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## The Vulnerability of Rising Powers: The Logic Behind China's Low Military Transparency

Oriana Skylar Mastro

### ABSTRACT

Scholars and officials persistently criticize China for low transparency in its military affairs. Why does Beijing exacerbate the asymmetric information problem, even though this theoretically increases the likelihood of conflict? I offer an explanation, the vulnerability hypothesis, for why rising powers are likely to reject military transparency and the conditions under which this may change. By evaluating over 100 authoritative Chinese sources, I identify four threads of Chinese strategic thinking consistent with the vulnerability hypothesis: the United States is inherently dangerous as a declining hegemon, transparency heightens the risk of war during power transitions, transparency grants operational advantages to the opponent, and only the strong can leverage transparency to enhance deterrence. These findings have implications for power transition theory and US–China military relations.

The relatively low level of Chinese transparency about its military affairs exacerbates concerns about whether China will rise peacefully. The limited information provided about Chinese decision making, key capabilities, and the purpose of China's military modernization consistently disappoints observers. Moreover, Chinese behavior is often inconsistent with the objectives officially declared.<sup>1</sup> Major US Department of Defense strategy documents warn China year after year about the potential repercussions of secrecy, to include increased suspicion about Chinese intentions and the possibility of inadvertent conflict due to miscalculation and misunderstanding.<sup>2</sup> Because of these risks, high-level US State Department officials consistently include a plea for more transparency in their messaging to Beijing.<sup>3</sup> Recently, US National Security Advisor Susan Rice added to the calls, arguing, "greater military engagement and transparency can help us manage the realities of mistrust and competition."<sup>4</sup> Regional players such as Japan and Australia are also encouraging Beijing to be more open about its military capabilities, development plans, and intentions.<sup>5</sup> Independent organizations such as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and Jane's all indicate that China's relatively low military transparency, especially in the realm of military expenditure, makes it difficult to accurately capture trends in Chinese military modernization.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars also criticize China's choices, arguing that transparency would reduce the risk of arms races and instability during this critical period of China's rise. The basic logic of the pro-transparency view is as follows: China's rapid military modernization creates suspicions in Washington and capitals across the Asia-Pacific region about China's intentions. If China does not in fact harbor secret plans and intends to rise peacefully as its leadership proclaims, even if it continues to develop its military, greater transparency would significantly reduce the likelihood of unintended miscalculation, as well as the uncertainty – even "fear" – that can drive "worst-case scenario" defense planning. In this view, Beijing's failure to embrace transparency does itself a major

disservice by driving reactive arming by other states that would not occur otherwise. This, in turn, makes China even more insecure and destabilizes the region. Given these dynamics, prominent China experts characterize China's failure to embrace transparency as a serious miscalculation on Beijing's part.<sup>7</sup>

International relations scholarship largely reinforces this view that China should embrace transparency about its changing military capabilities and strategic intentions to increase its chances of avoiding conflict as relative power shifts.<sup>8</sup> In the bargaining model of war, greater information about the balance of resolve, capabilities or costs of war facilitate bargaining and may allow countries to reach agreements both prefer to war.<sup>9</sup> Defensive realists argue that failing to credibly reveal information about the nature of one's military capabilities can lead to deterrence failures, inadvertent spiraling into war, and failure to cooperate, even when states are purely security-seeking.<sup>10</sup> Recently, Adam Liff and John Ikenberry derived an empirical test from the security dilemma literature and applied it to the contemporary Asia Pacific, arguing that China's rise is generating – and its limited military transparency is exacerbating – nascent security dilemmas in the region.<sup>11</sup> Even aspects of offensive realism believe transparency can enhance stability – uncertainty creates more room for miscalculation, causing failures in balancing that increase the likelihood of war.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these potential benefits and over a decade of international pressure and criticism, China remains relatively secretive about its military modernization compared to international standards. China significantly underreports its defense expenditures, and estimating the actual amount is difficult because of poor accounting transparency.<sup>13</sup> In addition to an opaque budget, China has not taken substantial steps to make information more accessible to other countries about its nuclear weapons modernization, current and future weapons systems, the organization and deployment of major units, main military operations and exercises, and national strategy.<sup>14</sup> China has released defense white papers every two years since 1998, but their level of information lags behind those released by other countries in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific.<sup>15</sup> While the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) official position is that it embraces transparency, and indeed nominal improvements have been made over the past decade, China is still far from reaching the levels of transparency expected of a major economic and military player in the international community.<sup>16</sup>

This presents a puzzle for students of international relations. Why would China knowingly and intentionally exacerbate the asymmetric information problem? If indeed transparency will enhance China's security by reducing uncertainty and the possibility of conflict, as other countries consistently argue, why does China continue to adopt a posture of relative secrecy? The existing literature suggests China's secrecy is the result of an insufficient appreciation of the costs and benefits of different degrees of military transparency.<sup>17</sup> I will argue, however, that this conventional wisdom cannot explain Chinese behavior because it gets the cost-benefit calculus wrong.

Transparency in the military realm is best understood as consisting of two separate dimensions: intent transparency, regarding strategic plans and preferences; and capability transparency, regarding the factors that comprise military power. In these terms, most US analyses of China's military transparency are actually critical about its lack of *capability* transparency, rather than its *intent* transparency; while Beijing claims to be transparent because it offers a degree of *intent* transparency. My central contention – which I label the *vulnerability hypothesis* – is that China is likely to continue to reject greater *capability* transparency during most of its rise, until, in its own assessment, it approaches local military parity with the United States.<sup>18</sup>

For most countries in the international system, transparency contributes to their security by preventing miscalculation and misunderstanding. But for a rising power like China, more information does not equate to greater security because the source of potential conflict and instability is different – the risks inherent in US decline and potential power transition. Therefore, Chinese strategists focus more on the severe costs of transparency before the power transition is complete, in particular increasing the probability the US will adopt disruptive policies and the intensity of those policies. Low-level capability transparency creates uncertainty about its military growth, which

creates US uncertainty about the balance of power and likelihood of power transition. The hope is that this helps Beijing both prepare and prevent – uncertainty may delay any disruptive action to a more favorable time, or could even discourage such reactions altogether if the US fails to react before the power transition is complete. Disruption can take many forms, including tactical measures, such as designing effective countermeasures, political maneuvers, such as forming counterbalancing coalitions, and in the extreme, preventive war. Therefore, a rising power like China is likely to embrace a high-level of capability transparency only when it perceives its overall capabilities to be comparable to those of the dominant power in the region. Once power transition reaches this stage, the creation of a strong deterrent has mitigated its vulnerability to adverse US actions.

I conduct a plausibility probe by evaluating whether the mechanisms central to the vulnerability hypothesis are present in Chinese strategic thought. First, I dissect Chinese strategic thinking on the issue from authoritative and timely Chinese writings. First, I collected all articles in five authoritative military and political journals in China (*Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, *Shijie Jinji yu Zhengzhi*, *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, *Waijiao Pinglun*, and *Dangdai Yatai*) from the past five years and then selected those that addressed China's rise, military modernization, or military transparency. I also gathered additional articles by searching *junshi touming* (military transparency) and *zhongguo jueqi* (China's rise) in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). The result was 84 potentially relevant academic articles that I then read for views and rationales concerning on military transparency. I also analyze the most authoritative book on military transparency, *junshi touming lun*, published by the Academy for Military Science, the highest-level research institution of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the editor of this book, Major General Chen Zhou, is a fellow at the Academy of Military Science and has been a part of the drafting team for all of China's defense white papers.

I then analyze the official Chinese position, which focuses largely on intent transparency, from official statements and coverage in state-sponsored media. This research approach best reveals the views of Chinese political and military elite on military transparency for two reasons. First, these sources have strong government and Party affiliations.<sup>20</sup> Given the nature of the political system in China, it is unlikely these highly prolific writers would have high positions in their state run institutions or be able to publish their views in these government-sponsored publications if such views were contrary to a consensus within the CCP.<sup>21</sup> Second, I have also tried to hedge against bias by including the full range of views from moderate to hawkish assessments of US intentions; if indeed there is a convergence in their views, there will be a higher confidence in my findings.

My theoretical contribution is important for two reasons. First, my vulnerability hypothesis is the first informational approach that offers an explanation of the conditions under which the benefits of transparency are likely to outweigh the costs and vice-versa. Current scholarship on information in international politics identifies a tension between states' incentives to reveal or conceal private information. Transparency advocates argue that revealing private information may reduce the likelihood of inadvertent conflict and facilitate cooperation. Pro-secrecy approaches contend that exacerbating uncertainty facilitates attempts to misrepresent power, allowing a country to feign strength to elicit greater political concessions and enhance deterrence or weakness to discourage counterbalancing and other policies disruptive to its rise.<sup>22</sup> These tensions are especially acute in the shadow of a potential power transition, a period in which the balance of power is shifting, countries' identities are in flux and sticky international institutions are slow to adapt.<sup>23</sup> But without additional variables, these theories about the benefits of transparency and secrecy lead to indeterminate predictions. I build a theory that seeks to explain the conditions under which the incentives for one type of information posture may prevail over those of another.

Second, my analysis is the first to comprehensively capture Chinese strategic thinking on this critical security issue. It demonstrates that the logic and decision making behind Beijing's policy reflects that of a utility-maximizing rational actor.<sup>24</sup> Existing explanations rely on miscalculation to explain China's secrecy because they inadequately account for the perceived costs of transparency. A more complete understanding of the cost-benefit analysis that drives China's low military

transparency would contribute to our scholarly and practical understanding of Chinese military modernization, its perception of the relationship with the United States, and the challenges of power shifts more generally. The contours of Chinese strategic thinking on transparency could serve as inputs to better design policies of engagement, deterrence, crisis management, and managing or mitigating tension. In the conclusion, I offer specific recommendations to this effect. Moreover, my findings challenge an article of faith in the policy and scholarly community that greater Chinese transparency would be a positive stabilizing step.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I address the role of information in international relations theory, the indeterminate nature of its cumulative predictions, and its limitations in understanding military transparency in the shadow of potential power transitions. Second, I present my vulnerability hypothesis. Third, I assess the degree to which this approach corresponds with the strategic thinking behind the preference for low-level transparency about capabilities through an extensive analysis of authoritative Chinese sources. Lastly, I reflect on the implications of my findings for both theory and policy.

### Transparency and information in international politics

Past studies have also defined transparency as a state-level variable (the degree to which information is deliberately revealed) as well as a structural variable (degree of transparency in the international system resulting from mechanisms such as a free press, open government hearings, or reporting requirements of international regimes).<sup>25</sup> Political scientists have also used the term transparency broadly, referring to financial, political, and military transparency. This article is concerned with the latter, the degree to which private information is deliberately revealed, which can range from low to high.<sup>26</sup> While the empirical distribution of cases has undoubtedly shifted towards transparency with globalization, the information age, advent of international institutions, and advancement in national intelligence collection methods, states are still extremely powerful players with the ability to keep secrets, partly due to resource constraints and technical and cognitive limitations.<sup>27</sup>

I propose that military transparency is composed of two constitutive dimensions: intent transparency and capability transparency. Intent transparency refers to the degree to which information about a country's security policy, strategic plans, intentions, decision-making processes, and preferences are accessible, plentiful, and accurate. Capability transparency captures the degree to which information about a country's military budgets, personnel management and training, military hardware research, development and acquisition (RD&A), and order of battle are accessible, plentiful, and accurate. The differentiation between capability and intent often provides analytical leverage in international relations theories. For example, Stephen Walt argued that states did not devise balancing strategies based on others' capabilities alone. Instead, "perceptions of intent play an especially crucial role in alliance choices."<sup>28</sup> Moreover the signaling literature, with its focus on incentives to misrepresent and cheap talk, points out that states need to engage in costly actions that sink costs or tie hands in order to credibly communicate information.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that information presented through intent transparency is less informative, credible, and verifiable than information provided through capability transparency. For this reason, capability transparency is weighted more heavily in the overall concept of military transparency, with intent transparency contributing a smaller share to the overall concept.

These definitions highlight that transparency is useful mainly as a relative measure – in practice, it can be difficult to ascertain an absolute measure of accessibility or accuracy without comparison to other time periods or countries. All countries have state secrets, but some have a much lower standard for what information needs to be withheld than others. For example, the United States' default position is transparency, and then it considers withholding a relatively small proportion of information about its military affairs such as methods of intelligence collection; war plans; programs for safeguarding nuclear materials; and vulnerabilities of US installations, infrastructure, capabilities, and protection services based on the threat to national security.<sup>30</sup>

In many international relations theories, greater information improves policy outcomes. The causes of war literature cites private information about the cost of war or the relative balance of power as the main culprit for the outbreak of war and greater information as a mechanism to end the war.<sup>31</sup> Neoliberal institutionalists argue that the quantity and quality of international institutions facilitate cooperation by encouraging information provision.<sup>32</sup> Transparency can calm threat assessments, push strategic interaction toward peace, and help control provocative and hostile action by making known defections from agreements.<sup>33</sup> Democratic peace theories point to the desire and ability of democracies to credibly communicate information as one mechanism that reduces the probability of conflict for such dyads.<sup>34</sup> Other studies in the school of liberalism stress that international trends such as the advent of information technology, economic globalization, and democratization increase transparency to the benefit of the international system.<sup>35</sup> In sum, multiple literatures argue that transparency can dampen conflictive tendencies as relative power shifts.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, secrecy about military affairs has long been a central goal of military strategists. Napoleon Bonaparte argued that maintaining private information about strategy, tactics, and capabilities was the key to military victory, advising “you must not fight too often with one enemy, or you will teach him all your art of war.”<sup>37</sup> Much earlier, Sun Zi famously warned against predictability, stating, “do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.”<sup>38</sup> These strategists understood the value of secrecy in war fighting as a means to gain advantage over the enemy. International relations scholars have also identified how secrecy allows for states to manipulate their images and misrepresent their power to accrue greater benefits than would otherwise be possible.<sup>39</sup> Offensive realism warns that a state can never be certain about another’s intentions, regardless of degree of transparency, and therefore states should focus on protecting information that would give the opponent an upper hand in case of conflict.<sup>40</sup> Recent scholarship in formal modeling clarifies there are rational incentives for arming in secret even though doing so creates a risk of war.<sup>41</sup>

Revealing capabilities can make a state more vulnerable militarily, but there may also be benefits in terms of enhanced deterrence, reduction of threat, or concessions received in bargaining. Scholars have identified this tension between the benefits of transparency and secrecy but fail to identify the conditions under which a state will choose to be secretive or transparent about their military affairs.<sup>42</sup> Without the introduction of additional variables, clarification of concepts, and scope conditions, the result of this tension remains indeterminate.

### **Rising powers and the vulnerability hypothesis**

I offer a new perspective, the vulnerability hypothesis, which seeks to reconcile the contradictory views of the pro-transparency and pro-secrecy literature in the case of power transitions. The vulnerability hypothesis posits that how the rising power perceives its material conditions determines its level of military transparency. A rising power is a state whose economic and military power is increasing at such a rate that it may be able to match or supersede the dominant power at some point in the future. As long as a rising power believes itself to still be militarily inferior to the dominant power, it chooses strategies to best prepare for any disruptive policies the dominant power may undertake. This compels the rising power to choose a low level of transparency about its capabilities.<sup>43</sup> The goal of secrecy is not merely to feign strength or weakness, as the existing literature often assumes, but to create uncertainty which may impose caution and complicate war planning on the part of the dominant power, thereby mitigating the rising power’s vulnerability.<sup>44</sup> The rising power may increase its intent transparency during this period of vulnerability to capture some of the benefits of openness without the risks associated with increasing capability transparency. As the rising power’s military capabilities improve to the point that it perceives them to rival or challenge those of the dominant power, it will become more transparent because more information now accrues deterrent benefits that make disruption of these specific capabilities much less likely. This means once material conditions improve sufficiently, the rising power’s capability transparency



may even reach comparable levels to that of the dominant power if it achieves military parity in the region during its rise.

Periods of power transition can end peacefully, either with the rising power emerging as the new great power, as was the case with the United States vis-à-vis Great Britain, or with the rising power failing to reach its potential, as was the case with the Soviet Union. But more often than not, power transitions culminate in “hegemonic war,” a conflict brought on by broad changes in economic, military, and political affairs, which both threatens and transforms the international system.<sup>45</sup> The probability of war is particularly high during power transitions because the balance of power is shifting constantly, making it difficult to ensure that benefits are distributed to reflect the underlying distribution of power.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, states are attempting to delineate “future influence over a range of diverse and partly unpredictable issues that cannot be calculated with any degree of precision and that are not easily amenable to negotiation.”<sup>47</sup>

The shadow of a potential power transition creates unique incentives for a rising power that neither the pro-transparency nor the pro-secrecy literature fully captures. First, more information may not lead to a corresponding decrease in the probability of war in the case of power transitions. For example, defensive realism argues that there is room for signaling that decreases the likelihood of conflict based on the offensive-defense balance.<sup>48</sup> But the vulnerability hypothesis suggests that revealing defensive systems may be insufficient to reassure during a power transition for two reasons. First, a country can reveal defensive systems while concealing the offensive ones in an attempt to deceive. Second, an enhanced defense inures a state to coercion, which also creates more favorable conditions for an aggressive offensive. For example, China’s counter-intervention capabilities, or A2/AD capabilities, prioritize improving firepower over mobility, which falls under the definition of defensive.<sup>49</sup> However, China’s capabilities concern US strategists because the more China can protect itself from harm, the lower its costs of war, and the more difficult it is to deter and coerce.

A rising power tends to be more skeptical that transparency can reassure a dominant power that fears its declines. It assesses that the dominant power’s threat perceptions are based on the general trend of its declining power, not on an interpretation of the rising power’s intentions. If a rising power were to reveal that it is stronger or weaker than estimated, neither reality will console the hegemon as long as its relative power declines.<sup>50</sup> Great powers that feel constrained by the very presence of other powerful states as well as rising powers fearful of other countries undermining their rise both require a particularly high sense of security that could result in aggressive actions.<sup>51</sup> Even if transparency reduces the probability of war, these power transition dynamics ensure that disruptive hegemonic policies, with preventive war as the extreme, will always be real possibilities.

A rising power will choose the composition and level of military transparency that best ensures state survival – this will change depending on where the country is in the rising process. In the beginning stages of rising status and consequently military modernization, it finds itself in a precarious situation of acute vulnerability. Information about everything from national strategy to weapons systems and military organization could allow a strategic rival to more effectively neutralize any new capabilities.<sup>52</sup> The rising power also needs to ensure its military buildup does not grab the attention of potential adversaries, which could then be motivated to respond with policies that adversely affect its rise. With more information, the dominant power may be able to better target its disruptive strategies to impact the rising power’s ability to perform specific military missions, a variable more important than aggregate military assets.<sup>53</sup> In other words, at this stage, augmented capabilities have indeed decreased the rising power’s overall security if it embraces high transparency. However, once the rising power’s military capabilities reach a level of sophistication that deters attempts to disrupt its military modernization, the rising power is more secure. Therefore uncertainty about where the rising power is in its trajectory, created by low military transparency, is critical to its successful rise – alerting others without having an adequate deterrent could spark action that leaves it worse off.

The vulnerability hypothesis predicts that the need to mitigate this vulnerability will drive the rising power to choose a low level of capability transparency *while it perceives itself to be in an inferior position* to the hegemon. Because capability transparency is weighted more heavily than intent transparency in the composition of military transparency, this creates low-level military transparency even if the rising power marginally increases intent transparency. Some scholars may counter that this is a mistake because poor information flows promote arms racing and worst-case scenario planning among rivals.<sup>54</sup> But that counter-argument embodies a faulty assumption that a hegemon planning a preventive war is the worst-case scenario for the rising power. In fact, the worst case is that the hegemon has better information with which to plan a *more effective* preventive war. Greater transparency about military budgets, procurement, platform development and performance, logistics, and order of battle may marginally reduce the possibility of war, but they greatly increase the chances of defeat if war does occur. In other words, the marginal cost of an increased risk of war is outweighed by the marginal benefit of the decreased risk of losing that war. In sum, China currently faces unique incentives that will encourage low military transparency during most of its rise.

### Chinese strategic thinking on military transparency

In this section, I evaluate Chinese strategic thinking and observed behavior and argue that they provide preliminary support for the vulnerability hypothesis. This section draws from my assessment of over 100 Chinese language sources – including official statements, press commentaries, scholarly articles, and semi-official writings – that were collected based on the authoritativeness of the publication and relevancy to the topic. I then read through all these sources and coded any information that addressed military transparency which fell into three categories: 1) conceptualization of military transparency; 2) assessments of China's relative military transparency; 3) rationales or defenses of China's degree of military transparency.<sup>55</sup> These sources provide substantial evidence that Beijing's low military transparency is largely the result of a reluctance to increase capability transparency due to vulnerability concerns. The main challenge to the vulnerability thesis was not an alternative explanation for China's low military transparency but a separate argument that there is no lack of transparency to explain. Those that argued that China was transparent were rare and largely printed in the state-run media. The more moderate position that China's transparency has increased in recent years was more common and is discussed in a following section on intent transparency.

In this section, I identify four threads of thinking in the Chinese strategic community that support this logic. The first argues against the pro-transparency view that more information is sufficient to reassure the dominant power, often referred to as the declining hegemon in Chinese writings. The second thread highlights the mechanisms through which transparency can heighten the risk of war. The third thread warns that greater transparency could reduce the probability of victory in a conflict by exacerbating military vulnerability. Fourth, a country should only embrace military transparency from a position of strength when more information yields exceptional deterrent value that balances the risks of any increase in operational vulnerability. I then show that Chinese thinkers recognize the risks associated with this posture and attempt to partly reduce them by increasing intent transparency.

The first thread highlights the dangers a declining hegemon presents for a rising power and the difficulty in ameliorating them. Chinese scholars and military experts are cognizant of the doomsday theories associated with power transition, discussing in their own writings the effect of anarchy on state responses to great changes in China's relative power.<sup>56</sup> History alone provides many examples of declining powers pursuing aggressive strategies to disrupt a rising power's trajectory.<sup>57</sup> As the *Science of Military Strategy*, a highly authoritative source, warns, the most dangerous war is a formidable foe attacking China with the purpose of destroying its military potential.<sup>58</sup> The United States is seen as no



exception to this rule. To the contrary, Chinese writers point to past US policies of preemption and willingness to use military means to defend and ensure its international leadership position as evidence the United States is likely to pursue disruptive politics.<sup>59</sup> The popularity of contemporary US scholars who argue for the need to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon further alarms Chinese analysts.<sup>60</sup> Even Qin Yaqing, who tends to have more generous interpretations of US policy drivers, asserts, “the US longs to maintain its preponderance” and its strategic goal is clearly “to continue to occupy and strengthen its global leadership position.”<sup>61</sup> In contrast, Wang Jisi, another known moderate on US–China issues, wrote optimistically about the future of US–China relations in the mid-2000s but largely because China’s political, economic, and military power was still greatly limited.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, immediate threats such as terrorism, non-proliferation, and rogue states distracted the United States and created great incentives to take a cooperative stance vis-à-vis China.<sup>63</sup>

But the 2011 US announcement of a rebalance towards Asia, with its troop deployments, expanding presence in Australia, increased military investment, and attempts to strengthen military alliances, damaged any remaining optimism that Washington would not try to curb China’s rise.<sup>64</sup> The shift in US strategic focus demonstrated to many in China a US unwillingness to accept its decline, potentially foreshadowing even riskier acts to reverse the negative trend, like preventive war.<sup>65</sup> Continued US surveillance operations in China’s periphery and involvement in regional territorial disputes are considered signs that the United States is unlikely to give China the operational space commensurate with its power and security needs.<sup>66</sup> This suggests that Beijing should take precautionary measures to prepare for confronting the United States.<sup>67</sup> The Chinese conventional wisdom is that power transition dynamics are generating antagonism in the bilateral relationship.<sup>68</sup> While all Chinese writings insist on the peaceful nature of China’s rise, they admit that the trends challenge US strategic interests and regional influence, creating competitive tendencies in both capitals that are likely to intensify.<sup>69</sup>

Given these dynamics, Chinese thinkers have concluded that transparency is insufficient to reassure the United States because China’s upward trajectory, not its power at any given period of time, is the main source of anxiety.<sup>70</sup> The United States pushes for transparency because it wants to know where China is currently in the process of its rise to determine if its own power is at the point of being challenged – understanding China’s strategic intentions is secondary.<sup>71</sup> The desire to maintain its dominant position motivates Washington, and Chinese policies cannot therefore eliminate the possibility of disruptive US policies.<sup>72</sup> Clearly providing evidence of the dissipating gap in military power between China and the United States could trigger unwanted US attention and abruptly end the current period of strategic opportunity in which the United States is not completely dedicated to stifling China’s rise.<sup>73</sup> The popular belief in China is that whether the United States treats China as a cooperative partner or an adversary depends largely on its assessments of the power transition trends.<sup>74</sup> Since the United States will remain militarily stronger than China for the foreseeable future, the critical issues for Chinese security become US attitudes towards China’s rise or the possible measures Washington may take to address it.<sup>75</sup>

Second, there is a strong line of thinking in Chinese writings on how transparency can increase the probability of conflict by undermining deterrence for weaker powers, a core logic of the vulnerability hypothesis. During the early years of its rise, secrecy helped China “to stay under the radar, to work hard without being overly ostentatious...[to] prevent China from becoming a target for trouble.”<sup>76</sup> But now the trajectory of China’s rise is so clear that the United States has started to create difficulties for its military modernization programs and treat it as potential opponent.<sup>77</sup> This creates additional incentives for a weaker power to create uncertainty and ambiguity to manage the risks of hostile policies that may be undertaken in the shadow of a potential power transition.<sup>78</sup> While transparency allows strong countries to enhance their deterrent, weaker countries worry about revealing weaknesses that could ultimately undermine their deterrent.<sup>79</sup> In this way, greater Chinese transparency can boost US confidence in victory, thereby increasing the probability of war.<sup>80</sup> As an op-ed in *China Daily* warns, adhering to US demands for transparency would be naïve given China’s inferior military power; the United States could “easily use such an advantage to bully China once

the latter exposes all of its military power unreservedly.”<sup>81</sup> There is a general consensus that the desire to secure strategic interests, protect its overwhelming advantage, and gain strategic leverage over China drives US calls for transparency.<sup>82</sup>

The third thread in Chinese thinking warns against transparency because it grants operational advantages to the opponent. The long shot of improving trust enough to escape disruptive US policies comes at the guaranteed cost of providing information that will facilitate the almost-certain US attempts to undermine China’s rise.<sup>83</sup> Transparency can expose security vulnerabilities and provide inputs into the adversary’s planning process that give it a leg up in an armed conflict.<sup>84</sup> In the extreme case of the nuclear realm, secrecy about the exact number and deployment of Chinese nuclear warheads is considered to be the only way to maintain the survivability of its minimal deterrent.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, China’s aversion to transparency suggests that Chinese leaders are not confident that the presence of its nuclear weapons would be sufficient to deter a US president from targeting Chinese conventional forces, particularly on the mainland, in the case of limited conflicts. The idea that transparency weakens combat effectiveness is not new – ancient Chinese strategist Sun Zi asserted, “all warfare is based on deception” and “military devices, leading to victory, must not be divulged beforehand.”<sup>86</sup> One point made in an authoritative military journal is worth quoting at length:

[Secrecy] is the cautious approach to security...there will be consequences if such information is shown to people without any considerations. The lighter consequence will be the loss of mystique and the needed power to deter. The heavier consequence will be the accidental exposure of weak points that could be exploited by an opponent, resulting in serious impact on the foundation of the state.<sup>87</sup>

Even short of war, transparency about capabilities can support disruptive politics, such as arms racing, that directly impact a country’s prospects of rising successfully.<sup>88</sup> The perception is that China receives the most attention for its low transparency because other countries want to design the most effective policies to curb China’s growing military power and ability to act.<sup>89</sup> The hope is that the United States will have a greater difficulty designing targeted cost-imposing strategies when there is uncertainty about the nature of Chinese capabilities.<sup>90</sup>

The fourth thread stresses capability transparency is a tool of deterrence for the strong.<sup>91</sup> The view is that if two countries have conflicting interests but are relatively equal in power and wish to avoid war, transparency becomes an effective way to “subdue the enemy without a fight.”<sup>92</sup> But weaker developing countries must maintain secrecy because transparency does not grant such deterrent benefits; transparency can expose weaknesses, thereby providing a target set. Or if a country is stronger or developing strength more quickly than previously thought, transparency can elicit policy responses such as an arms build up that are unmanageable given limited resources.<sup>93</sup> China’s deterrent power, for example, is still too limited to fully take advantage of the benefits of transparency, especially given the threats to its security.<sup>94</sup> But Chinese thinkers believe China can be selectively transparent about capabilities that are advanced enough to rival those of the United States to capture the deterrent benefits.<sup>95</sup> This type of “specialized” transparency can occur in specific domains in which a country has localized superiority with consideration given to the likely impact on combat effectiveness and security, not external pressure.<sup>96</sup> The purpose of publicizing operations, military preparations, or new weapons in such cases is not to build trust, promote stability, and avoid miscalculation but to enhance one’s deterrent by credibly signaling the ability and willingness to retaliate against any action.<sup>97</sup>

Chinese observed behavior provides additional evidence that minimizing vulnerabilities is the main motivation behind its approach to military transparency. Of the various components of capability transparency – military budgets, personnel management and training, military hardware development and procurement, and order of battle – the outside world has the most information about the most advanced weapons currently found in the PLA’s active arsenal. Systems are often brought into the public sphere due to a combination of testing requirements and countries’ intelligence collection capabilities. A few examples of this phenomenon include the January 2007

ASAT test, January 2010 BMD test, the J-20 prototype tests, the January 2013 DF-21D test, and Wu-14 hypersonic glide vehicle flight tests. Efforts to create export demand can also engender greater information; at the 10<sup>th</sup> Zhuhai air show, for example, China conducted flight demonstrations of the Y-20, KJ-2000, KJ-200, and J-10 aircraft, ground demonstrations for 18 kinds of aviation equipment in active service and six ground-based systems.<sup>98</sup> For naval platforms that are particularly difficult to conceal due to size – for example the *Jingdao* (056) frigate, Liaoning (CV-16) aircraft carrier, *Luyang III* (052D) guided missile destroyer and *Qingzhou* mine sweeper – China has embraced pageantry with elaborate commissioning ceremonies and over the top propaganda videos to satisfy nationalistic audiences and warn weaker regional actors.<sup>99</sup> In short, for things it cannot hide, China has attempted to offset concomitant increases in its vulnerability by exaggerating its deterrent value.<sup>100</sup>

### **Compensating with intent transparency**

The vast majority of Chinese articles reviewed recognize there are tradeoffs associated with transparency and secrecy – transparency can bring with it many of the benefits the United States stresses, if managed well. But this openness can also bring danger, national disaster and can even threaten a country's existence.<sup>101</sup> Given the likelihood that a declining United States will adopt some sort of disruptive policies to stifle China's rise, it would be foolish for China to embrace military transparency while still in a relatively inferior position.<sup>102</sup> As the PLA Secrecy Committee (*jiefangjun baomi weiyuanhui*) affirms, external criticism will not drive China's position on military transparency; the military situation will determine what to reveal, when, and to whom.<sup>103</sup> The minimal prerequisites for capability transparency are that the United States will not endanger China's security or attempt to reduce its combat effectiveness.<sup>104</sup> Until then, China needs to be vigilant about what information about its military affairs it reveals to the United States.

China is therefore unlikely to increase its capability transparency in a meaningful way until it perceives that it is approaching regional power parity with the United States. At the same time, leading Chinese academics, military strategists, and state-sponsored media providers demonstrate a deep understanding that this heightens anxiety about Chinese intentions, hurts its image, and provokes misunderstandings and miscalculations.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, many hope China can partly achieve the benefits of military transparency through corresponding increases in intent transparency.<sup>106</sup> To that end, China has incrementally expanded its military exchanges, established crisis hotlines, routinized public announcements of strategic intentions, boosted involvement in multilateral frameworks, and has begun issuing notifications of its military activities and exercises.<sup>107</sup>

China can improve intent transparency by keeping agreements, being actively involved in international regimes, and reiterating its strategic intention not to seek the expulsion of US forces from the region in the future.<sup>108</sup> China has also increased the number of joint exercises, conducting 31 bilateral or multilateral exercises or training events with foreign militaries in 2014 compared to an average of only seven per year during the previous decade.<sup>109</sup> Top Chinese leaders, including the past two ministers of defense, also point to military exchanges as critical evidence that China places great importance on the issue of military transparency and devotes itself to promoting mutual trust.<sup>110</sup> An additional series of measures to enhance intent transparency include establishing a MND website, spokesperson, and welcoming foreign correspondents – something that would have been “unimaginable” a decade earlier.<sup>111</sup> One major step occurred in November 2014 when President Obama and President Xi agreed to mutual reporting of any major military activities.<sup>112</sup>

Even as China goes down this path, many realize that relying mainly on improvements in intent transparency to create progress in military transparency has severe limitations. Most expect international pressure for China to be more open about its capabilities and future development plans to continue, if not grow, as Chinese power grows.<sup>113</sup> But given that increasing capability transparency is not an option, given that it would expose Beijing to great risk, and increases in intent transparency come at a relatively low cost, this becomes the logical strategy for any rising power to pursue.

### Theoretical contributions and future avenues for research

While informational approaches to security studies have led to important insights, scholarly understanding of what determines the degree and nature of private information in the international system is limited because the literature fails to take into account states' strategic choice of creating or revealing private information. This article provides preliminary evidence in the crucial case of China that the degree of vulnerability, determined by material factors, is the main consideration in decisions regarding military transparency and, therefore, the distribution of private information among major powers. The vulnerability hypothesis also posits a new reason for low transparency – to heighten overall uncertainty about the stage of a country's rise that complicates planning and delays action – that does not rely on an assumption that states feign either strength or weakness.<sup>114</sup> The vulnerability hypothesis adds a component to power transition theory by highlighting another aspect that makes the period before power shifts potentially dangerous: the uniquely high degree of incomplete information that hinders agreements short of war.

My findings also show a strong Chinese belief that in the shadow of a potential power transition, trends in relative power shape threat perceptions more so than assessments of intentions. Chinese writings also provide rationales for low transparency that are not unique to its political system or culture but could apply to any rising power. If China were opaque merely due to cultural or political preference for secrecy, the Chinese discussion about military transparency would be equally secretive and muted. The plethora of articles and debates on the topic suggests otherwise. This is not to deny the role of the domestic political system; given that democracies are less likely to fight each other than autocratic or mixed regime pairs, regime type could play a role in determining when the shift from low to high transparency occurs. For example, a democratic rising power facing a democratic great power may determine it needs lesser military capabilities to deter disruptive policies than other dyads, and therefore begin to embrace high military transparency at lower levels of power. Additionally, democracy's need for legislative approval of military budgets may generate a higher baseline for minimal transparency.

While this in-depth case study provides strong support for the vulnerability hypothesis in the case of China, future research needs to be done to determine the degree to which it explains the informational choices of past rising powers. The logic may also apply to other dyads that experience a higher than average propensity for conflict, such as rivalries. In those cases, scholars should pay close attention to whether and how the rising power's position on military transparency evolved as its relative power changed because the vulnerability hypothesis predicts that rising powers are likely to become more transparent about capabilities at the stage when the power gap is closing.<sup>115</sup> Preliminary evidence suggests the case of Japan's rise is consistent with this logic. The vulnerability hypothesis would predict transparency at this stage because Japan believed it had surpassed the regional hegemony, Russia and China, in military power and had therefore safely navigated its most vulnerable period.<sup>116</sup> Japan was transparent about its capabilities at end of the 19th century, publicizing through writings and public war games its newfound naval power, its force of 50,000 men in Korea, and their domestically manufactured Murata magazine rifle.<sup>117</sup> It even made public the unified system of public finance it used to raise funds for its military.<sup>118</sup> Evidence also suggests that Japan's military transparency was largely driven by a desire to deter, not reassure; by providing accurate and credible information about its intentions and military capacity, Tokyo hoped to prevent disruptive Russian and Chinese responses, and compel both countries' acceptance of the new status quo.<sup>119</sup>

### Practical implications for US–China relations

There are three primary practical implications of this research that should inform policy. First, pressure and persuasion is insufficient to convince China to embrace capability transparency. Second, if the United States continues the push in spite of the low probability of

success, it should distinguish between capability transparency and intent transparency and not reward Chinese progress on each equally. Lastly, movement toward greater military transparency may actually foreshadow conflict, not cooperation.

The findings of this research suggest the current US policy of pressuring China to be more transparent about its military affairs has severe limitations. China has made some improvements in its military transparency due to US pressure but mostly in the low risk realm of intent transparency by releasing white papers or expanding military exchanges. While such progress should be lauded and further promoted, China will only embrace capability transparency when its leadership is confident its ability to fight is so great that the United States would be sufficiently deterred from action in any future contingency. This does not mean the United States should stop shaming Beijing on this score – maintaining the talking points about the need for greater transparency about its military budget, personnel management and training, military hardware RD&A, and order of battle may have public diplomacy benefits. Also, such complaints may be a way to express concern about Chinese military modernization without portraying US strategy as one of containment. But the current focus in US-China military exchanges on increasing Chinese military transparency and building strategic trust is misplaced, causing key military figures and academics to be overly confident in the potential impact of dialogue.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, concessions should not be made with hopes of inspiring reciprocity, a practice often used in agenda setting for high-level military exchanges with the Chinese. Instead, the goal of military-to-military relations should be to enhance predictability, to understand each other's standard operating procedures, and expand routine communication to manage the risk of accidents associated with frequent operational encounters.

However, if the United States maintains its talking points on military transparency in spite of the limitations, which may be politically necessary, interlocutors should at least distinguish between capability transparency and intent transparency to put more direct pressure on China to reveal specific elements of military power. Chinese thinkers demonstrate a belief that China can build strategic trust, control and manage risk, avoid miscalculation, and reduce suspicions sufficiently by continuing bilateral activities such as exchange visits, high-level meetings, and strategic consultations, as well as ship visits and joint exercises without the risks associated with embracing greater transparency about capabilities.<sup>121</sup> This increase in intent transparency is a positive step but does little to inform the United States about the nature, purpose, and trajectory of Chinese military capabilities – the fundamental aim of the transparency push. If the United States continues to emphasize transparency in its messaging without the distinction, it may grant political rewards to China disproportional to the actual concessions made, which could further weaken the impact of US political pressure.

Lastly, China may not provide greater information about its military affairs in the future for cooperative purposes such as to de-spiral or reassure. This research cautions that if China does work to achieve high levels of transparency, this is not necessarily a positive indicator of peaceful intentions and acceptance of the US-led world order. Instead, according to the vulnerability hypothesis, the more likely explanation is that China is confident in its relative power and hopes to show its strength to coerce or deter.<sup>122</sup> In other words, a shift towards transparency may presage a more assertive and aggressive China, rather than a more cooperative and friendly China. However, the good news is a shift towards greater transparency communicates the Chinese belief that it has reached local military parity with the United States, which given current trends, is likely to happen in the next ten years.<sup>123</sup> Until then, policymakers should understand that information about China's military capabilities found in the public realm does not present a comprehensive and objective picture of Chinese military capabilities. Instead, any information Beijing fails to hide, it attempts to mold to present its military in the most positive light to deter external actors and impress domestic audiences.

Shifting global power creates delicate and dangerous periods in international relations that are rarely navigated peacefully. I have argued that a rising power will prioritize policies that alleviate vulnerability to disruptive policies during such periods, choosing to shun military transparency even



if it heightens criticism and concern from the dominant power. Until the power gap closes, the rising power will protect as much as possible its private information about its capabilities. Thorough research convincingly demonstrates that Chinese behavior and strategic thought are largely consistent with this logic. The strategic calculations states make regarding military transparency impact the distribution of private information in the international system, and therefore its stability. The vulnerability hypothesis greatly enhances our understanding of these calculations; future research projects should assess the empirical validity of this model in cases of other rising powers, test the degree to which it is applicable beyond rising powers, and determine in greater specificity how much more states weigh capability transparency over intent transparency in their assessments.

## Notes

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16. DoD China Report 2013, p. 32.
17. One of the reasons given for the failure is the extremely conservative political culture of the CCP and closed and opaque policymaking system of the PLA. Liff and Ikenberry, "Racing toward Tragedy?" p. 90; David Shambaugh argues that Chinese leaders "do not appreciate the importance of defense transparency as a security-enhancing measure" because they have been "socialized in a military institution and political culture that prizes discipline and secrecy." David Shambaugh, "China's Military Views the World: Ambivalent Security," *International Security* Vol. 24, No. 3 (Winter 1999/2000), p. 55.
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20. An institution under the Academy of Military Science, a research center under the Central Military Commission, publishes *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* (China Military Science, hereafter CMS). The Chinese Foreign Ministry administers the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), which publishes *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (Journal of International Studies, hereafter JIS) and China's Foreign Affairs University, which publishes *Waijiao Pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review, hereafter FAR). Lastly, both *Dangdai Yatai* (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies, hereafter JCAPS) and *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* (World Economics and Politics, hereafter WEAP) are published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), which is affiliated with the State Council.
21. Out of the 60 authors cited in this article, 24 were academics, six were top experts at Chinese state-affiliated think tanks, four were from Party organizations, 18 were from military organizations, and eight were reporters for state-sponsored media outlets. The academic authors are from major government-run Chinese universities. The military authors hail from institutions such as the Academy of Military Science, the Equipment, Command and Technology University (affiliated with the Second Artillery), and the General Armament Department.
22. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
23. Powell, *In the Shadow of Power*, p. 85.
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41. Adam Meirowitz and Anne E. Sartori, "Strategic Uncertainty as a Cause of War," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 2008), pp. 327–352.
42. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War;" Lindley, *Promoting Peace with Information*.
43. Jack Levy argues that the rising power is concerned in general that the declining hegemon will seek to prevent the deterioration of its position, including the use of force while circumstances are still favorable. Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* Vol. 40, No. 1 (October 1987), p. 87.
44. For feigning strength, see Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War." For feigning weakness, see Branislav L. Slantchev, "Feigning Weakness," *International Organization* Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer 2010), pp. 357–388.
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46. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Powell, *In the Shadow of Power*, p. 85.
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48. When the offense has the advantage, it is easier to destroy the other's army and take its territory than to defend one's own; when the defense has the advantage, it is easier to protect and hold than to move forward, destroy, and take. Transparency may allow countries to escape the security dilemma, but only if the defense has the advantage, countries can distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons, and countries are building mainly defensive weapons. Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma."
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56. Qin Yaqing, "Wuzhengfu wenhua yu guoji baoli-daguo de qiangxing jueqi yu heping fazhan" [The Culture of Anarchy and International Violence—The Forceful Rise and Peaceful Rise of Great Powers], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* [Social Sciences in China] No. 5 (2004), pp. 53–56. In 2007 a whole section of *China Military Science* was dedicated to evaluating the strategic choices of rising powers. See "Strategic Choices of the Rise of World Powers," *CMS* Vol. 20, No. 3 (2007), pp. 39–85.
57. Zhang Wenmu, "Daguo jueqi de luoji" [The Logic of Great Power Rise], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* [Social Sciences in China] No. 5 (2004), pp. 61–63; Yan Xuetong, "Heping jueqi yu baozhang heping-jianlun zhongguo jueqi de zhanlue yu zhengce" [Peaceful Rise and Ensuring Peace—A Brief Note on the Strategy and Policy of China's Rise], *JIS* Vol. 4, No. 3 (2004), pp. 12–16; Li Xiaodong, "Daguo jueqi anquan zhanlue de lishi kaocha" [Historical Review of Security Strategy of the Rise of World Powers], *CMS* Vol. 20, No. 3 (2007), pp. 39–49.
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59. Yan Xuetong, "Heping jueqi;" Wu Xianxiang and Gao Yiqun, "Xianfa zhiren yu meiguo baquan" [Pre-emptiveness and US Hegemony], *CMS* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2005), pp. 134–138.
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- Wang Jisi, "China's Search for Stability with America," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 85, No. 5 (September/October 2005), pp. 39–48.
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  62. Wang Jisi, "Meiguo baquan yu Zhongguo jueqi" [American Hegemony and China's Rise], *FAR* Vol. 84, No. 5 (2005), pp. 13–16; Zhao Lingmin, "Leguan kandai zhongmei guanxi" [Optimism in Assessing China-US Relations], *FAR* No. 21 (2008), pp. 50–53. Some attack Wang for his moderate views, see Henry C. K. Liu, "China's Misguided 'Experts on the US,'" *Asia Times*, May 2, 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/IE02Ad01.html>.
  63. Yan Xuetong, "Heping jueqi." Others were hopeful that the presence of nuclear weapons and positive trends in the US–China economic relationship would dampen conflictive tendencies. Hao Yufan, "Yong dazhanlue sikao Zhongmei guanxi" [Sino-American Relations and China's Grand Strategy], *Meiguo wenti yanjiu* [Fudan American Review] Vol. 2, No. 1 (2012), p. 8. The impact of nuclear weapons on transparency is addressed in the implications section.
  64. Hao, "Yong dazhanlue sikao zhongmei guanxi," p. 2; Yuan Peng, "Dui Zhongmei guanxi weilai fazhan de zhanlue sikao" [Strategic Thinking on the Future Sino-American Relationship], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] No. 1 (2010), p. 69; Fan Jishe, "Meiguo duihua zhanlue de piaolue: shiyi yihuo fangfan" [US's Strategy Towards China: Adaption or Precaution?], *FAR* No. 1 (2013), pp. 76–77; Tang Jian, "Quanli zhuan yi yu zhanzheng: guoji tixi, guojia moshi yu Zhongguo jueqi," [Power Shift and War: the International System, National Model, and China's Rise], *JCAPS* No. 3 (2014), pp. 92–93.
  65. Yang Yuan, "Jueqiguo ruhe yu baquanguo zhengduo xiaoguo? – jiyu gudai dongya lishi de anli yanjiu" [How Does a Rising Power Struggle for Small Powers against a Hegemonic Power? – Case Studies Based on Ancient East Asian History], *WEAP* No. 12 (2012), p. 34.
  66. Hu Bo, "Zhongmei dongya haishang quanli heping zhuan yi: fengxian, jihui ji zhanlue" [The Peaceful Transition of Maritime Power in East Asia between China and the US: Risks, Opportunities and Strategy], *WEAP* No. 3 (2013), pp. 31–32, 34.
  67. Wang Jisi, "The Case for Restraint: Comments and Responses," *The American Interest*, November 1, 2007; Sun Xuefeng and Wang Haibin, "Zhongguo huoqu quanqiu shiyu ziyuan de zhanlue xuanze," (China's Strategic Options at Tapping the World's Crude Oil Resources), *JCAPS* No. 1 (2010), p. 23. Retrieved from <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2007/11/01/the-case-for-restraint/article.cfm?Id=340&Mid=16>.
  68. Yang Kai, "Zhongmei junshi jiaoliu yu anquan huxin jizhi jianshe pingxi," [On Building Institutional Mechanisms for Greater China–US Cooperation in Military Exchanges and Security Mutual-Trust], *WEAP* No. 4, (2009), pp. 62–64; Zhou Fangyin, "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de dongli, lujing yu qianjing," [The Motives, Paths, and Future of Sino-American New Type of Great Power Relations], *JCAPS* No. 2 (2013), pp. 15–16.
  69. Zhu Feng, "Zhongmei zhanlue jingzheng yu dongya anquan zhixu de weilai" [China–US Strategic Competition and the Future of East Asian Security Order], *WEAP* No. 3 (2013), pp. 12, 14, 23–24. The challenge is understood as not only as a military one but also economic and ideological. See Fan, "Meiguo duihua zhanlue de piaolue," pp. 76–77.
  70. Not one Chinese source argued that transparency would be sufficient to address anxiety associated with power transitions. The United States is unlikely to easily accept new countries into the great power club. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 327; Ruan Zongze, "Zhongmei mianlin jianli xinxing daguo guanxi de lishi jiyu" [China and the US are Encountering a Historical Opportunity to Build a New Type of Great Power Relations], *JIS* No. 6 (2012), pp. 25–27; Cao Wenzhen and Ding Yi, "Zhongguo jueqi yu shijie zhixu de chongsu – jianlun Zhongmei quanli zhuan yi xia de chongtu yu baorong" [The Rise of China and the Reshaping of the World Order – Focus on the Conflict and Tolerance under the Transfer of Power between US and China], *Taipingyang xuebao* [Pacific Journal] Vol. 21, No. 3 (2013), p. 23.
  71. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 103.
  72. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 207, 327. Zhou Fangyin, "Taoguang Yanghui," p. 14; Cao and Ding, "Zhongguo jueqi yu shijie zhixu de chongsu," p. 29; Shi Qingren and Zhou Lin, "Qianxi junshi touming" [Brief Analysis on Military Transparency], *Zhongguo guofang bao* [China National Defense News], April 2, 2009.
  73. Wang Haifeng and Wang Jing, "Lengzhan hou Zhongmei junshi jiaoliu yu hezu" [China–US Military Exchange and Cooperation After the End of the Cold War] *WEAP*, No. 3 (2006), pp. 90–91.
  74. Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China and its Power Status," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2006), pp. 5–33; Li, "Daguo jueqi anquan zhanlue;" Liu Jianfei, "Suzao Zhongguo Meiguo duihua zhanlue xin Dongxiang" [Molding China: New Trends in US China Policy], *Zhongguo dangzheng ganbu luntan* [Chinese Party-State Cadre Forum] No. 3 (2006), pp. 33–35.
  75. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 103.
  76. Song Dexing, "Zhanlue xianshi zhuyi – Zhongguo dazhanlue de yizhong xuanze" [Strategic Realism – An Option for China's Grand Strategy], *WEAP* No. 9 (2012), p. 9.

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78. This is especially the case in the nuclear realm. See Teng Jianqun, "Zhongmei he lingyu duihua de huigu yu zhanwang," [An Assessment and Forecast of Past Sino-American Exchanges in the Nuclear Realm], *JIS* No. 3 (2011), p. 28.
79. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 138.
80. Iraq is often given as an example of this phenomenon. Shi and Zhou, "Qianxi junshi touming," Li Xuejiang, "Guoji guancha Zhongguo buke bei mei junshi touming suo huyou" [China Should not be Deceived by US's Demand of Military Transparency], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], November 3, 2009. Retrieved from <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/157578/10310343.html>.
81. Xu Jia, "Issues of Military Transparency," *China Daily*, August 1, 2008.
82. Yan Yongchun, "Gaosu ni yige zhenshi de 'junshi touming'" [Let Me Tell You the Truth about 'Military Transparency'], *Zhongguo guofang bao* [China National Defense News], January 14, 2013. Retrieved from [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_4164ae6f0101577i.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4164ae6f0101577i.html); Xu and Han, "Meiguo junshi touming zhengce," pp. 83–84, 89–90; Wang Changqin, "Zhuanjia tan 'junshi touming': ba 'zhiqing' yu 'zhimi' fenkai" [Experts Discuss 'Military Transparency': Separate 'Knowing the Situation' from 'Knowing Secrets'], *Zhongxin wang* [China News], November 18, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2011/11-18/3469073.shtml>; "Jieyi shihuo: qianxi junshi touming" [Explaining Points of Confusion: A Brief Analysis on Military Transparency], *Zhongguo guofang sheng* [National Defense Students of China], April 15, 2009.
83. Or in the words of the *People's Daily*, to be transparent but still fail to credibly communicate your peaceful strategic intentions (touerbuming) is the scariest situation. Chen Ce, "Renmin Ribao." Some authors do contend that Beijing should reform the foreign policy process to make it less opaque. Wang Rihua, "Zhongguo chuantong de guojia jian xinren sixiang jiqi qishi" [Inspirations from Traditional Chinese Thoughts on Trust between States], *WEAP* No. 3 (2011), pp. 119–121. Retrieved from <http://www.guofangsheng.com/show.aspx?id=3686&cid=37>.
84. "Jieyi shihuo;" Chen Ce, "Renmin Ribao." While this is the case across all countries, the risk that countries will use information to find weak links to exploit is more severe for the weaker party. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 138.
85. Teng, "Zhongmei he lingyu duihua," pp. 18, 26–29.
86. Sun Zi, *The Art of War*.
87. Ding Chunguang and Ma Gensheng, "Youxiao kongzhi linghuo shiren – lun zhongda junshi xinxi de chuanbo kongzhi" [Effective Control, Flexible Demonstration – on the Dissemination and Control of Important Military Information], *Junshi Jizhe* [Military Correspondent] No. 4 (2011), p. 42.
88. Teng Jianqun, "Lun Zhongguo de junshi touming du" [On China's Military Transparency], *JIS* No. 3 (2009), p. 51. The logic applies even more strongly in the nuclear realm where more information could influence US spending priorities in ways that make it harder for China to gain advantages without spending itself into the ground.
89. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 100–101. For example, the United States may leverage international regimes to weaken the power and influence of China. See Zhou Fangyin, "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi," p. 23.
90. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 310.
91. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 38, 137–138, 216.
92. Shi Qingren and Li Xuejun, "Zhongguo junshi touming de lishi qiyan ji fanzhan tanxi" [The Historical Origins and Development of Chinese Military Transparency], *Guanzi xuekan* [Guan Zi Journal] No. 4 (2009), p. 96.
93. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 101.
94. "Zhongguo junshi touming buwei quyue xifang yulun," [Chinese Military Transparency is not Something Used to Please Western Public Opinion], *Zhongguo jun wang* [China Military Online], April 18, 2013. Available at [http://txjs.chinamil.com.cn/junshity/2013-04/18/content\\_5304091.htm](http://txjs.chinamil.com.cn/junshity/2013-04/18/content_5304091.htm).
95. Shi and Li, "Zhongguo junshi touming," pp. 96–97.
96. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, p. 321.
97. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 137–138.
98. Ken Allen, "China's Air Force Foreign Relations Program and Implications for Interaction with the U.S. Air Force," *Foreign Area Office Association Journal of International Affairs*, March 3, 2015.
99. For a video example, see "Huguo liqi: jiexi zhongguo 052D daodan quzhujian" [A Honed Weapon for National Defense: An Analysis of China's 052D Missile-equipped Destroyer], *Junqing jiema*, March 22, 2014. Available at <http://v.ifeng.com/v/hglqjxzgddqzj/#0127bccb-bb74-48ff-a11e-9a8a8b523f19>. On the domestic public dimension, see Isaac B. Kardon, "China's Emerging Debate on Military Transparency," *China Brief* Vol. 10, No. 18 (September 10, 2010). Available at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=36811&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=2a2ff14868#.VuBZi\\_krJQJ](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36811&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=2a2ff14868#.VuBZi_krJQJ).



100. The ancient Chinese saying, “the gentleman draws the bow without discharging the arrow as a warning” captures this idea. Ding and Ma, “Youxiao kongzhi linghuo shiren,” p. 42.
101. Select examples include: Wu Xiaoming and Xu Weidi, “Junshi touming yu anquan huxin” [Military Transparency and Mutual-Trust in the Security Realm], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] No. 12 (2005), pp. 49–56; Luo Yuan, “Zhongguo junshi ‘yangguanghua’” [The Sunnyization of Chinese Military Affairs], *Guancha* [Outlook] No. 37 (2007), pp. 42–43.
102. Wang Changqin, “Zhuanjia tan ‘junshi touming.’” One writer puts it more bluntly, arguing, “it would be foolish to fully adhere to US calls for transparency given that the United States is preparing for a possible military confrontation with China.” Xu Jia, “Junshi toumingdu yu Zhongmei junshi huxin” [Military Transparency and Mutual Trust between China and the United States], *Heping yu fazhan* [Peace and Development] Vol. 104, No. 2 (May 2008), p. 17.
103. Xu Chen, “Baofang jiehe tuchu zhongdian: 2013 nian guofang baipishu toushe jundui baomi gongzuo xin dongxiang” [2013 Defense White Paper Reflects New Trends of Military Secret Service], *Baomi gongzuo*, No. 4 (2013), p. 35. Available at <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32496.pdf>.
104. Luo, “Zhongguo junshi ‘yangguanghua;’” Xu Chen, “Baofang jiehe tuchu zhongdian.”
105. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 101, 137, 310; Su Yincheng, “Zhongguo jundui: geng kaifang, geng touming, geng zixin” [Chinese Military: More Open, More Transparent, More Confident], *Qiushi lilun wang*, October 24, 2012; Yan Yongchun, “Huxin rang shijie geng anquan - ‘junshi touming lun’ pingjie” [Mutual-Trust Makes the World More Secure – A Review on “The Theory of Military Transparency”], *Junying wenhua tiandi* No. 4 (2013), pp. 43–44.
106. Guo Rui, “Xifang guojia zhuliu meiti ‘Zhongguo guofang touming du’ baodao yanjiu” [A Study on Western Mainstream Media’s Reports on ‘China’s National Defense Transparency’], *JCAPS* No. 2 (2012), p. 47; Wang and Wang, “Lengzhan hou Zhongmei junshi,” p. 92; For more on the difference between intent transparency and military (capabilities) transparency, see Wu and Xu, “Junshi touming yu anquan huxin.”
107. Xu Hui and Han Xiaofeng, “Meiguo junshi touming zhengce jiqi dui Zhongguo de yingxiang” [The Impact of American Military Transparency Policy on China], *FAR* No. 2, (2014), pp. 91–92; Chen Ce, “Renmin Ribao: Zhongguo junshi toumingdu dabu maijin, xiang shijie zhan heping chengyi” [People’s Daily: Great Leaps in Chinese Military Transparency, A Peaceful Gesture to the World], *Xinhua*, July 5, 2011; Chen Zhou, “Junkeyuan zhuanjia: Zhongguo junshi touming zhiduhua jianshe chengxiao xianzhu” [Expert at the Academy of Military Science: Great Success has been Achieved in Institutionalization of Military Transparency], *Zhongxin wang* [China News], January 17, 2012; Sun Xianghua, “Zhongguo xin wajiao: yige lingdaoli de jieshi moxing” [China’s New Diplomacy: an Explanatory Model of Leadership], *FAR* No. 2 (2010), p. 110.
108. Shi and Li, “Zhongguo junshi touming de lishi qiyan,” pp. 94–97; Xu and Han, “Meiguo junshi touming zhengce,” pp. 91–92.
109. “Chinese military exercises create records in 2014,” *China Military Online*, December 17, 2014. Retrieved from [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-12/17/content\\_6273930.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-12/17/content_6273930.htm).
110. Chang Wanquan: gongtong nuli cujin yatai diqu junshi guanxi lianghao fazhan,” [Chang Wanquan: Cooperate to Facilitate the Positive Development of Military Relations in Asia-Pacific], *Xinhua wang* [Xinhua Online], (Nov. 21, 2014). Available at [news.xinhuanet.com](http://news.xinhuanet.com). Hu Yanan, “Visit to U.S. Aims to Ease ‘Misgivings’ between Militaries,” *China Daily*, May 5, 2012. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2012-05/05/content\\_113591.html](http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2012-05/05/content_113591.html).
111. Zhang Tao, ed., “Interview with Guan Youfei, director of Foreign Affairs Office of MND,” *China Military Online*, April 17, 2013. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2013-04/16/c\\_124589335.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2013-04/16/c_124589335.htm); “Guofangbu fayanyanren huanyou xinwen shiwu juzhang jianren,” [Defense Ministry’s Director of News Bureau has Taken on the Role of Press Secretary], *Xinlang junshi* [Sina Military], June 23, 2010. Retrieved from <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2010-06-23/1404597670.html>.
112. Promoting a new type of major power relations is also part of efforts to clearly communicate Chinese peaceful intentions. Yao Jianing, ed., “2014 zhongguo jundui wajiao shida tupo” [Ten breakthroughs of China’s military diplomacy in 2014] parts 1 and 2, *China Military Online*, December 26 and 29, 2014. Retrieved from [http://www.china.com.cn/military/2014-12/26/content\\_34412790\\_9.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/military/2014-12/26/content_34412790_9.htm); Zhang Feng, “Zhongguo liwailun chuyi” [On ‘Chinese Exceptionalism’], *WEAP* No. 3 (2012), pp. 88–91; Zhou, “Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi,” p. 15.
113. Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 302–303; Yang Kai, “Zhongmei junshi jiaoliu,” pp. 60–62; Zhang Ping, “Zhongguo wajiao de xinqidian gaoduan luntan zongshu” [A Summary of High-end Forum ‘A New Beginning of Chinese Diplomacy’], *FAR* No. 3 (2014), p. 156; Xu and Han, “Meiguo junshi touming zhengce,” p. 91.
114. The fact that Chinese experts are divided about whether the Chinese military is strong or weak suggests China is achieving this strategic aim.
115. US transparency about its naval modernization 1883–1900 seems to follow this logic. Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 35th Anniversary ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 125, 227, 237.
116. John Albert White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 145.

117. S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2003), pp. 146, 151.
118. Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 147.
119. Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (Hong Kong, China: Longman Group, Ltd., 1985); Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 146–147, 151. James Fearon goes as far as to argue that Japan launched the Russo-Japanese War for the purpose of credibly demonstrating its military might. See Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War.”
120. Mike Mullen, “A Step Toward Trust with China,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2011. For the objectives of military relations with China, see Shirley Kan, “US–China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, Washington DC, November 20, 2013.
121. This position is found in dozens of writings. Some examples include Qiu Yuanping, “Zhongguo de heping fazhan yu gonggong waijiao” [China’s Peaceful Development and Public Diplomacy], *JIS* No. 6 (2010), pp. 1–3; Yang Kai, “Zhongmei junshi jiaoliu,” pp. 60–62; Zhang Ping, “‘Zhongguo waijiao de xinqidian’ gaoduan luntan zongshu” [A Summary of High-end Forum ‘A New Beginning of Chinese Diplomacy’], *FAR* No. 3 (2014), p. 156.
122. A movement towards greater transparency in the nuclear realm may also be a negative indicator – a warning that a shift in thinking about nuclear deterrence has occurred – specifically that Beijing has lost faith in the credibility of its second strike, which would necessitate greater transparency to correct.
123. For a comprehensive assessment of US vs Chinese military capabilities, see Eric Heginbotham, *The US–China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015).

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