solved without it.

China’s economy is on track to become the world’s largest by around 2030, if not sooner. This position gives the country global influence and provides a strong basis for a sophisticated military machine, but it also makes China heavily dependent on global markets and resources for its prosperity and stability. Chinese spokesmen worry that talk of China’s economic rise also encourages the rise of “China threat” theory. They insist that China is and will continue to be a poor, developing country. To be sure, China’s GDP per capita of $6,600 (in U.S. dollars) in 2009 still ranked only 128th out of 227 countries in the world. Yet by quality-of-life measures, the Chinese population is more educated, healthier, and better skilled than bare income figures suggest. The fact is that China is in different senses both poor and rich. By entering the world economy, China has both gained the ability to influence others and opened itself to economic influence from others.
A nation’s influence consists not only of strategic and economic power, but also of the “soft power” of values and ideas. China’s opening to the world has reduced the mystique that the Chinese “way of socialism” once enjoyed in the West. In exchange, the success of the Chinese model—“market authoritarianism” or the “Beijing consensus”—has given Chinese diplomats a respectful hearing throughout the developing world and in the West’s boardrooms. But China remains vulnerable to international criticism over the regime’s violations of human rights, which reveal the illegitimacy of the Chinese political model to many of the country’s own people.

In the post–Cold War era, the four rings of China’s security are more closely linked than ever before. Beijing has come to realize that internal stability is increasingly vulnerable to international events and that China’s international influence depends on its ability to maintain stability at home. As China’s 2006 defense white paper observed, “Never before has China been so closely bound up with the rest of the world as it is today.” In the first decade of the twenty-first century, “thinking locally demands acting globally” has become the unofficial mantra guiding the PRC’s diplomacy. This mantra has required a more proactive and global foreign policy.

China’s location in the heart of Asia, the complexity of its regional environment, its abundance of difficult neighbors, its location between American and Russian spheres of influence—all the attributes that define the difficulties of China’s geopolitical position—also contribute to its strategic importance and its ability to achieve foreign policy goals. Despite its power liabilities, it has taken advantage of its situation to turn itself into one of the major world actors. China is a large developing country, but it is in a different diplomatic class from other large developing countries such as India, Brazil, and Indonesia.

For now, China frames the assertion of its existential interests in the language of cooperation, seeking to reassure its neighbors and the major powers of its willingness to cooperate and to respect their interests. At the same time, it integrates into the world system to gain advantage, with a long-term possibility of working to change the system to suit its own values, political model, and vision of the world. The possibilities exist for both cooperation and conflict with the rest of the world. China’s role remains to be defined by its interactions with its neighbors and by theirs with it. Its security needs are not logically incompatible with the interests of its neighbors and the other major powers, but neither will these interests automatically mesh.
WHO RUNS CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY?

A country’s search for security is shaped by the vision, skills, and information embedded in its leadership and policymaking institutions. In the case of the PRC, the institution that has shaped foreign policy most decisively has no formal existence: the post of supreme leader. So far this position has been occupied by only four men: Mao Zedong (ruled 1949–1976), Deng Xiaoping (the dominant leader 1978–1992), Jiang Zemin (in office 1989–2002), and Hu Jintao (term of office 2002–2012). A fifth leader, Xi Jinping, has been selected to succeed Hu Jintao in 2012 for what is anticipated to be two five-year terms.

The leader’s personal vision shaped the substance of China’s search for security in each period—the willingness to endure isolation under Mao, the plunge into globalization under Deng, the push to reassure other powers under Deng, Jiang, and Hu, and under all four leaders an attentiveness to balance of power and a willingness to use force if other methods of asserting China’s interests failed. The institution of the supreme leader has also given Chinese foreign policy some of its operational characteristics—consistency of strategic vision, the ability to enforce sacrifices upon certain institutions and individuals, and the capacity to change course dramatically without negotiating with other centers of power.

Over time, the role of the leader has changed. Each successive chief has been weaker politically than the previous one, forced to be more of a consensus seeker, and each has faced a progressively more complex foreign policy agenda. The other parts of China’s foreign policymaking system have grown larger, more bureaucratic, more institutionalized, and more professional. Today the policy center still consists of a small, authoritarian, party–state–army elite that has the advantages of compactness and insulation from other government institutions, media, and civil society. Yet compared to the past, the makers of foreign policy confront more complex and vocal social constituencies that have more to lose or gain from foreign policy decisions than previously because of the impact of globalization on their daily lives and that know more about foreign policy than in the past because of the liberalization of the official media. The policy elites today sometimes find themselves hedged in by public attitudes they have helped to create, which set limits not so much on the substance of decisions as on how they must be presented.

The top foreign policy decision makers are well-vetted and long-experienced cadres of the Communist system. They have been promoted through career tracks that have socialized them well to the rules of the system, so much so that they sometimes have trouble striking out in new policy directions. They work within decision-making procedures—both formal channels and informal consultations—that are clearer and more stable than they were in the past, but that are often cumbersome and stove-piped, with a weak capability for crisis response. The leaders are served by a well-resourced intelligence apparatus, but
they suffer from information overload and selective analysis. China has the policy advantages and disadvantages of an authoritarian state. It can sustain strategic policies in a disciplined way over long periods of time, but it suffers the risk that leaders unchecked by independent institutions will make large mistakes and have difficulty correcting them.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL STRUCTURES OF POWER

China’s formal government structure does not provide for the post of supreme leader. The Chinese Constitution, modeled on the 1936 Soviet Constitution created by Stalin, says that “all power in the People’s Republic of China belongs to the people.” Theoretical state sovereignty is accordingly concentrated in the institution that notionally represents the people, the National People's Congress (NPC), which is made up of around three thousand delegates, who meet for a couple of weeks once a year and whose powers are exercised between meetings by the Standing Committee. The state structure is unitary: the Constitution provides for neither separation of powers nor federalism. Instead, the NPC appoints the premier, who heads the State Council (i.e., the cabinet), whose job is supposed to be to execute policy set down by the ruling party, the CCP, and by the NPC. The NPC also appoints the officials of the judicial branch and holds the power to interpret and supervise implementation of the Constitution, to amend it, or even to replace it. A great deal of territorial power has been delegated from the central government down to the provinces, municipalities, counties, and townships, but the center never gives it away permanently. Local budgets are controlled from the top either by financial allocations or by delegated taxing powers.

Also recognized in the formal structure is the leadership of the state apparatus by the CCP, an elite party whose membership in 2011 was about 80 million, around 6 percent of the nation’s population. The party, according to Marxist theory originally the political vanguard of the working class, now has members in all walks of society and is the dominant channel to political power. It appoints personnel throughout the government, army, economy, and cultural and educational establishments. It decides on major policies and transmits these policies for implementation to the state apparatus (i.e., government agencies). Its own constitution makes its highest organ the Central Committee, a body with a membership that varies in the range of two hundred to four hundred. But the Central Committee meets only once or twice a year, mainly to hear reports. Its powers are actually exercised by the Political Bureau (Politburo), consisting of twenty-odd top leaders who meet about once a month, and by an even more select body called the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), which consists of the five to eleven most powerful leaders (always an odd number), who meet once a week and pass on all the important decisions in both domestic and foreign policy. The party's top official is the general secretary.

In keeping with the idea—rooted in both Chinese and Marxist traditions—that the citizens have no real conflicts of interest among themselves, the formal structure is designed to avoid any kind of pluralism. CCP ideologists state that the people’s historic
decision to vest power in the ruling party, effected by the CCP’s victory in the revolutionary war of 1946–1949, is irreversible, so there is no need for multiparty competition for power. (Eight small “democratic parties” exist but do not compete.) When elections are held, except in scattered cases at the village level, they do not foster competition but allow the masses to choose leaders approved by the party, albeit sometimes from among multiple candidates.

Because China is such a huge country, power does not work in practice quite the way it works on paper. Four of China’s thirty-three province-level units have populations larger than the largest European nation, Germany; 216 of China’s 2,861 counties have populations larger than seven American states; and China has twenty cities of more than 5 million in population compared to one in the U.S. (New York). As a result, the system assigns great responsibilities and correspondingly great powers to the party chiefs at each level of government, who are told to make everything work as best they can in whatever way they think best.

At any level of government, the local party secretary directly or indirectly runs everything—the police, the courts, the local-level people’s congresses, the population-planning bureaucracy, the Propaganda Department and local media, the agricultural bureau, industry, commerce, and the rest. The center’s ultimate control is enforced by awarding promotion to those officials who meet its priorities, of which the most important in recent years have been to grow the economy, to keep the increase of population within planning targets, and to prevent the outbreak of social protest. This model of concentrated local control, which some scholars call “de facto federalism,” means that power is both decentralized and centralized: it is decentralized to local leaders who exercise authority within their jurisdictions, but it is centralized because these local officials’ careers are controlled by the ruling party’s personnel system, which rewards officials whose performance meets the center’s demands.

This system of concentrated local power responsive to central priorities largely determines how Chinese officials deal with security problems in the First Ring, including demonstrators and dissidents throughout the country, dissatisfied ethnic minority populations in places such as Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as foreign foundations, NGOs, journalists, and travelers gathering information and promoting change. Outside analysts sometimes see local diversity in human rights and environmental practices or in openness to foreign business as a sign of policy disagreements within the regime, but it is closer to the truth to say that all local party secretaries share the same priorities—development and social order—and simply pursue them in different ways depending on local conditions and their own skills.

Policymaking for the Second, Third, and Fourth rings beyond China’s borders is reserved to the central authorities—and with respect to important decisions to a small circle among them. Just as a village party chief takes ultimate responsibility for all problems in the village, so for global issues the three large foreign policy bureaucracies—the CCP, the state, and the military—bring their biggest problems to Zhongnanhai, the complex of offices in the heart of the old imperial palace complex in Beijing where the Politburo and its Standing Committee meet.
THE LEADER’S CHANGING ROLE

If in America all politics is local because issues find their ultimate resolution with the voters, so in China all important politics is ultimately court politics because the difficult issues find their way up the system to the top. But the character of court politics has changed over time.

In the person of Mao Zedong, the system produced a dictator who often ignored the Central Committee and Politburo and made decisions unilaterally, frequently in the dark of night, half-asleep, based on quirky sources of information and shifting, delphic rationales. The other leaders were often puzzled about Mao’s goals, but he enforced his decisions with a mix of power resources. Official position was one such resource. Mao was head of state, a mainly ceremonial post he relinquished in 1959 to the second-ranking leader, Liu Shaoqi. He was also CCP chairman, a position he retained until his death that allowed him to control personnel appointments not only in the party itself, but throughout society and the economy. The chairmanship also gave him control of the mass media, education, arts, culture, and ideology through the party Propaganda Department. To honor Mao, the post of chairman was abolished after his death, and subsequent party heads were given the title general secretary.

Mao’s most important formal source of power, however, was the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC), a job he gripped tightly throughout the power struggles of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. In the capital, he controlled the physical security of his rivals in the central leadership by controlling the central guard corps and the Beijing garrison. In the provinces, his command of the military enabled him to dictate the course of the Cultural Revolution. With the trump card of physical force, Mao stood down the opposition of his top military officers to the Cultural Revolution in 1967 and prevented his comrade-in-arms Lin Biao from conducting a coup against him in 1971.

Equally important were Mao’s informal sources of power. His authority reflected not only his long history in the party—he was present at its creation in 1921, and in 1934–1935 he led the Long March—but also his reputation as the leader of the revolution, founder of the army, and creator of China’s form of Marxism–Leninism. During the great famine of 1959–1961, when China sustained an estimated 45 million deaths chiefly because of Mao’s misguided economic policies, the CCP managed to hold onto power in part because of Mao’s status as a demigod. Even as the peasants died from hunger, they believed that Mao could do no wrong and that he would rescue them. It was therefore just when he caused the regime’s greatest crisis that his colleagues could least afford to purge him. Similarly, when Mao’s intraparty victims came back to power after his death to consolidate their power as his heirs, they felt it necessary to say that Mao’s “contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh[ed] his mistakes.” By reaffirming in words many of the practices they abandoned, they preserved their claim to Mao’s hand-me-down charisma. The endless game of maintaining supremacy also depended on attributes of character. Mao’s deviousness, will power, and ruthlessness seemed to cow even the former bandits and
warriors who made up his circle of followers and rivals. When Mao died in 1976, his successor, Hua Guofeng, and allies in the military and the Beijing guard corps arrested Mao's more radical followers (the so-called Gang of Four, who included Mao's wife, Jiang Qing) and, after an interlude, passed power to Deng Xiaoping in late 1978. In formal terms, Deng's highest civilian post after his return to power was vice premier, and after 1989 his only formal position was honorary chairman of the Chinese Bridge Playing Association. His authority came first from his prestige and personal connections throughout the party, army, and bureaucracy dating back to the CCP's earliest years. Second, Deng's power, like Mao's, was based on his control of the military. From 1981 to 1989, he held the post of CMC chairman. This source of power became decisive in 1989 when Deng overruled other leaders and mobilized military units to suppress democracy demonstrators in Beijing. Third and most important, other senior leaders who were Deng's potential rivals vested authority in him because they believed that China needed to adopt the kinds of pragmatic policies he had been associated with—and punished for—during the Mao period. Although there were debates throughout the Deng period over the pace of reform, he sustained the consensus by policy zigzags and by initiating occasional purges of his own lieutenants (such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang) when they went too far.

Unlike Mao, Deng ruled with considerable consultation in the narrow circle of top power holders. Balancing the more conservative views of senior contemporaries such as Chen Yun and the more reformist views of some of his own followers, such as Zhao Ziyang, Deng remained the indispensable man, the ultimate arbiter for decisions in both domestic and foreign policy—policy areas that became increasingly interlinked by virtue of his decision to take the Chinese economy global (see chapter 10). To deal with the growing complexity of the issues involved in going global, Deng restored and built up the foreign policy apparatus—the professional diplomatic service, academic institutes, and bodies of experts in trade disputes, foreign exchange, intellectual property rights, arms control, human rights, and similar areas.

Deng endured some foreign policy failures (such as the inability to rein in Vietnamese challenges to Chinese interests in the late 1970s; see chapter 6) and suffered some setbacks (such as the Tiananmen crisis and the failure to be admitted to the WTO on his watch; see chapters 12 and 10, respectively). However, by and large his colleagues considered his policies successful as long as China's economy and global influence grew. Deng guided China's 1979 normalization of relations with the U.S. and the 1989 normalization of relations with the Soviet Union (see chapter 3). Above all, he led the process of China's immersion in globalization through a series of decisions first to open Special Economic Zones, then to open the entire coastal area to foreign investment and trade, and finally, in 1992, to place the policy of opening to the outside world beyond political debate with a series of forceful statements made during his so-called Southern Tour. With this last act, Deng set in concrete China's commitment to globalization as a way to build national power. His role then faded as illness encroached, and he passed away in 1997 at the age of ninety-two.

As Deng's influence waned, that of Jiang Zemin grew. Elevated by Deng to the position
of CCP general secretary during the crisis of 1989, Jiang spent a significant part of his thirteen years in office consolidating power. With the deaths of most of the senior leaders of Deng’s generation and the retirements of Jiang’s own main cogenerational rivals by 1997, Jiang was able to exercise unchallenged authority for the remaining years of his term as general secretary until 2002. It was Jiang, for example, who made the ultimate decisions on China’s negotiating stance on WTO membership and who articulated the strategy of maintaining smooth relations with the U.S. under the slogan “Enhance trust, reduce friction, develop cooperation, and avoid confrontation.”

The personal nature of power under Mao and Deng generated activity by faction leaders below the top leader who wished to influence policy. As with the man at the top of the system, so too the power resources of the faction leaders at levels below him included institutional position, personal connections, attractive or fearsome attributes of character, and the rhetorical ability to define ideological orthodoxy. Some factions dwelt in the leader’s court and drew power from access to him; others centered in the military, the bureaucracy, or regional governments and rooted their influence in the corresponding bureaucratic resources. Factions took shape through networks of people who had personal connections (guanxi) based on long associations and personal trust. Senior leaders contended for power by adopting ideological and policy positions that served the needs of their power bases. Some stressed ideological purity, others the practical needs of their institutions. When the supreme leader was vigorous, the factions fought for his ear. When he was weak or chose not to intervene, other senior leaders tried to take control over policy.

Foreign policy was not usually the central issue in factional conflicts. It was a realm unfamiliar to most of the Communist leaders and, especially under Mao, one that usually affected their power interests less than domestic issues. Despite factionalism, the supreme leader had his way on most foreign policy issues, imposing a consistent style and strategy across a range of decisions. Many of Mao’s senior colleagues at first opposed intervening in the Korean War, but they united quickly behind him once he decided to do so. Mao’s choice to break with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s faced hardly any dissent at top levels of the leadership. The chairman was personally responsible for launching the two 1950s Taiwan Strait crises that risked war with the U.S. and for initiating the policy of rapprochement with the U.S. in 1971–1972.

In a similar way, it was Deng Xiaoping who decided on China’s open-door policy in the late 1970s, normalization of relations with the U.S. in 1979, the 1979 incursion into Vietnam, rapprochement with the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the “one-country two-systems” policy for reunification of Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the agreement with Great Britain on the return of Hong Kong to China. PRC foreign policies may not always have been correct, but under Mao and Deng they were usually the product of a coherent vision and were carried out with discipline.

However, every major factional struggle drew foreign policy issues to some extent into its vortex. All of Mao’s early conflicts with party rivals over revolutionary strategy involved the question of how closely to follow orders from the Soviet-controlled Communist International (Comintern). The first major power struggle after 1949 led to the purge and death in 1954 of a top leader, Gao Gang, who had tried to cultivate close relations with
Stalin independently of Mao. Mao’s purge of Peng Dehuai in 1959 was also based in part on the charge that Peng wanted closer relations with Moscow. As a count against Peng, this charge may have been unjustified, but it sent a message to other colleagues who were thinking of questioning the wisdom of splitting from the Soviet Union. When Mao purged Liu Shaoqi and other orthodox party leaders in the Cultural Revolution, he accused them not only of domestic deviations, but of conciliatory leanings toward the West. The power struggle between Mao and Lin Biao in 1970–1971 embroiled Lin in resistance to Mao’s opening to the U.S., and after Lin’s death he was charged, justly or not, with favoring capitulation to the Soviet Union.

When the leader was weak, factional struggles might not only refer to foreign policies but affect them as well. When Mao was incapacitated late in his life, the faction led by his wife attacked its rivals for their association with U.S.–China rapprochement and a conciliatory Taiwan policy, thus forcing the government to adopt a temporary hard line toward the U.S. Even after the radicals were defeated, the power struggle between Deng Xiaoping and Mao’s designated successor, Hua Guofeng, froze policy toward the U.S. for a time until Deng gained power. Not until 1978 did Deng establish the authority needed to make compromises over Taiwan and thus normalize relations with the U.S. Setbacks to Deng’s power after the 1989 Tiananmen incident were associated with a temporary hardening of policies on trade with the U.S., arms transfers, human rights, and Hong Kong, among other areas. Deng’s illness in 1995–1997 contributed to the hardening of PRC policies toward Taiwan, human rights, and trade.

For foreigners, negotiating with Beijing under Mao and Deng had advantages and disadvantages. The considerations that shaped policy were either hidden in plain sight in the leader’s speeches and the official newspaper or were so private that even intelligence agencies could not discover them. From demonstrators in the streets to diplomats in conference rooms, the nation maintained unanimity behind a seemingly rigid ideology. But a Malraux, a Kissinger, or an Edgar Snow might be ushered into Mao’s or Deng’s presence to hear disquisitions marked by candor and flexibility. An enemy such as Nixon might be received as a friend, or a friend such as Khrushchev might be received as an enemy. China’s diplomats presented poker faces of discipline and secrecy during negotiations. But in the presence of the great leader or his authorized representative—under Mao, this representative was normally Premier Zhou Enlai—everything might be negotiable. Even so, any policy changes would be cloaked in public claims of doctrinal consistency. Once reached, an agreement could be relied on.12

GROWING INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Mao’s foreign policy apparatus was rudimentary. His decisions were implemented by a small staff under Zhou Enlai, the premier and sometime foreign minister. After receiving a phone call or written instruction from Mao, Zhou frequently handled even small details of policy personally. There is no record that Zhou had independent foreign policy views, but his
urbane style often led foreign negotiators to view him as a voice of moderation. He negotiated all the arrangements for the 1971 visit to China of an American ping-pong team, which opened the way for Henry Kissinger and later Richard Nixon. Even on his deathbed, Zhou continued his diplomatic work, receiving a Romanian delegation and holding discussions on policy toward Taiwan. Zhou sometimes had to work with a severely diminished staff. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao disbanded the few foreign policy institutes China had, called home all but one of its ambassadors, and sent most of the foreign policy establishment to the countryside to be reeducated by the peasants.

One of Deng Xiaoping’s goals starting in the early 1980s was to create greater institutionalization in party and government processes so that the political chaos of the Mao years would not recur. Under Deng’s guidance, limits on the length of political leaders’ terms of office began to be observed; leaders retired from office before they died and did not interfere in politics after retirement; the NPC and the CCP’s Central Committee met on schedule every year; new leaders were chosen by consultation among the outgoing leaders; the military ceased to exercise a voice in the succession to civilian posts; decision making in various spheres was supported by the work of staff in specialist agencies; a division of labor developed within the leadership over who had the right to propose decisions in which policy areas; and the PBSC chaired by the general secretary collectively cleared important decisions.

Jiang Zemin both benefited from and paid a price for the institutionalization begun by Deng. He benefited because he could draw real power from his formal positions as general secretary, head of state, and chair of the CMC. Even though he had no prior credibility as an ideologist, economic decision maker, or military strategist, his official posts gave him the right to speak in each of these areas. He had to fight less than Mao or Deng to defend his power in the factional arena because by this time lines of authority were better defined and terms of office more reliable. In other ways, Jiang was hampered by institutionalization: he could exercise final say only after consulting with other leaders in their areas of responsibility, and he had to step down from office when his term was over—which he did with apparent reluctance in a three-step process lasting from 2002 to 2004—and accept a successor, Hu Jintao, whom he had not chosen himself, but whom Deng had put in place as heir apparent early in Jiang’s term.

More than any of his predecessors, Hu Jintao worked within an apparatus that routinely required a great deal of coordination with other powerful, trusted, and expert actors. He could not decide issues arbitrarily or purge other leaders, the way Mao did, or intervene unpredictably in the policymaking domains assigned to others, as Deng did. But because he held the same triad of positions as Jiang Zemin—party general secretary, head of state, and chair of the CMC—he exercised the crucial prerogatives of setting agendas, leading discussions, and summarizing the results of meetings, which gave him the dominant influence over the course of foreign policy.

The Politburo and the PBSC are the levels at which major foreign policy decisions are most likely to be integrated with one another and with domestic policy decisions. It was at this level that policymakers dealt with such issues as the negative impact of the Great Leap Forward on relations with the Soviet Union (chapter 3) and the need to relax domestic
ideology in order to implement Deng Xiaoping’s open-door economic policy (chapter 10).

When the U.S. and China were negotiating the agenda for Richard Nixon’s pathbreaking visit to China in 1972, the Politburo issued the negotiating instructions for Chinese diplomats. In 1995, when the Clinton administration, in the face of China’s warnings to the contrary, allowed Taiwan’s leader Lee Teng-hui to visit the U.S., a meeting of the Politburo decided on China’s response, which included missile exercises in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, the withdrawal of the Chinese ambassador to the U.S., and the suspension of high-level U.S.–China diplomatic and military contacts.

Below the Politburo and the PBSC are the central party Secretariat and the General Office. There are also four departments that help the leaders set policy for specific aspects of foreign and domestic affairs. The Propaganda Department (in 1998 officially renamed in English the Publicity Department) governs the domestic and foreign work of the propaganda apparatus, which includes the media, the educational sector, and the cultural establishment. The United Front Work Department oversees policy related to nongovernmental persons and groups in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Overseas Chinese circles as well as relations with people at home and abroad classified as intellectuals, members of national minorities, and representatives of religious communities. The International Department (formerly International Liaison Department) manages party-to-party relations with political parties abroad, which was a central element of Chinese foreign policy during the years of high Maoism, but a less central element today. There is also the Organization Department, which is in charge of personnel matters.

The major mechanism for debating, coordinating, and recommending policies in specific issue areas is a type of ad hoc body called a “central leading small group” (CLSG, zhongyang lingdao xiaozu). Such groups existed in the past to implement orders from the top rather than to make decisions. Today they are venues for the top leaders to consult, reach consensus, and recommend policies to the Politburo for final approval. Like the Principals Committee or the Deputies Committee of the U.S. National Security Council, CLSGs are committees of ranking decision makers created to coordinate policy among bureaucracies. They operate on assignment from the Politburo and are reshuffled as the Politburo deems necessary. A highly ranked person—the general secretary himself or another member of the PBSC—chairs each group; a person of ministerial rank administers the group’s work; and the heads of relevant cabinet-level offices are normally members of each CLSG.

Several CLSGs are known currently to operate within the domain of international relations:

The Foreign Affairs CLSG (Zhongyang waishi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu) is normally chaired by either the general secretary or the premier. The senior staff person for the committee is normally the vice premier or state councillor in charge of foreign affairs (vice premier and state councillor are cabinet ranks above the rank of minister). The working group includes a high-level military representative. As the coordinating institution (or “mouth”) for the whole foreign affairs bureaucratic system, this group coordinates the foreign affairs–related work of a mix of party and state agencies: the International Liaison Department; the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Commerce, and Culture; the party
central’s Foreign Affairs Office, the party central’s news office, and the General Staff Department of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

The State Security CLSG (Zhongyang guojia anquan lingdao xiaozu) is normally chaired by the general secretary and includes among its members the PBSC member in charge of state security and public-security affairs, the senior military intelligence officer, and representatives from the State Council offices on Taiwan affairs and Hong Kong and Macao affairs. This CLSG coordinates work across the fields of security, foreign affairs, and defense.

The Overseas Propaganda CLSG (Zhongyang duiwai xuanquan lingdao xiaozu) is normally chaired by the PBSC member in charge of propaganda work and includes the heads of the party’s Propaganda and United Front Work departments and the leaders of the party central’s news office, the party’s Xinhua News Agency, the official party newspaper (People’s Daily), and the Ministry of Culture. The same group meets under another label as the CLSG in charge of domestic propaganda.

The Taiwan Work CLSG (Zhongyang dui Tai gongzuo lingdao xiaozu) is normally chaired by the general secretary and includes the PBSC member who supervises agencies working on the Taiwan issue. It includes a high-ranking military representative. This small group coordinates the Taiwan-related work of the Ministry of State Security, the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, the PLA General Staff’s intelligence department, and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait.

The Hong Kong and Macao Affairs CLSG is run by a PBSC member and includes relevant United Front Work Department, State Council, and military representatives.

The Finance and Economics CLSG is chaired by either the general secretary or the premier and includes top party and cabinet officials supervising domestic and international economic affairs.

The Energy CLSG was established in 2006 to coordinate management of domestic and foreign energy strategy. It is chaired by the premier and includes a range of senior officials whose agencies are involved in or affected by energy security.

The Foreign Affairs CLSG superficially resembles the U.S. National Security Council (NSC), but there are important contrasts. The Foreign Affairs CLSG’s scope of work is defined more narrowly than the scope of issues that the NSC coordinates, with a range of related issues delegated instead to the other CLSGs that have responsibilities related to foreign affairs. Unlike the NSC, the Foreign Affairs CLSG makes decisions rather than just pooling advice from other agencies. But where the NSC has fulltime staff to help it enforce decisions down the bureaucracy, the CLSG does not. After it makes decisions, state agencies under the State Council are supposed to implement them.

Within the State Council, a Foreign Affairs Office under the premier coordinates the work of the various state agencies involved in foreign affairs, including four ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages diplomacy and staffs embassies and consulates. The Ministry of Commerce concentrates on trade issues, such as conflicts regarding protection of intellectual property rights, accusations of Chinese protectionism, and policy toward multilateral economic institutions, including the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the WTO. The Ministry of State Security handles espionage and
counterespionage, diplomatic security, and border control, combining many of the functions of America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The Ministry of National Defense is a front for the CMC, lacking the staff and functions of a full ministry. Its job is to represent the military in the cabinet (State Council) and in dealings with foreigners.

Other cabinet-level ministries and commissions conduct negotiations on specific foreign policy issues, as is the case in the U.S. and other governments. The Ministry of Finance, for example, has been China’s primary representative to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Ministry of Education administers the policy of sending students abroad and receiving foreign students in China. The Ministry of Public Security handles police functions relating to foreigners, from crime solving to fire safety and traffic control. The Ministry of Culture has a Department of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. The State Commission on Science and Technology controls allocation of foreign currency among civilian and military industries for importing advanced technology. Below the cabinet, other government agencies that have foreign policy roles include the People’s Bank of China, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, the State Statistical Bureau (which has the right to approve surveys conducted by foreigners in China), and the bureaus that administer policies regarding customs, travel and tourism, aviation, foreign experts employed by Chinese agencies, and so on.

This system often achieves enviable consistency in the articulation and application of policy across different policy bureaucracies. On important matters on which the center has spoken, Chinese officials and policy intellectuals are briefed and disciplined. People at all levels know what the policy is and are motivated to comply with it whether they agree or disagree with it because the political system does not reward disobedience or dissent. This compliance allows China to pursue a more strategic foreign policy than most other countries across the broad span of issue areas and policy actors as well as over time. But the high centralization of power also creates some span-of-control problems. Although officials up and down the line are well informed on what the policy is, there are not enough hours in the day for the people who have real power to make sure that all the bureaucracies below them implement policy in the way they intend. Classic examples of this problem have included the failure of military-run enterprises to comply with nonproliferation commitments made by central officials, local officials’ toleration of intellectual property rights violations, and human rights violations carried out by security authorities that embarrassed the foreign ministry and the justice ministry.

Lamarckian evolution, long discredited in biology, functions with important effect in the world of policy. A change in behavior (such as deciding to join the WTO) induces a change in physiology (staffing up the bureaucracy with experts on WTO rules and procedures), which induces a change in DNA (those experts become a constituency with distinctive beliefs and values, who push a set of policies within the system). Although the initial impulse to get involved in such an issue area may be only instrumental, some degree of socialization to international norms occurs through the creation of an expert staff in the bureaucracy, which in turn affects not only the technical bureaus themselves, but to some extent, through them, the decision makers at the top. In this way, the process that
international relations theorists refer to as “social learning” among states takes place as governments gain both the capability and the propensity to negotiate over and selectively comply with new international regimes. Other policy areas in which this phenomenon occurred in the Chinese system in the post-Mao period included nonproliferation and arms control, human rights, intellectual property rights, international commercial dispute resolution, international environmental regulation, international public health, UN affairs, and product safety regulation. In all these areas, Deng Xiaoping’s shift to a policy of global engagement required China to participate in the relevant international regime; participation in such a technical field required expertise; experts were trained and brought into the government; and once in the government, the experts gained some degree of influence because only they knew how to work the particular international system in which they were experts. Seldom, if ever, however, has the siren song of emerging international norms trumped national interest in the final calculations made by the decision makers at the top.

INTELLIGENCE

The outer ring of the Chinese foreign policy establishment consists of research institutes, think tanks, and intelligence agencies that provide the leaders with information and ideas. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has numerous area studies institutes studying all parts of the world from the angles of politics, economics, history, religion, and culture. In addition, at least twenty-five think tanks in Beijing are devoted to analyzing international affairs. Specialized research institutes serve the Foreign Ministry, the State Council, the CCP’s CMC, the Ministry of National Defense, and the PLA’s General Staff. Some institutes, such the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations, seem to serve more than one master. Although formally under the auspices of the Central Committee’s Foreign Affairs Office, this institute, which is one of the largest and oldest foreign policy think tanks, also maintains close ties to the Ministry of State Security. Each provincial government runs a social sciences academy that includes international relations in its field of studies. The governments of Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Harbin, and other major cities have also established foreign policy institutes. Think tank staff are often sent to Chinese embassies abroad. They visit foreign universities and research centers to give lectures and conduct interviews, spend time as visiting scholars overseas, attend foreign academic conferences, and participate with experts from other countries in “Track II” dialogues (policy-related dialogues among persons with government connections but without current governmental responsibilities). These analysts prepare reports for government agencies, informing the Chinese leadership of the latest thinking overseas on issues affecting Chinese security. Many research organizations provide periodic reports to the Politburo.

The Chinese government also posts around the world a large staff of journalists, who prepare reports on the same subjects covered by embassy personnel and think tanks. Most Chinese journalists work for the official Xinhua News Agency, the China News Service, or a government or party newspaper such as the People’s Daily. Most of them are party
members. Abroad as at home, reporters write not only for publication, but also for classified, “internal” news bulletins that circulate among ranking party and government officials. In most foreign countries, Chinese reporters are allowed to base themselves more widely and travel more freely than diplomats.

Like all major powers, China has a sophisticated overseas covert intelligence system. Because it is secret, our knowledge of it is limited. Most of the few cases in which the U.S., Japan, and other countries have apprehended Chinese spies have involved efforts to transfer sensitive information on advanced technologies with potential military use. Such cases suggest that the Chinese security agencies focus in part on technological information. They develop relationships with some Chinese going abroad for long-term visits or permanent residence, expecting that a portion of them will develop careers in fields dealing with national security or sensitive technology and will one day provide classified information to the Chinese government.

The U.S. congressional Cox Commission in 1999 issued a report alleging extensive and effective espionage operations by China in the U.S. Some commentators charged that the commission’s claims were unsubstantiated, and botched prosecutions by U.S. law enforcement agencies, as in the 1999 case against Taiwan-born scientist Wen Ho Lee, gave the impression that the threat of Chinese espionage might be overhyped. But it is likely that Beijing is indeed engaged, as the U.S. intelligence community believes, in widespread and aggressive espionage operations in the U.S. to acquire military and dual-use technology. In the 2000s, there were increasingly frequent reports of extensive Chinese hacking into Western government, company, and NGO computer networks. It was hard to prove where the hacks came from, but many must have represented attempts to obtain information or discover weak spots that could be attacked in case of cyber war. The hacking went both ways: Beijing authorities claimed that their computers were also frequently attacked by outsiders.

China’s experts on U.S. affairs seem to have achieved a good understanding of the American political system after about twenty years’ effort. American goals and methods in international affairs used to puzzle Chinese analysts because the country’s pluralist system works so differently from China’s. Here is a system in which the chief executive is selected not by a deliberate promotion process within the ruling elite, but by an unpredictable, uncontrollable public process that often brings inexperienced people to power; a system in which political parties with significantly different international strategies alternate in power or sometimes divide power during the time in office of a given administration, leading to puzzling inconsistencies and changes of direction in national strategy; a system in which no single center seems to be in charge of matters of high importance to national security because the Congress or the courts—sometimes individual congressional representatives or judges—have the power to intervene in matters of consequence; a system in which ideology often seems to hold sway over pragmatic national interest as policymakers labor to sell their policies to a skeptical public. The key to good intelligence in deciphering these puzzles has not been the discovery of secrets, but an understanding of the complex signals emitted by a pluralistic political system. By training an impressive cadre of U.S. experts—many in American graduate schools—and through a long process of interaction with
Washington policymakers, the Chinese leaders have developed the necessary body of advisers to give them a reasonable understanding of U.S. policy and its drivers. Their views of American goals and methods are discussed further in chapter 4.

As in most countries, intelligence agencies also focus on identifying and assessing threats to the state. China’s intelligence system seems adept at information gathering but less skillful at interpretation and analysis. From The Tiananmen Papers, a body of secret documents related to the 1989 Tiananmen incident, we get the impression that a great deal of raw intelligence goes to the top, more than the senior leaders can conceivably read, although they may sample it on important topics. At the time of any international crisis or shift in U.S. China policy, squads of information collectors from Chinese media, think tanks, and government agencies fan out internationally to collect a vast quantity of evidence, most of which must be redundant. People working on Chinese human rights issues have become used to pervasive Chinese surveillance and harassment of their Internet traffic and phone calls not only within China, but outside it.

Assessments, however, may sometimes succumb to information pathologies, which appear to work differently depending on whether the threat is domestic or foreign. When monitoring and assessing domestic threats, intelligence organs may be pressured to downplay the full extent of a problem, a pressure that may paradoxically be greater the more the agency realizes the seriousness of the stakes. For example, intelligence agencies appear to have been caught off guard by the scope of the unrest in Tibetan areas in March 2008 and the intensity of outrage among Uyghurs in Xinjiang in July 2009. The reason for the lapse may lie in the agencies’ unwillingness to deliver assessments that embarrass local authorities or contradict current thinking among the leaders. Disaffected Tibetans and Uyghurs are always officially depicted as constituting “a small handful” of troublemakers who have foreign links and do not enjoy broad support in their communities. This view may also be reflected in internal reporting. To suggest that disaffection is deeply rooted and widespread would challenge the official belief that economic development in areas populated by ethnic minorities is the answer to the problem. Moreover, it is easier to blame foreign instigators for the unexpected scope and intensity of domestic dissent than to say that government policies have failed.

The reverse may be true in the case of foreign threats, where the intelligence community has reasons to play up challenges. For example, articulating the means and mechanisms by which the U.S. may appear to threaten China requires little encouragement. For Chinese intelligence professionals, the assumption of a U.S. threat to the PRC is not only politically astute, but also representative of actual beliefs. It is easy to interpret the uncoordinated words and actions of diverse actors in the complex U.S. political scene as elements of a coordinated scheme to weaken China. For example, proclamations about human rights and democracy are not interpreted as expressions of American idealism, but as methods for meddling in China’s internal affairs and undermining CCP rule.

Outside the circle of expert advisers and policy professionals, the regime has little interest in or access to critical or original views. The only public dissent the government tolerates is the occasional expression of strong nationalism, the loudness of which the government seems to be able to modulate depending on whether it needs more or less
background noise of that type for its diplomacy. The lack of independent opinion arguably does no harm as long as the government’s policy is working. But when the policy is unwise, the echo-chamber effect robs the country of a chance to consider alternatives.

THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY

The PLA—the collective name given to China’s army, navy, air force, and missile forces—is the third pillar of the regime’s authority along with the CCP and the state. It not only protects the country against external enemies but helps defend the regime against internal threats (chapter 11). The CCP came to power as an armed rather than a civilian force by winning a civil war rather than an election. Its claim to legitimacy is rooted in that victory. Mao’s regime after 1949 continued to rely on the army, first to establish and then to maintain control. When the Cultural Revolution brought the country near chaos, Mao called out the military in 1967. The PLA not only restored order but also took over the administration of every major institution and every level of government from the county level up to the provincial level through so-called revolutionary committees. After Mao’s death, military leaders supervised the arrest of his radical heirs, backed Hua Guofeng as Mao’s immediate successor, and then a couple of years later supported the rise of Deng to power. Deng used the PLA to save the regime during the Tiananmen crisis of 1989.\(^26\)

Domestic security remains a key mission of the Chinese military. In all these ways, the PLA is truly a “party army,” not neutral among political contenders, but loyal to a specific ruling group. The Chinese system is best characterized not as a “party–state,” as it is often called, but as a “party–army–state” in which the military is an integral part of the regime.

The military’s relations with the civilian authorities strike a balance seldom seen elsewhere. A bedrock principle of CCP ideology is that “the party controls the gun.” Military officers sit as symbolic but not powerful presences in the party Central Committee and the NPC. The army holds two seats in the Politburo, enough to exchange information but not to influence outcomes. Since the Deng period, no military officers have been appointed to the most powerful decision-making body, the PBSC. Senior officers serve in the relevant CLSGs, where they provide information and coordinate actions, but so far as we know, they do not tend to use these positions to lobby for a distinct institutional point of view. Except when summoned, the PLA intervenes little in civilian affairs. Unlike some armies, the PLA does not promote an ideology of its own such as corporatism or military nationalism. It has remained loyal to the civilian regime’s conception of socialism as this conception has evolved under successive leaders. It promulgates the party’s ideology in its ranks through a hierarchy of political commissars. The PLA used to raise much of its own budget from farms and enterprises. In 1998, Jiang Zemin decided to divest the PLA of these independent sources of income, a decision apparently taken with the military leadership’s concurrence.\(^27\)

Since then, military expenditures have been allocated by the state, including some significant allocations outside the official defense budget. In all these ways, the Chinese political system is characterized by civilian control.
Yet in its own area of responsibility, the PLA operates with a high degree of autonomy. Once overall defense expenditures have been set by the state, military officials decide how to spend the money among competing needs. Civilian leaders lay down a vision of likely enemies and probable foci of future world tension, but the military decides how to equip and train itself for future contingencies, handles military tensions with other countries, and conducts military diplomacy. The civilian leaders decide when to go to war, but the military manages the war. Such a division of labor stands in sharp contrast to the way the U.S. system works, in which civilians in White House, the Pentagon, the intelligence community, and the Congress play key roles in deciding how war will be prepared for and how it is fought.

The crucial channel for high-level civilian control over the military is a narrow one: the chairmanship of the CMC. There are formally two such commissions, one within the party apparatus and, since 1982, another one within the state. In reality, they are the same body. The commission’s chairmanship has been occupied successively by Mao, Hua Guofeng, Deng, Jiang, and Hu. The CMC’s civilian leader appears to have few civilian staff to advise him on his work in the commission (except that Hua, Jiang, Hu, and Xi Jinping served as CMC vice chairs in their capacities as heirs apparent); rather, he is assisted by a staff in uniform, beginning with the generals who serve as CMC vice chairs and moving down the ranks from there.

Under Mao and Deng, the civilian–military imbalance may have been less important because both of them had served in the military, understood the military technology of their day, and commanded deep personal loyalty among the officers. Later CMC chairs, however, have had no military background, and at the same time China’s strategic problems and military technology have become more complex. The later chairmen have therefore been increasingly captive to the PLA for expertise in military matters. The civilian chair’s chief tool of influence has been his jealously guarded control of senior promotions. Mao frequently purged and replaced top military officers. Deng, Jiang, and Hu consolidated power by rotating their own appointees into positions as commanders of the central staff departments, service arms, military regions, and the central guards bureau that handles security for the top leaders. This process generated some degree of personal loyalty to them in the most senior ranks. The incoming party leader, Xi Jinping, is the son of a one-time Communist guerilla leader and served as secretary for a senior military official in his twenties, giving him slightly deeper roots in the military than Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao.

Despite the thinness of civilian control over military matters, party leaders have been able to make the major decisions of war and peace. It was Mao who decided to intervene in Korea in 1950, to develop nuclear weapons in 1955, to launch a war with India in 1962, and to ambush Soviet troops in early 1969. Deng Xiaoping decided on the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 and on the naval clash with Vietnam in the Spratly Islands in 1988. Jiang Zemin gave the green light for Chinese missile tests and military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in 1995–1996.

Civilian control seemed to fray only during the Cultural Revolution, after Mao had placed the army in administrative control of the whole country and labeled the army’s chief, Lin Biao, as his “designated successor.” In October 1969, Lin issued the so-called No. 1 Order,
which put the PLA on heightened alert against possible imminent attack by the Soviet Union. He reportedly issued this directive without Mao’s knowledge, which contributed to Lin’s estrangement from the chairman. Lin Biao may have contemplated a military coup in 1971—or at least Mao believed a Lin family coup was in the works—but it never materialized. The October 1976 arrest of the Gang of Four was carried out by a group of military and civilian officials who did not seize power themselves but pledged their loyalty to Mao’s successor at the time, Hua Guofeng.29

It is less clear who made decisions for military force in a long list of lesser incidents, including naval clashes with Vietnam in the South China Sea in 1974, 1992, and 1994 and with the Philippines in 1995, 1996, and 1997; the collision between a Chinese fighter plane and an American EP-3 surveillance aircraft in 2001 in the vicinity of Hainan Island; an unannounced anti-satellite test in January 2007; Chinese harassment of the USNS *Impeccable* in 2009; and a variety of clashes and near clashes with Japanese and American ships at various times in the East China Sea, around the Diaoyutai (Senkaku) Islands, and elsewhere. These decisions were quite possibly made within the military chain of command without input from civilian decision makers. Moreover, China’s behavior during some of these incidents showed that civilian authorities had difficulty getting control of crises once they were in the hands of the military. In 2001, for example, a stove-piped command-and-control structure apparently made it difficult for the top leaders to get information and make decisions on a timely basis about the collision between the Chinese fighter and the American surveillance aircraft and the latter’s subsequent emergency landing on Hainan Island. The delay caused the crisis with the U.S. to drag on for weeks. Chinese officers have created diplomatic kerfuffles on some occasions when they used threatening language that was out of tune with the civilian leadership’s emphasis on “peaceful development” and “the new security concept.”30

PLA officers are not unlike military officers elsewhere in being nationalistic, suspicious of adversaries, hawkish, and politically conservative, but they operate on a longer leash than soldiers in many other countries. The old structures of civilian control may no longer be robust enough to coordinate China’s military actions with its diplomatic strategy at a time when the army’s capabilities are expanding and its regional role is growing. In the trend of institutionalization in the making of foreign policy in general, civilian control of the military lags behind.31

THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY

The less institutionalized the policymaking process, the more difference is made by the leader’s beliefs and style. Mao Zedong’s quirks and convictions had a decisive impact on Chinese foreign policy in the first two and a half decades of the regime, as explored further in chapter 3. How Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin shaped policy toward the U.S., globalization, and other issues is discussed throughout the book.

Hu Jintao was sixty years old when he acceded to the leadership in 2002.32 Born in
Shanghai, he was trained as a hydropower engineer in China’s elite technical university, Tsinghua. He served in a series of technical and provincial posts and in the politically influential Communist Youth League in Beijing. In December 1988, he was assigned to serve as party secretary in Tibet. Unfortunately for him, Lhasa convulsed in riots a few months later, and Hu had to order his subordinate, the local government chairman, to declare martial law. Deng Xiaoping in 1992 selected him ahead of all the competing cadres of his generation to serve in the PBSC, apparently as a reward for his loyalty to the organization. Affable and cautious, Hu held onto his slippery perch as heir apparent for ten years and duly succeeded Jiang Zemin in 2002.

Hu was viewed by his colleagues in the top leadership as a good listener and a consensus builder. His “work style” was considered “democratic” in Chinese Communist terms: he was businesslike, thoughtful, and uninterested in empty show—all in contrast to the way Jiang Zemin was perceived. Although different from Jiang in style, Hu did not depart from Jiang’s foreign policy line in substance. He set out to sustain the previous leader’s achievements—stable relations with the U.S. and successful navigation of the white-water pace of globalization. As China’s challenges evolved during his time as leader, Hu led the country to a more extended and assertive international presence, not only in Asia but in Africa, South America, and the Middle East. Although his strategy at times posed difficult choices—among them how to frame policies toward Taiwan, Japan, the U.S., human rights, and the global trade and financial systems—analysts discerned no indications of serious dissent in Beijing’s policy circles. Hu apparently guided the collective leadership to consensus around decisions that bore his personal stamp.

The elite’s consensus choice of Xi Jinping to succeed Hu in 2012 signaled the intention to give China a more assertive international voice. Xi is a large man with the build of a football player, and he is married to a popular folk singer who worked in a PLA entertainment troupe. His father was an early guerilla fighter in the Communist Revolution and a senior party leader of Mao’s generation. When the father lost his post in Mao’s purges, Xi was sent to the countryside to “learn from the peasants” in a poverty-stricken agricultural commune. His size and strength helped him to survive the grueling life of agricultural labor. He was the champion of wrestling matches with the farmers and was renowned for his ability to carry a shoulder pole of twin 110-pound buckets of wheat for several miles across mountain paths. On his local government’s recommendation, Xi got into Tsinghua University as a “peasant–worker–soldier student.” As noted earlier, he briefly served a senior military leader who had once been a subordinate of his father’s.

Unlike Hu Jintao, Xi served for much of his career in one province, Fujian, where he rose from deputy mayor of a city in 1985 to provincial governor in 2000. There he gained a reputation as populist, pushy, and results oriented. His superiors evaluated him as “modest, full of ideas, hard-working, unpretentious; insists on eating meals in the city government cafeteria, washes his own clothes, refuses excessive banqueting, has warm relations with Party committee and city government staff.” During his governorship, he tried to make the province attractive for investors from Taiwan, which is directly across the Taiwan Strait, and many of whose people speak one of the Fujian dialects. He urged his subordinates to practice “limited government” and to take an attitude of “public service.” He hectored
provincial cadres for laziness, careerism, and caution in a manner said to be similar to that of former premier Zhu Rongji, who was known for being confrontational with his subordinates and producing results. “Many of our civil servants still think they are running a planned economy,” Xi said at one meeting. “Whenever there’s a problem they seek to add more staff and introduce more government structures.” On another occasion, he accused provincial officials of spending all their time chasing promotions and engaging in alliance building: “These guys may manage to fall into a few better jobs. But as our efforts [to improve government efficiency] build steam, they will fall by the wayside.”

In the 2000s, Xi moved from Fujian to the top party posts in Zhejiang and then Shanghai. His appointments as a member of the PBSC in 2007, PRC vice president in 2008, and CMC vice chair in 2010 signaled that he had been chosen as heir apparent to Hu Jintao, to take office as general secretary in fall 2012 and as head of state in spring 2013. In keeping with the ground rules of the CCP personnel system, Xi is a decade younger than Hu, so he is scheduled to succeed to the general secretary post at the age of fifty-nine.

During his anticipated two five-year terms in office, Xi will try to guide China to the rank of second or even first economy in the world; to the status of a middle-level economy on a per capita basis; to an approximate diplomatic parity with the U.S. as a major power in a multipolar world; and to a military position where China can deter or defeat intervention in any of the territories that China claims, including Taiwan, and play a role in protecting its economic interests overseas. Just as Hu Jintao had the right kind of personality to represent China in the 2000s during its low-keyed period of “peaceful rise,” so Xi Jinping has been chosen to speak for a China that is expected to be increasingly powerful and assertive in the second decade of the twenty-first century.