

**Panel:** Is China Prepared for International Leadership? (Orchid)

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**Organizing Institution:** The Brookings Institution

**Talking Points for:** Jonathan Pollack  
The Brookings Institution

Despite the widespread attention among external observers to China's political, economic, and military ascendance, the Chinese leadership still remains tentative and cautionary about the country's power position and strategic opportunities. More assertive voices are far more prevalent among scholars and commentators than at an official level.

This uncertainty reflects unease about China's daunting domestic preoccupations as well as unease about the coming leadership transition. A reactive, self-protective mindset remains widespread within policy making circles, but this also results in inadequate coordination at decision-making levels.

Leaders are trying to manage bottom-up domestic pressures as well as coordinate increasingly complex bureaucratic arrangements within the system. But there is also a growing awareness of the need to manage the reactions of neighboring states as well as the United States to the country's growing political, economic, and strategic weight.

Amidst the multiplicity of voices and viewpoints expressed within China, deeper, unresolved questions persist. What are China's legitimate longer-term aspirations as a major power, and should China's strategic calculations be based on full cooperation with outside powers, as distinct from more autonomous conceptions of its role and power in the international system?

Divergent impulses and forces seem likely to persist within the Chinese system. Policy makers seem increasingly mindful of external pressures and expectations that Beijing assume a more visible and constructive international position, but with leaders as yet unable to articulate a fully formed conception of China's role and responsibilities in global politics.

A stable and secure global and regional order does not seem possible without China's full participation, including the capacity to manage potential crises or major turbulence in the international system. China's incorporation into the regional and global order remains a preeminent challenge at multiple levels. This will require a fuller international awareness of the uncertainties that will continue to shape China's future behavior, while imparting to Chinese policy makers the need for Beijing to assume a role commensurate with its ever-increasing economic and political weight.

*\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.*

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