

## FROM RECKLESSNESS TO LEADERSHIP

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*"A leader leads by example, not by force."* --Sun Tzu

China has risen and become reckless.

Flexing its muscles at America's allies in the East by acquiring aircraft carriers, escalating territorial disputes, and fanning the flames of protests, Beijing enters into dangerous waters.

First off, China plays with fire when it capitalizes on strategic opportunity at the expense of its neighbors.

While it is tempting for Beijing to sacrifice a few Hondas and Toyotas for the sake of sending a clear message to Japan – not to mention provoking anti-Japanese sentiment domestically – such action against China's biggest trade partner is economically hazardous. Beijing risks boxing itself into a corner where it must stand by rallies of nationalism when tensions peak.

South Korea, another major Chinese trade partner, sees disputes over uninhabitable islands not only as an economic threat, but also as potential upset to regional cooperation efforts on North Korea.

Taiwan feared the PRC's military rise for decades. Still, cross-Strait economic ties are incredibly strong; China is Taiwan's biggest export and second largest import partner. Flaring tensions risk economic and diplomatic detriment for both sides.

China's rise was disquieting for the Philippines and even Vietnam, both of whose good relations with the United States were highlighted this summer by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, which brings us to the second reality:

Washington will never back down in the Pacific.

Perceiving an America in decline and a consequent opening for its own assertion of regional dominance, China was taken by surprise in the former's shift to the Pacific.

However, America's pivot to Asia was not to contain China: it was meant to galvanize China's potential in the region by shaping favorable outcomes for all parties on both sides of the Pacific. The United States seeks to reaffirm the rules, norms, and institutions in Asia that have brought its nations decades of peace and prosperity. Beijing must realize this. If China continues to view these nonthreatening moves as confrontational, China risks containing China, which points to the third and perhaps greatest risk to the middle kingdom: itself.

China's domestic problems are catching up with it. The One Child Policy has brought instability to the country's entitlement system. Today, there are five workers for every elderly person; by

2035, this ratio will be 2:1. Worse, a growing Chinese middle class will crave more liberty and hundreds of millions more still need to be brought out of poverty. These issues require more focus than territorial disputes over rocks.

China must use its position of power responsibly to lead by example.

First, it must work with its neighbors to find safeguards that will prevent territorial disputes from exploding. Asia may be too preoccupied with making money to jump into war, but each incident will grow distrust, not the economy.

Second, China must lead the way to an agreement that will settle territorial disputes permanently. Are the resources and symbolism of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands so valuable to China that it would risk its position as the world's second largest economy?

Third, a Sino-American partnership must be sought to make clear that the United States seeks to guide, not contain, China. As China's growth continues, Beijing will face a choice: continue down the path of risky unilateralism or adopt an approach that involves responsible economic integration under U.S. guidance. As U.S. and Chinese economic interests continue to converge, both parties can mutually benefit as partnered leaders of the global economy.

With great power comes great responsibility: Beijing must understand the consequences of its claims and empower itself as the region's diplomatic leader. Doing so will allow China to lead in other regional matters, including strategically reshaping the Korean peninsula and better facilitating trade in Asia.

The world witnessed a century ago what the assassination of an archduke did to a rising power in Europe. The same mistake must not be made with regard to uninhabitable islands.