CHINA, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND GLOBAL SECURITY: BRIDGING THE GAPS

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China's expanding global economic and geopolitical role has spawned a growing divide between those who portray the country's rise as a force for prosperity and peace and those who depict it as an assertive, mercantilist threat. Such conflicting paradigms oversimplify the complex political economy of the country's international relations. These flawed frameworks reflect a lack of boundary-breaking thinking, research, and policymaking that can account for the interaction between the economic and geopolitical aspects of China's rise. Recognizing such shortcomings is the first step toward better understanding and constructive engagement with China.

Competing Perspectives

- China's peaceful development paradigm claims that the country's continued pursuit of economic development will contribute to regional and global economic prosperity as well as security and stability.

- The geoeconomics paradigm characterizes China as a mercantilist power whose state-led economy and increasingly assertive foreign economic initiatives will enhance the country's regional and global power and leverage.

- Both approaches offer oversimplified understandings of the complex interaction among the economic, geopolitical, and security dimensions of China's relations with the rest of the world.

- These flawed approaches tend to reflect and reinforce the narrow specializations of many policymakers and academics in either purely economic or geopolitical and security affairs. Understanding the negative impact of this dynamic and working toward more creative solutions is necessary to build more constructive relations with China.

Understanding China's International Political Economy

- Now is a fortuitous time to recognize and address these flawed frameworks and their consequences. By promoting a series of high-profile foreign economic development initiatives and institutions, China's President Xi Jinping has declared that Chinese-led economic development will underpin greater regional and global prosperity and security.

- To improve upon these unsatisfactory paradigms, academics, policymakers, and other practitioners must recognize the limits of rigid specializations in economics and geopolitical and security studies. Instead, they must seek creative, boundary-breaking ways to better understand China's expanding global footprint, as well as the dynamic and reciprocal interactions between economics and politics in general, and between economic development and security in particular.

- Some researchers, policymakers, and foundations have already initiated research and engagement on topics that offer insights about the linkages between economics and geopolitics, including the relationship between economic development and security. But much more can and should be done, including tapping into promising traditions of research, policy, and foundational engagement.

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