



ATLANTIC MEMO #20

China's Rise: Consistent Engagement Is Key

Atlantic Community members believe that the sustainability of China's rise is interdependent with that of the West. As the world emerges from the global financial crisis Beijing faces challenges unique to the modern world. Its population boom requires sustained economic growth and industrialization at an unprecedented pace.

Although 61% of members agreed that China poses little threat to the international system, inevitably the scale of its rise will adjust the power balance. In the face of climate change, financial turmoil, nuclear proliferation and increasing demand for resources it is clear that cooperation is the solution, as agreed by 72% of participants.

1. The West has much to lose if China fails to rise.

The West has much at stake as China rises and the maintenance of a consistent policy holds the key to building trust (Lai). China's ownership of almost USD 2 trillion in reserves and its export market gives it a considerable stake in Western economies. However, China now seeks to boost internal demand (Shiang Lee) to insulate against another crisis but the West must create a climate of shared economic responsibility (Szwajkajzer). The policy priority must be helping China adjust to meet the challenges its financial boom will present (Acharya, Stadtler).

Domestic problems still serve to undermine economic progress as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) must tackle corruption, climate change (Miller), and value its transparency as fundamental to economic development (Novas). As the CCP builds up to leadership change in 2012 it is re-evaluating its role both domestically and internationally and the West must manage this through stable diplomacy (Sevilla).

2. China does not have to become a threat, if engaged constructively.

The West must be prepared to direct the rise of China, helping to form its role in the international community, by engaging and encouraging it to act positively. Washington and Brussels cannot rely on the success of liberal democracy to guarantee that China will develop peacefully, but they can maintain faith in its ability to provide the most stable option (Man Tien).

Despite the consensus that military conflict is unlikely debate still rages on whether "friction will be a permanent fixture of the China-US relationship" (Lawson). Key is the increase in Chinese financial influence across the third world where Beijing has "used economy as a means to consolidate its penetration" (Cristiani). By quietly reshaping Asia's security order through economic investment China is now active in infrastructure projects in strategically vital areas (Blank). This development of China's geopolitical significance is shifting the global balance of power (Kline) but the West must recognize that China is still far from projecting power like the US (Gear).

3. Europe should engage with China to keep pace with Washington and Beijing.

Along with the EU and US, China is moving into position as the third point on a global power axis that is becoming the "G3." With both "China and the US conducting more in-depth consultations on climate change and the financial crisis than either does with the EU" European leaders should increase engagement with Beijing (Xu) to keep pace. A greater cohesion in the foreign policy apparatus of the EU is the only way to match the political pace of the two powers.

In order to do this Europe has to make a choice between a policy of engagement or confrontation. Our users identified isolation and confrontation as less than viable policy options for EU governments. The role of confronting China on its human rights record could therefore fall to "international civil society, NGOs and the media" (Cinco) allowing leaders to maximize progress on issues of mutual interest such as North Korea and climate change.

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