

## **Is China Prepared for International Leadership?**

**Panel:** Session 2 (Orchid)

**Date/Time:** April 25, 2012. (17:15-18:30)

**Organizing Institution:** Brookings Institution

**Speakers:** Jonathan Pollack (Moderator), Brookings Institution  
Evans Revere, Brookings Institution  
Christopher Clarke, US State Department, Retd.  
Dennis Blasko, US Army, Retd.

### *Panel Short Summary*

Erik French, The Maxwell School of Syracuse University  
Shwe Mar Than, GSIS in Ewha Womans University

The panel examined China's role in the international system and considered whether or not China is ready to become a global leader.

Jonathan Pollack (Brookings Institute) began by breaking down China's preparedness for global leadership into three separate issues: China's leadership transition, military modernization, and capacity for regional leadership. Pollack also stated that it was important to determine whether rising expectations regarding China's role as an international leader have outstripped China's growing capabilities.

Christopher Clarke (US State Department, retired) discussed the importance of China's upcoming leadership transition for China's international role. China's elite, according to Clarke, have failed to adequately prepare for the massive overhaul of China's leadership in 2012. As such, China's leadership will need to take the time to establish their legitimacy and administrative control once the transition has occurred, reducing their capacity to pursue a more assertive foreign policy. Clarke concluded that this poorly planned leadership transition will effectively hamstring China's potential for international leadership in the near future. China is not prepared to take on a regional or global leadership role in the near future.

Dennis Blasko (US Army, retired) focused on whether or not China's military modernization would lead China to assume a prominent role in international military leadership. Blasko contended that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a cautious and

conservative organization with a defensive military doctrine and no major aspirations for global leadership. The PLA still only has a limited capacity to conduct operations far from its own shores and instead focuses on operations in its near vicinity. China's military modernization has focused on defense of the mainland and its 200 miles of coastline, as well as "software" improvements like personnel development, doctrine, and training. By 2049, the centennial of the founding of the PLA, China plans to have completed its modernization, and Blasko argues that at this time China will become capable of being more externally oriented and taking the lead in outside of area operations.

Evans Revere (Brookings Institute) argued that scholars should ask whether China is ready for regional leadership before examining its potential for global leadership. In essence, Revere asked "is the region ready for Chinese leadership" rather than "is China ready for international leadership?" Revere also highlighted that a critical component of leadership is that the leader must be accepted by its followers. States in the East Asian region, according to Revere, are not ready to accept Chinese leadership. These states are uncertain about China's intentions, concerned about PLA modernization, and suspicious of China due to maritime territorial disputes and China's alliance with North Korea. Pollack concluded the presentations by pointing out that economic growth would not automatically make China an international leader and that observers will be able to get a sense of how prepared China's leadership is if it faces a major crisis in the near future.

Questions and discussions after the initial presentations focused on the desirability of international leadership for China, China's involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the potential for Chinese economic leadership. Other questions dealt with which countries would be ready to follow China if it became a global leader. Audience members also raised questions concerning the causes of China's more assertive foreign policy decisions in 2010, the object of US-Chinese competition in East Asia, and the role of responsibility in leadership.

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