

CAUTIOUS COOPERATION: CHINESE PERSPECTIVES OF U.S.-CHINA CRISIS
MANAGEMENT (2008 – 2020)

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By

Alexis Dale-Huang, B.A.

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Alexis Dale-Huang, B.A.

Advisor: Kristen Looney, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Crisis management is but one example of U.S.-China security cooperation that has been a significant factor in U.S. strategic thinking on the Asia-Pacific region. Most English-language studies of U.S.-China crisis management have either been written by or only consider the perspectives of Western academics, and also primarily focus on the potential for aggressive Chinese behavior in the event of a crisis. This article adds to the current literature by showing how Chinese scholars, officials, and analysts view U.S.-China crisis management for military crises in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on an analysis of Chinese news articles, government statements, and the scholarly literature, I argue that Chinese observers view crisis management with the U.S. as a significant aspect of U.S.-China relations, but worry increasing mutual distrust could destabilize the bilateral relationship and the broader regional security environment. This analysis disputes the widely held view that China would not cooperate with the U.S. in the event of a military crisis, demonstrating instead that U.S.-China crisis management is within China's national security interests.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

As the political, economic, and security components of the U.S.-China relationship continue to deteriorate, the potential for a U.S.-China military conflict has increasingly become a topic of interest among scholars and policymakers in the U.S. and throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Recent Chinese behavior and the foreign policy objectives outlined in Chinese President Xi Jinping's 19th Party Congress address in 2017 confirm Beijing's strategic shift to a more active foreign policy that will directly challenge U.S. security interests in the region. The Trump administration's more confrontational approach towards China has also raised tensions between the two countries, especially since the U.S. characterized China as a "strategic competitor" in the *2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy*.¹ Finally, recent provocative actions from other countries in the region like North Korea have led to many fearing not only a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula, but also the potential for a significant U.S.-China military conflict in East Asia.

Regardless of what kind of military crisis may occur, understanding Chinese views on U.S.-China crisis management is necessary for scholars, analysts, and policymakers. This article examines Chinese views of U.S.-China crisis management to better understand how they fit into China's foreign policy towards the U.S. and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Within this framework, it also seeks to answer the following questions: Do Chinese experts value U.S.-China crisis management? Is the Chinese leadership under Xi even interested in crisis management, especially as the power gap between the two countries closes?

¹ *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

Understanding current Chinese views of U.S.-China crisis management is significant for several reasons. First, events in recent years have shown that traditional hotspot issues in the U.S.-China relationship, such as North Korea, Taiwan, and the South China Sea, may erupt into significant bilateral or regional conflicts. China's more confrontational foreign policy approach under Xi has led to many U.S. scholars, analysts, and officials questioning potential areas of bilateral cooperation, especially in crisis management. Considering and understanding Chinese thinking on crisis management is also necessary to manage and prevent any future military crises in the region.

I argue that despite the changing power dynamics and growing tensions between the two countries in recent years, Chinese scholars, officials, and analysts currently view crisis management with the U.S. as a positive and important aspect of the U.S.-China security relationship. However, Chinese sources also express concerns that growing U.S.-China mutual distrust could destabilize the bilateral relationship and the broader regional security environment in the event of a crisis. This analysis disputes the view that China would not consider pursuing U.S.-China crisis management during a military crisis, but also the thinking that China would only exploit a crisis as a foreign policy tool to gain an advantage over its adversary.

My findings are based on an analysis of print sources from Chinese scholars, analysts, and officials in both Mandarin Chinese and English. This includes Chinese news articles, government statements, scholarly journal articles and books, and research publications by Chinese civilians and military officials. While thoroughly examining Chinese-language sources demonstrates the range of opinions on U.S.-China crisis management within Chinese government and academic circles, analyzing both authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources also presents potential areas of debate within Chinese policy circles. Such debates

include those discussing whether China should find ways to cooperate with the U.S. on military-specific issues and what kinds of mechanisms would be necessary for such cooperation.

The paper is divided as follows. The next section reviews crisis management in a U.S.-China context. The third section examines Chinese views of U.S.-China crisis management to explain why Chinese experts believe in the importance of crisis management with the U.S. The fourth section looks at the implications of this analysis for the broader U.S.-China security relationship. The final section provides concluding thoughts on U.S.-China crisis management and the potential for future bilateral security cooperation.

CHAPTER 2. CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

With its economic success, enhanced military capabilities, and widespread influence throughout the Asia-Pacific region, China has demonstrated its rising power in the international system. Since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, China has demonstrated that it has achieved a position where it can have a greater say in international affairs, but has also been pursuing policies that challenge the current U.S.-led liberal international order. China is pursuing construction activities in the South China Sea to strengthen its efforts to control and dominate the region, despite significant international criticism from both Southeast Asian countries and the United States. Xi's call for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to be transformed into "world-class forces" by 2050 during his 19th Party Congress speech has also demonstrated China's interest in using the PLA to enhance its global leadership in the international security arena.² Furthermore, Xi's most prominent global economic and development projects like the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank also suggest that China will

² "Full Text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress," Xinhua News Agency, November 3, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.

continue to support alternative international institutions that better fit with its foreign policy goals and directly challenge those of the United States. As a result, both Xi's statements and his foreign policies over the last several years have sparked academic and policy debates throughout the United States over China's grand strategy and how the U.S. should face an increasingly assertive China.³ Yet they have also led many in the U.S. to question whether the Chinese leadership and academic circles under Xi Jinping still support U.S.-China security cooperation in general.

Despite these changing power dynamics in the U.S.-China relationship and the broader Asia-Pacific region, crisis management has remained an important component of U.S.-China cooperation and a significant factor in U.S. strategic thinking on ongoing security issues in East Asia. According to Michael Swaine, crisis management can be defined as a policy that “does not seek to resolve the basic issue that created the crisis,” but instead works to defuse and prevent an escalation of a potential crisis.⁴ In his analysis of crisis management theory in China, Alastair Iain Johnston notes that Chinese scholars define crisis management in a similar fashion, but also emphasize the use of diplomatic, military, and economic tools that can be used to reduce tensions and prevent further escalation in a crisis.⁵ Furthermore, Chinese scholars Wang Jisi and Xu Hui have argued that China manages crises through a series of steps, including identifying both

³ For examples, see Harry Harding, “Has U.S. China Policy Failed?,” *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2015): 95-122; Aaron L. Friedberg, “Competing with China,” *Survival* 60, no. 3 (2018): 7-64; and Michael D. Swaine, “A Relationship Under Extreme Duress: U.S.-China Relations at a Crossroads,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 16, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/16/relationship-under-extreme-duress-u.s.-china-relations-at-crossroads-pub-78159>.

⁴ Michael D. Swaine, Zhang Tuosheng, and Danielle F. S. Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 3.

⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, “The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China,” *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 29-44, 32.

countries' interests and objectives, analyzing information, predicting possible scenarios, and implementing the preferred scenario.⁶

When discussing U.S.-China crisis management, both American and Chinese scholars often reference past and potential military crises that are either just between the two countries, or also involve a third party in the region. In the context of the U.S.-China security relationship, Swaine defines a political-military crisis by considering three factors: (1) “Key or core interests of the actors are involved”; (2) a “time element or sense of urgency exists”; and (3) “Great advances or threats (or both) to the interests of all sides are possible...”⁷ Examples of political-military crises that are commonly referenced in American and Chinese crisis management research publications include the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, the 1999 Embassy Bombing Incident, and the 2001 EP-3 Incident.⁸

With China's growing influence and capabilities in recent years, U.S. scholars and officials have been increasingly worried over whether “hot-spot” issues may erupt into larger military crises in the Asia-Pacific region. In this case, some issues like Taiwan and the South China Sea will directly challenge what China believes to be its national sovereignty and core interests. However, other regional hot-spot issues, like the North Korean nuclear issue, also have the ability to force the region into a broader military conflict and will directly challenge China's interest in maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. As a result, “hot-spot” issues in this case refer to regional security issues that all involve the security interests of both the U.S.

⁶ Wang Jisi and Xu Hui, “Pattern of Sino-American Crises” in Swaine, Zhang, and Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 139.

⁷ Swaine, Zhang, and Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 1.

⁸ See Swaine, Zhang, and Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises* and Wu Xinbo, *Shijie ru qiju ju xin – ershiyishijichu zhongmeiguanxi de xinggeju* [New Landscape in Sino-U.S. Relations in the Early 21st Century] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe [Fudan University Press], 2011).

and China, present different opportunities for crisis management, and can immediately erupt into a larger regional military crisis due to their controversial nature in the U.S.-China relationship.

CHAPTER 3. ANALYSIS OF CHINESE SOURCES

This paper is significant in that very little research has comprehensively studied Chinese views of U.S.-China crisis management since Xi came to power. Existing English-language studies of U.S.-China security relations have been written by Western analysts and often study the possibility of a U.S.-China crisis given the state of U.S.-China relations.⁹ The existing literature also primarily consists of chapters of larger reports on crisis management and often comes from small groups of crisis management scholars in China and the U.S.¹⁰

This paper seeks to contribute to the current literature by using several authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources to analyze Chinese strategic thinking on U.S.-China crisis management from 2008 to 2020. Many scholars of U.S.-China relations argue that the Chinese leadership began actively pursuing assertive policies in the Asia-Pacific region following what they perceived to be a weaker United States after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.¹¹ Chinese scholars have also viewed the 2000s as a “period of strategic opportunity,” following China’s accession to the World Trade Organization and the United States’ strategic orientation towards

⁹ See Timothy R. Heath, Kristen Gunness, and Cortez A. Cooper, *The PLA and China’s Rejuvenation: National Security and Military Strategies, Deterrence Concepts, and Combat Capabilities* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2016), xii and Avery Goldstein, “First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 49-89. One exception is Johnston, “The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China.”

¹⁰ See Swaine, Zhang, and Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises*.

¹¹ Orville Schell and Susan L. Shirk eds., *Course Correction: Toward an Effective and Sustainable China Policy* (New York: Asia Society, 2019), https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CourseCorrection_FINAL_2.7.19_1.pdf and Aaron Friedberg, “Getting the China Challenge Right,” *The American Interest*, January 10, 2019, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/01/10/getting-the-china-challenge-right/>.

the Middle East.¹² Yet scholars like Cui Liru, the former president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), have noted that the Global Financial Crisis “and the subsequent global recession made this recession momentum even more conspicuous.”¹³

This article’s definitions of authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources are based on those created by American China studies scholars Alice Miller and Michael Swaine. Therefore, authoritative Chinese sources in this paper will include statements from the highest levels of the Chinese leadership, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, and the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China.¹⁴ Non-authoritative Chinese sources include op-eds, journal articles, and reports from Chinese scholars, in addition to pieces from *People’s Daily*, *Xinhua*, *Jiefangjun Bao*, and *Global Times*.

Based on an analysis of Chinese news articles, government statements, military documents, and the scholarly literature, I have found a wide range of perspectives on U.S.-China crisis management. The following section has been divided into the three most common themes from an analysis of both authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources: the need to better understand the characteristics of U.S.-China crisis management strategies; the importance of U.S.-China crisis management in the current international climate; and Chinese fears of provocative U.S. policies that could lead to a U.S.-China military crisis. This analysis of sources from Chinese scholars, officials, and analysts shows that China believes U.S.-China crisis

¹² Evan S. Medeiros, “China Reacts: Assessing Beijing’s Response to Trump’s New China Strategy,” *China Leadership Monitor*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.prclleader.org/medeiros>.

¹³ Cui Liru, “China’s ‘Period of Historic Opportunities,’” *China-US Focus*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/chinas-period-of-historic-opportunities>.

¹⁴ Graham Webster, “Who Speaks For the Chinese Government?,” *SupChina*, January 20, 2017, <https://supchina.com/2017/01/20/speaks-chinese-government/> and Michael D. Swaine, “Chinese Views of Foreign Policy in the 19th Party Congress,” *China Leadership Monitor* 55 (Winter 2018), <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/clm55-ms-final.pdf>, 10.

management is not only an important component of bilateral security cooperation, but also necessary as tensions between the two countries continue to rise.

Understanding the Characteristics of U.S.-China Crisis Management Strategies

One of the most common themes in Chinese-language sources related to U.S.-China crisis management is the importance of understanding the characteristics of both American and Chinese strategic thinking on crisis management. In this case, many Chinese scholars and analysts have studied and compared the different characteristics of both countries' crisis management strategies, and have used the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, the 1999 Embassy Bombing Incident, and the 2001 EP-3 Incident as case studies for analysis.

One of the most thorough studies of U.S.-China crisis management was written by Wu Xinbo, the Director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, in 2011. Wu argues that while understanding the similarities and differences between the two countries' crisis management strategies will help the two countries predict future crisis behavior, such an understanding will also help the two countries with crisis management and prevention in the future.¹⁵ He stresses that both the U.S. and China will take measures in various areas of the bilateral relationship to pressure the other side to make concessions, but also argues that both the U.S. and China have faced domestic pressures that complicate their crisis management strategies.¹⁶

Wu also describes the differences between the two countries' crisis management responses during a military crisis. On one hand, he argues that China often focuses on how the

¹⁵ Wu, *Shijie ru qiju ju xin – ershiyishijichu zhongmeiguanxi de xingaju* [New Landscape in Sino-U.S. Relations in the Early 21st Century].

¹⁶ Wu, *Shijie ru qiju ju xin – ershiyishijichu zhongmeiguanxi de xingaju* [New Landscape in Sino-U.S. Relations in the Early 21st Century].

other side must issue statements to take responsibility for their mistakes in a crisis.¹⁷ He also stresses that during a crisis, China also places importance on sovereignty, respect, and symbolic gestures.¹⁸ However, he notes that while the “slow flow of information” within the Chinese government led to a lack of accurate and up-to-date information during the EP-3 incident in 2001, China did not have the high-level crisis management mechanisms necessary to work with the U.S. and faces structural issues with crisis-related duties within the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and PLA.¹⁹

On the other hand, Wu argues that the U.S. will pursue policies during a crisis based on pragmatism, face bureaucratic challenges during the decision-making process, and use its relationships with allies and international organizations as leverage in a crisis.²⁰ Yet when examining case studies of U.S.-China crisis management, Wu also believes the United States’ “insensitivities and callousness somehow hindered crisis management or created long-term negative consequences for bilateral relations.”²¹ He notes that this was especially noticeable in the 1995 Taiwan Strait Crisis case, when the U.S. not only invited Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to visit the U.S., but also sent two aircraft carrier battle groups near Taiwan.²²

Chinese scholars have also studied the roles that development stages, economic systems, and cultural traditions play in U.S.-China crisis management. Su Ge, the Dean of the China Academy of International Studies, argues that such differences can not only lead to

¹⁷ Wu, *Shijie ru qiju ju xin – ershiyishijichu zhongmeiguanxi de xingaju* [New Landscape in Sino-U.S. Relations in the Early 21st Century].

¹⁸ Wu, *Shijie ru qiju ju xin – ershiyishijichu zhongmeiguanxi de xingaju* [New Landscape in Sino-U.S. Relations in the Early 21st Century].

¹⁹ Wu Xinbo, *Managing Crisis and Sustaining Peace between China and the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 25.

²⁰ Wu, *Shijie ru qiju ju xin – ershiyishijichu zhongmeiguanxi de xingaju* [New Landscape in Sino-U.S. Relations in the Early 21st Century].

²¹ Wu, *Managing Crisis and Sustaining Peace between China and the United States*, 26.

²² Wu, *Managing Crisis and Sustaining Peace between China and the United States*, 26.

misunderstandings and differences, but also that friction in international relations is “inevitable.”²³ While Su stresses that a military crisis should not significantly alter the U.S.-China relationship, he emphasizes that the U.S. and China should work to solve issues in a constructive manner through dialogue and equal consultation, seeking common benefits, and making long-term plans.²⁴ Su also adds that during a crisis, the two sides should try to find solutions that will not harm the “core interests” of the other party, and that the U.S. and China should move beyond their differences through dialogue, negotiation without politicizing economic and trade issues, and avoiding misjudgment.²⁵

In addition, Chinese scholars and analysts have noted that scholarly and official engagement with the West has contributed to the evolution of Chinese strategic thinking on U.S.-China crisis management. In their study of the entanglement of U.S. and Chinese non-nuclear and nuclear technologies, Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy scholars Tong Zhao and Li Bin note Chinese officials traditionally considered bilateral discussions of crisis management as a “signal of weakness.”²⁶ They stress that while Chinese scholars and officials have both learned and embraced new concepts in the Western international security studies literature,

²³ Su Ge, *Zhongmei guanxi de lishi jingyan he zhongyao yuanze* [The Historical Experiences and Important Principles of U.S.-China Relations], China People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2017, <http://www.cpfifa.org/cms/item/view?table=book&id=92>.

²⁴ Su, *Zhongmei guanxi de lishi jingyan he zhongyao yuanze* [The Historical Experiences and Important Principles of U.S.-China Relations].

²⁵ Su, *Zhongmei guanxi de lishi jingyan he zhongyao yuanze* [The Historical Experiences and Important Principles of U.S.-China Relations]. In this case, Su does not explicitly define what the other side’s core interests (核心利益) would be. This phrase is often used to describe China’s primary strategic goals rather than those of the United States. For more information on China’s core interests, see Feng Zhaokui, “What Are China’s Core Interests?,” *China-US Focus*, October 21, 2014, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/what-are-chinas-core-interests-2> and Caitlin Campbell et. al., “China’s ‘Core Interests’ and the East China Sea,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 10, 2013, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China's%20Core%20Interests%20and%20the%20East%20China%20Sea.pdf>.

²⁶ Tong Zhao and Li Bin, *The Underappreciated Risks of Entanglement: A Chinese Perspective* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2017/11/08/underappreciated-risks-of-entanglement-chinese-perspective-pub-73164>.

Chinese experts' own studies of "strategic security issues for their implications for arms control and crisis stability... [have] facilitated effective and in-depth exchanges between strategic communities in China and the West."²⁷

By examining case studies of U.S.-China crisis management, the two countries' histories, and the impact of scholarly bilateral exchanges, these Chinese sources have highlighted some of the most notable similarities and differences in U.S. and Chinese crisis management thinking and strategies. However, as the study of crisis management, and strategic security issues in general, becomes more popular in China, Chinese scholars and analysts have also demonstrated a common understanding that U.S.-China crisis management is necessary to help prevent potential future military crises.

Enhancing U.S.-China Crisis Management Is Necessary Given Current Relations

However, the changing dynamics of the broader U.S.-China relationship have led to many in the U.S. questioning not only the importance of U.S.-China crisis management, but China's willingness to cooperate on broader regional security issues. China's assertive actions in the Asia-Pacific region have raised tensions between the two countries since early 2008 with China's territorial ambitions in the South China Sea, but also its more active involvement in multilateral institutions, economic coercion, and domestic social and political changes since Xi Jinping came to power.

Despite such significant shifts in the broader U.S.-China relationship, Chinese-language authoritative and non-authoritative sources have continued to emphasize the importance of U.S.-China crisis management in the current international climate. For example, during his opening

²⁷ Tong and Li, *The Underappreciated Risks of Entanglement*.

speech at the 2014 U.S.-China Project on Crisis Avoidance and Cooperation at the United States Institute of Peace, Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai noted that “the term for ‘crisis’ in the Chinese language is ‘*Weiji*’ [危机], which has two characters. The first means danger and the second means opportunity. I think the key to our success in avoiding crisis is to turn dangers into opportunities for cooperation.”²⁸ He also emphasized that given the “complexities” in U.S.-China relations and “profound changes” in the world, if countries do not work together, “we [countries in the international system] would probably be overwhelmed by one crisis after another and all of us will end up as losers.”²⁹

However, many Chinese scholars and officials have argued that the United States’ more recent actions towards China since President Trump came to office in 2017 like pursuing a trade war, labelling China as a “strategic competitor,” and its recent responses to the coronavirus pandemic have only intensified Chinese frustrations with the U.S. Meanwhile, such harsh U.S. attitudes towards China have only been amplified in all areas of the U.S. government, with U.S. scholars, officials, and analysts increasingly agreeing that the U.S. should see China as a strategic competitor. Chinese scholars have also noted the importance of the U.S. debates that question the United States’ longstanding engagement policies towards China.³⁰

Zhang Tuosheng, the Director of the Foreign Policy Center at the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies (CFISS) and one of the leading Chinese scholars on U.S.-China crisis management, has argued that negative trends in the U.S.-China relationship may increase bilateral tension in the security realm and even lead to a crisis in the South China Sea or the

²⁸ “U.S.-China Cooperation in Peace and Security: Transcript of Ambassador Cui Tiankai’s Speech,” United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/us-china-cooperation-peace-and-security>.

²⁹ “U.S.-China Cooperation in Peace and Security.”

³⁰ Lyu Jinghua, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxiang xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”], *Global Times*, October 24, 2018, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKdZbW>.

Taiwan Strait.³¹ Noting the Trump administration’s more hawkish policies towards China and how it has labeled China a “revisionist country and its [the United States’] main strategic competitor,” Zhang stresses that political pressures may prevent effective crisis management between the two countries.³² He also argues that problems may arise as both countries deal with regional hotspot issues like the North Korean nuclear problem, and that the U.S. and China also face challenges in areas such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.³³ To enhance bilateral crisis management amidst such negative bilateral relations, Zhang recommends potential crisis management mechanisms like the resumption of bilateral security dialogues between the two countries’ high-level officials, strengthened hotlines between China’s Ministry of National Defense and the U.S. Department of Defense, maritime military security consultation mechanisms, and trilateral security dialogues with countries like Japan.³⁴

Lyu Jinghua, a retired PLA colonel, has also argued that given the increasing levels of “antagonism and confrontation” in the U.S.-China relationship, “the effective management of contradictions between the two sides, especially with the risks in the military area, make this especially important at this moment.”³⁵ She notes that since 2010, military issues between the U.S. and China like U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, U.S. operations in the South and East China Seas, and conflicts related to cybersecurity and space have been increasing.³⁶ To prevent future U.S.-

³¹ Zhang Tuosheng, Jiaqiang weijiguanli shi zhongmei liangguo de dangwu zhiji [“Strengthening Crisis Management Is a Top Priority for China and the U.S.”], *China-US Focus*, November 22, 2019, <http://cn.chinausfocus.com/m/41639.html>.

³² Zhang, Jiaqiang weijiguanli shi zhongmei liangguo de dangwu zhiji, [“Strengthening Crisis Management Is a Top Priority for China and the U.S.”].

³³ Zhang, Jiaqiang weijiguanli shi zhongmei liangguo de dangwu zhiji, [“Strengthening Crisis Management Is a Top Priority for China and the U.S.”].

³⁴ Zhang, Jiaqiang weijiguanli shi zhongmei liangguo de dangwu zhiji, [“Strengthening Crisis Management Is a Top Priority for China and the U.S.”].

³⁵ Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxian xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”].

³⁶ Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxian xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”].

China military crises from taking place, Lyu argues that both sides should “take crisis management and control as the core of stabilizing U.S.-China military relations and avoiding military conflicts.”³⁷ She recommends not only discussing crisis management in diplomatic and defense dialogues, but also suggests enhancing bilateral crisis management liaison mechanisms and communication efforts.³⁸ However, she also argues that the U.S. and China should “stop unnecessary provocations” and avoid infringing on each other’s core interests, and emphasizes issues with the South China Sea and Taiwan.³⁹

Several Chinese scholars have also stressed that stable U.S.-China military relations are necessary for the positive development of the bilateral relationship. In a 2015 report with the Washington, DC-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, Chinese scholars called U.S.-China crisis management the “core” of stable relations between the two countries.⁴⁰ While their recommendations included direct communication channels between the two countries’ top leaders, they also emphasized the importance of incorporating crisis management discussions into larger bilateral security dialogues and encouraging Track 1.5 or Track 2 dialogues that offer simulations of potential future U.S.-China military crises.⁴¹

In addition, while not specifically addressing U.S.-China crisis management themselves, Chinese authoritative and non-authoritative sources have summarized American reports and

³⁷ Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxian xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”].

³⁸ Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxian xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”].

³⁹ Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxian xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”].

⁴⁰ Yao Yunzhu et. al., “Zhongmei junshi guanxi: yanhua, qianjing yu jianyi” [U.S.-China Military Relations: Evolution, Prospects, and Recommendations] in *Chaoyue fenzhi zouxian shuangying – zhongmei zhiku yanjiu baogao* [China-US Relations: Exploring a New Pathway to a Win-win Partnership] (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017), 32.

⁴¹ Yao Yunzhu et. al., “Zhongmei junshi guanxi: yanhua, qianjing yu jianyi” [U.S.-China Military Relations: Evolution, Prospects, and Recommendations], 32.

bilateral meetings that have emphasized the importance of avoiding future bilateral military crises and enhancing U.S.-China crisis management. Following a high-level security meeting between the U.S. and China, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense released a message stating that the two sides hoped such dialogues would allow the two sides to improve crisis management and communication.⁴² One *People's Daily* piece also summarized a 2016 RAND Corporation report that recommended focusing on avoiding potential confrontations and encouraging both countries' governments to establish strong crisis management mechanisms.⁴³

These authoritative and non-authoritative sources show that despite growing tensions between the U.S. and China, Chinese officials, scholars, and analysts still value U.S.-China crisis management. Although some sources convey that China will remain firm in defending its core interests, especially those related to Taiwan and the South China Sea, they ultimately argue for the development of greater crisis management mechanisms and further high-level dialogues on bilateral crisis management in general. Despite China's rising power and fears within the U.S. of a potential great power transition, these sources convey that China ultimately wants to pursue U.S.-China crisis management, as it does not want a military crisis to potentially destroy the foundation of the bilateral relationship.

Fears of a Provocative U.S. Policies

Despite Chinese sources' calls for greater U.S.-China crisis management, some Western scholars and analysts question whether China actually sees a crisis as an opportunity to expand

⁴² Zhongmei liangjun liancan duihua jizhi shouci huiyi jinri zai mei juxing [“The First Meeting of the China-U.S. Joint Military Participation Dialogue Mechanism Was Recently Held in the U.S.”], Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, November 30, 2017, http://www.mod.gov.cn/jzhzt/2017-11/30/content_4798725.htm.

⁴³ Zhiku: Zhongmei kaizhan buhui yong heqi zhengge xitai dou shi zhangchang [“Think Tank: China and the United States Will Not Use Nuclear Weapons in War”], *People's Daily*, August 1, 2016, <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0801/c1011-28600660.html>.

its influence and strategic position. For example, some analysts have argued that Chinese “Military officials and thinkers appear to be exploring ideas on how to leverage crises to expand the country’s influence and strategic position... [and that] Beijing may be more willing to accept the risk of armed conflict in a future crisis involving Chinese core interests” than it previously has been.⁴⁴

Chinese scholars and government officials have consistently emphasized China’s peaceful intentions and the generally positive developments in U.S.-China relations. However, many Chinese sources have also expressed worry that the Trump administration’s aggressive policies towards China in the economic, political, and security arenas could lead to worsened bilateral relations and a potential U.S.-China military crisis.

In an essay for CICIR, Yang Wenjing has emphasized that given the United States’ new strategic posturing towards China, potential military conflict has become increasingly likely.⁴⁵ He notes that this has been noticeable in the United States’ arms sales to Taiwan, adding that “It is normal for U.S. warships to cross the Taiwan Strait and increase the frequency of arms sales to Taiwan. The frequency of such games between the two sides has increased.”⁴⁶ To address this issue, Yang recommends not only close military exchanges, but also long-term agreements to address ongoing issues in the Taiwan Strait and the South and East China Seas.⁴⁷

In addition, Zhou Bo, a senior colonel in the PLA, has told *Global Times* that with U.S. policies in the South China Sea since Trump took office in 2017 “undoubtedly undermining

⁴⁴ Heath, Gunness, and Cooper, *The PLA and China’s Rejuvenation*, ix.

⁴⁵ Yang Wenjing, Zhongmei Yatai Jingzheng Xing Gongchu “Moshi Tanxi [“An Analysis of the ‘Competitive Coexistence’ Model of the U.S. and China in the Asia-Pacific”], China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, October 30, 2019, <http://www.cicir.ac.cn/NEW/opinion.html?id=73035d47-525d-4467-a690-40ab58eeeca9>.

⁴⁶ Yang, Zhongmei Yatai Jingzheng Xing Gongchu “Moshi Tanxi [“An Analysis of the ‘Competitive Coexistence’ Model of the U.S. and China in the Asia-Pacific”].

⁴⁷ Yang, Zhongmei Yatai Jingzheng Xing Gongchu “Moshi Tanxi [“An Analysis of the ‘Competitive Coexistence’ Model of the U.S. and China in the Asia-Pacific”].

global stability,” they have “raised risks in crisis management and control.”⁴⁸ While discussing the potential dangers that could emerge from a crisis in the South China Sea in the *New York Times*, Zhou has also argued that the U.S. Navy’s Freedom of Navigation Operations, “including in waters that China claims as its own, ...increase the risk of an incident.”⁴⁹ Zhou has also argued that if a crisis similar to the 2001 EP-3 incident were to ever take place, it would be much more difficult to resolve. He writes, “An ever-rising China can only be more determined to safeguard what it sees as its sovereign rights, especially when Washington has deliberately intensified its competition with Beijing, and rather aggressively.”⁵⁰

Yet an August 2019 *Global Times* article has argued that “...separate and specific issues or events were usually the reasons that caused the crises between China and the US, which would not affect China-US relations.”⁵¹ However, it stresses that issues like “the Taiwan question and the South China Sea issue, has also been involved in the trade war, which cannot be resolved by crisis management of a specific problem or event.”⁵² Therefore, relations “have entered a long-term confrontation, competition and crisis.”⁵³

Meanwhile, scholars have continued to stress the United States’ growing involvement in Taiwan’s affairs. Tian Feilong, a Chinese academic at Beijing’s Space and Aerospace University, has argued that the United States’ reaction to El Salvador severing diplomatic ties

⁴⁸ Liu Xuanzun and Leng Shumei, “China will never seek hegemony: defense white paper,” *Global Times*, July 27, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1158973.shtml>.

⁴⁹ Zhou Bo, “China and America Can Compete and Coexist,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/03/opinion/pla-us-china-cold-war-military-sea.html>.

⁵⁰ Zhou Bo, “China and America Can Compete and Coexist,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/03/opinion/pla-us-china-cold-war-military-sea.html>.

⁵¹ “China-US new cold war can be avoided,” *Global Times*, August 25, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1162594.shtml>.

⁵² “China-US new cold war can be avoided.”

⁵³ “China-US new cold war can be avoided.”

with Taiwan serves as an example of the United States' growing strategic interest in Taiwan.⁵⁴ He also emphasizes that China must assess the importance of the Taiwan issue and create a crisis management strategy accordingly.⁵⁵

Zhang Tuosheng has also argued that "Among the many hotspots in East Asia and the Western Pacific, the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait should always be the most important focus in crisis management between China and the US..."⁵⁶ However, other Chinese scholars have noted that the U.S. and China have been able to find ways to cooperate when dealing with global issues of common interest like the North Korean nuclear issue.⁵⁷

But China has also reportedly been worried about the growing and U.S.-led anti-China sentiment that has been increasing since the coronavirus broke out in late 2019. *Reuters* recently reported that a CICIR report, presented by the Ministry of State Security to top Chinese officials, argued that due to this growing sentiment, China "needs to be prepared in a worst-case scenario for armed confrontation between the two global powers..."⁵⁸ *Reuters* notes that while it "couldn't determine to what extent the stark assessment... reflects positions held by China's state leaders..." the move "shows how seriously Beijing takes the threat of a building backlash that could threaten what China sees as its strategic investments overseas and its view of its security standing."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Tian Feilong, Maoyi zhan yu Taiwan wenti de jiuchan ["Entanglement between the trade war and the Taiwan issue"], *China-US Focus*, September 11, 2018, <http://cn.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/20180911/32614.html>. Tian is an associate professor at Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

⁵⁵ Tian, Maoyi zhan yu Taiwan wenti de jiuchan ["Entanglement between the trade war and the Taiwan issue"].

⁵⁶ Zhang Tuosheng, "The Shifting US-China Balance of Power in the Western Pacific: Getting the Transition Right," *Global Asia*, March 25, 2016, https://www.globalasia.org/v11no1/cover/the-shifting-us-china-balance-of-power-in-the-western-pacific-getting-the-transition-right_zhang-tuosheng.

⁵⁷ Zhao Minghao, "Is a New Cold War Inevitable?: Chinese Perspectives on US-China Strategic Competition," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12, no. 3 (2019): 371-394.

⁵⁸ "Exclusive: Internal Chinese report warns Beijing faces Tiananmen-like global backlash over virus," *Reuters*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-sentiment-ex/exclusive-internal-chinese-report-warns-beijing-faces-tiananmen-like-global-backlash-over-virus-idUSKBN22G19C>.

⁵⁹ "Exclusive: Internal Chinese report warns Beijing faces Tiananmen-like global backlash over virus."

CHAPTER 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

These Chinese sources clearly show China's active and growing interest in U.S.-China crisis management, despite the negative turn in the broader bilateral relationship. While scholars and officials have argued that an understanding of each side's views on U.S.-China crisis management is necessary to prevent future military crises from taking place, they have also emphasized their desire to work with the U.S. to avoid any potential military conflicts with the U.S. over regional hotspot issues. Despite the increasingly aggressive foreign policies from both the U.S. and China in recent years, Chinese scholars, officials, also all seem to agree that China does not want to directly challenge the United States' regional hegemony or engage in the resulting conflict that would ensue in the event of a power transition.

Yet as the political, economic, and security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region continue to change, and as trends in U.S. and Chinese foreign policies signify a deterioration of the bilateral relationship, U.S. officials should consider the following implications when thinking about U.S.-China crisis management.

China Will Continue to Pursue Policies that Run Counter to U.S. Interests in the Region

Although many sources have argued that China wants to work with the U.S. to help maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, almost all sources have emphasized China's unwavering positions on sovereignty and territorial disputes like Taiwan and the South China Sea and have criticized U.S. policies that they believe negatively impact China's core interests. With Chinese positions often criticizing the U.S. for its involvement in these issues, the

U.S. will likely continue to see China actively pursue aggressive policies that negatively impact the United States' policies towards Taiwan and regional territorial disputes.

Such strong positions on both issues will not change in the near future and will continue to guide China's foreign policy priorities in the region. Following the ruling in the Philippines' South China Sea arbitration case in July 2016, a *China Daily* article stated that "No foreign country should expect us [China] to swallow the bitter fruit of damage to our sovereignty, security and development interests."⁶⁰ In addition, during his speech at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi emphasized that "We stand firm in safeguarding China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will never allow the historical tragedy of national division to repeat itself... We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party... to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!"⁶¹ Such confidence in China's own abilities and position on such national security issues demonstrates that the Chinese government under Xi will likely continue to pursue aggressive policies that run counter to the United States' interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Non-authoritative Chinese sources have also made sure to point out the United States' provocative policies for regional hotspot issues when discussing U.S.-China crisis management. When discussing the Taiwan and South China Sea issues, Lyu specifically lists the United States' efforts to strengthen U.S.-Taiwan security cooperation through the 2019 Defense Authorization Act and the United States' freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea.⁶² Meanwhile, several statements from the Chinese government have consistently argued that

⁶⁰ "President Xi's remarks on South China Sea issue," *China Daily*, July 6, 2016, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-07/06/content_25989430.htm.

⁶¹ "Full Text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress."

⁶² Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxiang xin lengzhan ["Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War"].

rather than the U.S. maximum pressure policy, lifting sanctions on North Korea and dialogue between China, North Korea, and the U.S. – one of China’s primary foreign policy recommendations to manage the North Korean nuclear issue – is necessary.⁶³ This is especially the case as Chinese officials like Fu Ying, the Vice Chair of China’s National People’s Congress Foreign Affairs Committee, applauded the United States’ peaceful negotiations with the Kim regime and continued to call for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula “reached through peaceful means... [as China] is opposed to war and chaos on the peninsula.”⁶⁴

To address these issues, some Chinese scholars have recommended that the U.S. and China clarify their “bottom line” on each issue, stressing that if the United States “insists on touching it [China’s bottom line], the risk of crisis and conflict will be extremely great.”⁶⁵ Yet given that the Taiwan issue and the South China Sea disputes are two of the most likely future crises that would take place in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States and China’s opposing positions on these conflicts will likely continue to slow down any progress on U.S.-China crisis management. Some scholars have even gone so far as to say that the U.S. “should avoid touching China’s core interests and stop unnecessary provocations”.⁶⁶

⁶³ Benjamin Haas and Justin McCurry, “Optimism and confusion in Seoul over Trump-Kim summit,” *The Guardian*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/12/north-korea-sanctions-may-be-lifted-after-summit-says-china>.

⁶⁴ Fu Ying, “At the North Korea Summit, Empathy is the Key,” *China-US Focus*, June 11, 2018, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/at-the-north-korea-summit-empathy-is-the-key>.

⁶⁵ Zhang Tuosheng, Jiaqiang weijiguanli shi zhongmei liangguo de dangwu zhiji, [“Strengthening Crisis Management Is a Top Priority for China and the U.S.”]. For more information on China’s “bottom line principle” (底线原则), see Michael D. Swaine, “Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” *China Leadership Monitor* 44 (Summer 2014): 1-43, 6.

⁶⁶ Lyu, Guankong junshi fengxian, bimian zouxian xin lengzhan [“Manage Military Risks, Avoid a New Cold War”].

The U.S. Needs to Consider the Consequences of Its Own Actions in the Relationship

The strong criticism of the U.S. that is common in both authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources should also encourage the U.S. to consider the negative consequences of its own recent policies towards China. While Chinese sources have consistently attacked the United States' ongoing policies towards Taiwan and maritime disputes, they have also blamed the United States for weakening bilateral relations and creating regional instability. For example, many have criticized the Trump administration calling China a "strategic competitor," pursuing a trade war with China, and spreading rumors about the origins of COVID-19 without providing any specific evidence of an accidental release in Wuhan, China. Members of Congress have also significantly contributed to negative Chinese views of the U.S. after some have not only called on China to take responsibility and "pay the price" if the virus came from a Chinese laboratory, but also argued that the virus should be called the "Chinese virus."⁶⁷

Such arguing and both sides blaming each other for the negative trends in the relationship will cause greater mistrust between the U.S. and China and potentially lead to a lack of cooperation in the event of a future military crisis in the region. Although the United States arguably should criticize China for its assertive policies within China and in international relations in recent years, both authoritative and non-authoritative sources convey that such hostile bilateral interactions will make the potential for U.S.-China crisis management unlikely and its value less rewarding. Many Chinese officials, scholars, and analysts also fear that such

⁶⁷ "Cotton says China's leadership 'must be made to pay the price' if coronavirus came from Wuhan lab," Fox News, April 15, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/cotton-china-leadership-pay-the-price-coronavirus> and Aila Slisco, "GOP Senator Defends 'Chinese Virus' Name, Says It's Not Racist Because China Is Where 'These Viruses Emanate From,'" *Newsweek*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/gop-senator-defends-chinese-virus-name-says-its-not-racist-because-china-where-these-viruses-1493145>.

hostile and provocative U.S. policies could ultimately lead to a crisis that would destroy the foundation of the U.S.-China relationship.

Chinese Scholars, Officials, and Analysts Have a Greater Interest in Studying Crisis Management

These authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources have also shown Chinese official and academic circles' greater interest in researching U.S.-China crisis management. Although U.S.-China crisis management has rarely been mentioned in speeches and statements from Chinese government officials, essays and op-eds by Chinese academics clearly show that there is still an interest in security cooperation and enhancing bilateral military relations through the development of U.S.-China crisis management mechanisms.

While such an interest in this research has been noticeable in the increasing numbers of Chinese articles on U.S.-China crisis management, Western scholars have also written about this in recent analyses of Chinese foreign policy and U.S.-China relations. In a 2017 testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Timothy Heath has noted that “Interest in crisis management flourished in the early 2000s, especially in the wake of the 2001 collision between a Chinese fighter and a U.S. reconnaissance airplane near Hainan Island.”⁶⁸ In addition, Johnston has argued that early studies of U.S.-China crisis management, with contributions from scholars and practitioners in both countries, have enhanced China’s study of the topic.⁶⁹ He writes that based on “interviews with Chinese crisis-management specialists and from a look at the references used in PRC scholarship, it is also clear that... [Michael Swaine

⁶⁸ Timothy R. Heath, “Chinese Political and Military Thinking Regarding Taiwan and the East and South China Seas,” RAND Corporation, April 13, 2017, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT470/RAND_CT470.pdf, 5.

⁶⁹ Johnston, “The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China,” 33.

and Zhang Tuosheng's 2006 book *Managing Sino-American Crises*] ...has had an important impact on crisis-management research in China."⁷⁰ He also emphasizes that "from this exposure to American crisis-management theory Chinese crisis-management theorists have converged on a set of principles for guiding crisis-management practice."⁷¹

Such conveyed interest and belief in the value of U.S.-China crisis management is reassuring, especially as many in the U.S. worry that China seeks to confront the United States' regional hegemony and push the U.S. out of the Asia-Pacific region. However, given the current state of U.S.-China relations, the question remains as to whether authoritative Chinese sources will actively discuss, release statements on, or even mention U.S.-China crisis management in the near future.

U.S.-China Security Cooperation Is Still Possible

Despite the ongoing deterioration of the broader U.S.-China relationship and increasingly assertive Chinese policies, these authoritative and non-authoritative sources also demonstrate that China is still very interested in pursuing bilateral security cooperation through U.S.-China crisis management.

Realizing that further antagonism and verbal attacks on one another will only lead to greater instability in the relationship and region, Chinese sources often provide recommendations for how both sides can cooperate and work together to prevent any future crises from taking place. Some of the most common recommendations to continue the development of U.S.-China crisis management strategies include hosting trilateral security dialogues, formulating confidence building measures, finding ways to cooperate when combatting non-traditional security threats,

⁷⁰ Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," 33.

⁷¹ Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," 33.

establishing hotlines between the two countries' top leaders, and finding ways to host bilateral Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues on crisis management.⁷²

However, such interest in cooperation has been especially noticeable and necessary now, as both countries face the COVID-19 pandemic that originated in Wuhan in late 2019. During his speech at the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit in March 2020, Xi emphasized that as all countries work to manage the spread of COVID-19, a "virus that respects no borders," they must "comprehensively step up international cooperation and foster greater synergy so that humanity as one could win the battle against such a major infectious disease."⁷³

Yet while U.S.-China cooperation in addressing the pandemic arguably is necessary, attacks from one side to the other have prevented any sort of coordination and meaningful bilateral discussion from taking place. President Trump originally expressed his belief that the Chinese government would be able to successfully manage the COVID-19 outbreak and that the two sides would work together to solve the issue. However, statements from both sides' high-level officials have squandered any hopes for bilateral discussions and potential crisis management. This includes Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian questioning whether the U.S. military brought the coronavirus to Wuhan, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo calling Chinese Director of the Office of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi to tell China to not shift coronavirus blame onto the U.S., and the U.S. arguing that the virus should be called the "Wuhan virus" during discussions with G7 countries.⁷⁴

⁷² Zhang Tuosheng, Jiaqiang weijiguanli shi zhongmei liangguo de dangwu zhiji, ["Strengthening Crisis Management Is a Top Priority for China and the U.S.,"] and Yao Yunzhu et. al., "Zhongmei junshi guanxi: yanhua, qianjing yu jianyi" [U.S.-China Military Relations: Evolution, Prospects, and Recommendations], 32.

⁷³ "Full text of Xi's remarks at Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit," Xinhua, March 26, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/26/c_138920685.htm.

⁷⁴ Sarah Zheng, "Chinese foreign ministry spokesman tweets claim US military brought coronavirus to Wuhan," *South China Morning Post*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3075051/chinese-foreign-ministry-spokesman-tweets-claim-us-military>; Humeyra Pamuk, "Pompeo conveyed 'strong U.S. objections' to Beijing over COVID-19 accusations," *Reuters*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us->

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is likely not going to be considered as a U.S.-China military crisis, it serves as a potential example for how the U.S. and China can use established crisis management mechanisms to establish good will and apply such cooperation to other future crises. However, it seems that during the current COVID-19 pandemic, China seems to be primarily focused on crisis management at a domestic level. For example, Elizabeth Economy has noted that in a February 2020 speech, Xi “called for initial policy reforms, including an improved crisis management system and the closure of wet markets...”⁷⁵ Recent non-authoritative Chinese sources have also been emphasizing the success of China’s crisis management policies to address the coronavirus issue.⁷⁶

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Despite a significant downturn in the broader U.S.-China relationship, Chinese government officials, analysts, and scholars have all continued to argue that U.S.-China crisis management is necessary to prevent and manage future military crises in the Asia-Pacific region. While such Chinese calls for U.S.-China crisis management, and bilateral security cooperation in general, have been common over the last several years, they seem to be receiving much stronger and much more recent support because of the changing trends in U.S.-China relations. This demonstrates not only China’s commitment to working with the United States to maintain peace

[health-coronavirus-china-pompeo-react/pompeo-conveyed-strong-u-s-objections-to-beijing-over-covid-19-accusations-idUSKBN21336C](https://www.abcnews.com/Politics/pompeo-pushes-wuhan-virus-label-counter-chinese-disinformation/story?id=69797101); and Conor Finnegan, “Pompeo pushes ‘Wuhan virus’ label to counter Chinese disinformation,” ABC News, March 25, 2020, <https://www.abcnews.com/Politics/pompeo-pushes-wuhan-virus-label-counter-chinese-disinformation/story?id=69797101>.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Economy, “The Coronavirus Is a Stress Test for Xi Jinping: Can China Control an Epidemic From the Top Down?,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-02-10/coronavirus-stress-test-xi-jinping>.

⁷⁶ “China’s coronavirus response responsible, contribution to global fight – experts,” *Global Times*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1184863.shtml>; and “Seven things China has done right to battle coronavirus,” Xinhua, March 13, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/13/c_138875449.htm.

and stability in the region, but also its lack of interest in exploiting a potential military crisis to gain an advantage over the United States and protect its core interests.

Such calls for coordination fall in line with Chinese leaders' calls for greater global cooperation in areas of shared interest. In recent years, Chinese leaders ranging from Xi Jinping to Wang Yi have called for countries to work with China to confront the changing international landscape, non-traditional security challenges, and the developing regional security environment in the Asia-Pacific region. However, what is surprising are the calls for greater U.S.-China security cooperation in crisis management, especially as tensions rise in arguably every area of the bilateral relationship. Although not as vocal on the issue, authoritative sources have increasingly called for U.S.-China coordination on regional security challenges, including the South China Sea and North Korea issues, to prevent the emergence of a future regional military crisis. They have also expressed concern over the changing dynamics of the U.S.-China security relationship, despite widespread Western fears that China hopes to replace the U.S. as the regional and global hegemon in the coming years.

Non-authoritative sources have been much more vocal about the need for U.S.-China crisis management, especially in light of current relations. Ranging from academics to former military officials, these Chinese scholars and analysts have continued to call for and propose crisis management mechanisms that would help both sides better prepare for and address a potential military crisis. These sources have also encouraged further studies of U.S.-China crisis management, whether through Track 1.5 or Track 2 dialogues or additional research on the topic.

However, almost all Chinese sources have remained resolute in protecting China's core interests and resisting the United States' interference in the Taiwan and South China Sea issues. Although Chinese observers have argued that they view U.S.-China crisis management as an

important aspect of bilateral security cooperation, differing opinions on these issues from each side, and the policies they pursue to try and address them themselves, will likely remain significant roadblocks in meaningful security cooperation. Yet with the wide range of viewpoints on how to manage potential crises between the U.S. and China, in addition to the worsening state of the bilateral relationship, what kind of role U.S.-China crisis management will play in future negotiations, and whether it will still be valued in the near future, has yet to be determined.

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