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**The Roar of the Wolf Warriors: China's Increasingly Aggressive
Diplomacy**

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The strategic message that was the legacy of former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping to keep a low profile, move forward quietly, and be patient, changed under Xi Jinping's leadership, and especially during the four years of the Trump administration. Deng's policy was succeeded by the "wolf warrior diplomacy," reflected in China's greater extremism in statements against other countries, aggressive reactions to criticism, and punishment of countries that it believes harm its interests. It is an open question whether in the coming years, and especially with a new American administration, China will continue this diplomatic style and perhaps even intensify it, including in the context of potential military force. Israel must study Chinese policy carefully and maintain bilateral trade ties while strengthening its strategic ties with the United States. Against the background of the struggle between the powers, Israel would do well to follow the messages bequeathed by Deng: be patient, maintain a low profile, and progress toward long-term goals – without loud or provocative rhetoric.

On June 4, 1989, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping ordered the army to enter Tiananmen Square by force and, at the bloody cost of thousands, crush the student demonstrations, in order to maintain the stable rule of the Communist Party of China. After this serious crisis, Deng decided to relinquish his last official position as chairman of the Central Military Commission, appear in public at few events to emphasize the need for further economic reforms, and remain closeted at home until his death in 1997. Before retiring, however, he conveyed to the Communist Party leadership a message on the continuation of the diplomatic path vis-à-vis the world. The central section of his remarks, labeled "24 Character Strategy," instructed: "Hide your strength, bide your time" (*tao guang, yang hui*). Accordingly, China must "be sober, weigh events in a cold and considered fashion, adhere to political principles, preserve strength, be patient, and not rush to display leadership." According to this view, China does not need to be a leader in the international arena; it does not have the capacity and means to do so, and it must act modestly and carefully, talk little, and in parallel try to earn something. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Deng said that some developing countries expect China to be their leader, but it is clear that China cannot do that: this is not part of its basic national

interests, and moreover, China is not strong enough to do so. Indeed, over the years China has acted in a measured and controlled manner, especially vis-à-vis the United States, and its diplomats have maintained a low profile in the international arena.

At the Copenhagen climate summit in December 2009, Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister He Yafei defied US President Barack Obama and European leaders, preventing progress in negotiations and even calling US diplomats "irrational." He was then considered a rising star and one of the candidates to advance to the post of foreign minister. Although he received rave reviews on social media in China, senior party officials decided to oust him due to provocative conduct that harmed Chinese interests, and [he was removed from office and not promoted](#) to significant positions. As China grew stronger economically and politically, especially in the post-economic crisis of 2008, a debate developed in government and among Chinese scholars over whether China should preserve Deng's legacy, or embark on a new, more assertive path. Yang Wenchang, a former deputy foreign minister and then-president of the Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), [claimed in a 2011 article](#) that the West mistakenly interpreted the Chinese message as a silent preparation for removing the shining sword from the sheath and clarified that China is committed to Deng's message and to its peaceful development.

However, some two years later, with the appointment of Xi Jinping as president in March 2013, China began to shift from Deng's approach, which in recent years has been succeeded by more assertive and proactive diplomacy. The Trump administration's direct attacks on China, which included statements opposing the legitimacy of the Communist Party's rule and labeling COVID-19 "the Chinese virus," have contributed to the escalated rhetoric. Chinese diplomats and speakers today respond aggressively to criticism and are not afraid of confrontations. The current practice, dubbed in the West as "wolf warrior diplomacy," inspired by a 2017 Chinese action film, deviates from the traditional Chinese modus operandi and marks a new and firm line in the spirit of "the best form of defense is attack."

Chin's two most prominent and outspoken proponents of this stance are Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian and Hu Xijin, editor of the *Global Times*, the party's extremist daily newspaper. Both make extensive use of Twitter and attack directly those who oppose China, including President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. For example, after another statement by President Trump against the "Chinese virus," Hu Xijin called him "the stupidest president the United States has ever had." Similarly, the Chinese Foreign Ministry launched [a scathing attack on Australia](#) in November 2020, disseminating information about an investigation against Australian soldiers accused of killing civilians in Afghanistan, including [a fake picture of an Australian soldier killing a](#)

[child](#), and a Chinese diplomat in Canberra presented a 14-point document demanding a correction of Australia's behavior toward China.

To what extent these spokespeople represent Beijing policy and act in accordance with instructions from above is evident from an article [published](#) on December 16, 2020 by the official news agency Xinhua, which condemns "soft and insecure Chinese" who are not mentally strong and continue to kneel before United States and tout its benefits and virtues. The article claims that "there are naive people who believe that there is an advantage in compromise, and if China does not strike back and does not respond to criticism, it will be possible to find a path of peace and tranquility. This is an absurd argument, lacking courage and integrity." The article concludes by stating that "the Chinese people are not afraid and will face any danger and obstacle, without fear and trembling, as long as we have self-confidence and determination. Self-reliance on the path to China's development is the cure for those with soft bones." Some of these expressions are reminiscent of the Mao Zedong period, before the reforms began and China opened its gates to the West, raising the question whether Xi Jinping is leading China toward another period of cultural and intellectual tyranny and closure.

The current policy is apparently praised by conservative elements in the party and Chinese citizens who support a firm line against foreigners, but it isolates China, and in many countries encourages hostility toward it and fears of its future intentions. It is possible that the Xinhua article was written following internal criticism of the leadership's conduct, and reflects the silencing process in the party and in academia toward those who disagree with Xi Jinping's direction.

With the entry of President-elect Joe Biden into the White House, China will face a principled dilemma regarding its continued path and global status, given the tendency of a Democratic administration to form international coalitions and advance the United States as the leading actor in the multilateral arena. Hence the question, will China choose to pursue an aggressive policy, as it has done with Australia, toward other countries as well, and will self-confidence about its intensifying capabilities lead it to deviate further from former patterns? This issue is particularly significant in the context of principles on the use of force. China has not engaged in war since its war against Vietnam in 1979, and except for limited military incidents in the border areas has refrained from using military force extensively for over forty years. The coming years will show whether the wolf warriors will actually fight and not just roar, especially in the context of the ongoing conflict over the issue of Taiwan and sovereignty over the South China Sea.

Israel is still on the sidelines of the struggle between the great powers, and except for a few criticisms sounded in China after Secretary of State Pompeo's visits to Israel, is not perceived in Beijing as a senior partner in the anti-Chinese camp. Israel needs to continue to strengthen its strategic ties with the United States while maintaining its trade ties with China, learning the principles of Chinese policy and adopting Deng Xiaoping's own messages: keep a low profile, examine events coldly and carefully, plan your steps for the future, and do not rush to make loud public statements.