*In February 2013, Columbia professor Andrew Nathan spoke at Carnegie Council about his co-authored book,* [China’s Search for Security](https://www.amazon.com/Chinas-Search-Security-Andrew-Nathan/dp/0231140509/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1360945527&sr=1-2&tag=viglink23682-20). *The excerpts below have been broken down into what Nathan describes as “four rings of security concerns” from China’s point of view.  
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The **first ring** of Beijing's security concerns is inside the territory of the People's Republic of China [PRC]. We don't face very severe security concerns in the United States within our borders. We have issues of migration, of potential vulnerability to terrorism, and recently cyber-security has emerged as an American domestic issue. But Beijing's security concerns within the first ring are much more challenging.

One is the demographic heartland of China, where most of the Chinese people live who are of the Han ethnic group, 94 percent of the Chinese population. In that main part of China, there is a great deal of turbulence. As society modernizes, expectations rise, economic polarization increases, and there are environmental challenges and water challenges. The [communist] ideology has lost its credibility. People are believing more and more in religion. People are demanding more from the government. So there is constant turbulence in this Han heartland that the security apparatus has to manage.

As you know, the Chinese security apparatus is very big, well-staffed, teched-up. It tries to control, and to some significant degree still has succeeded in controlling, the Internet and social media. It tries to deal with public demonstrations by a combination of repression and targeted selective concessions to people. So that's a big part of the security agenda that in the United States is really much, much less.

In the Chinese case, even that piece of the security agenda is closely connected to foreign policy, because there are many foreign actors who are trying to influence the development of Chinese society: the human rights movement, foreign governments who promote the idea of human rights in China; the flow of foreign legal firms who are trying to tell the Chinese how they should develop their legal system; the international financial system and trading system that are trying to influence how things happen in China…

Then, the second part of the first ring is the national minority areas, which include of course Tibet—not only the Tibet Autonomous Region [TAR] that you see on the map, but those other parts of surrounding provinces around the Tibet Autonomous Region where there are a lot of Tibetan people living. It's actually in those Tibetan demographic regions outside of the TAR where these self-immolations have been taking place. So the Tibet problem is even bigger than the footprint of this thing called Tibet on the map. Then there is Xinjiang, where the Uyghur people and some other minority peoples live and where there is a lot of resistance to Chinese rule…

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The **second ring** that China has to deal with is two dozen surrounding countries, where the United States has only two. Among those 24 countries, most of them are really problematic for Beijing.

None of them is really a Chinese culture society that automatically likes China. None of them feels comfortable with the rise of China. None of them trusts China. Some of them are very, very large and powerful militarily and have histories of conflict with China. Oftentimes that conflict is determined by geographic reality.

So you think about looking around the periphery of China, and there is Russia, which is a huge country that has always been very, very suspicious of China. It's a completely different culture, different ethnicity, different view of the world. The Russians are almost paranoid about the fact that you have this vast Chinese population on the borders of the underpopulated Soviet Far East. Although China-Russia relations are very stable now and in many areas cooperative, they are fundamentally distrustful of each other.

Then you have Japan, which has a bad history with China and which has its own security anxieties in which China figures as a major anxiety. So it is very difficult for China and Japan to get along. You have a country like Vietnam, which historically is very suspicious of China. There's India, and then the smaller countries around the border are also very difficult. A country like Burma, for example, is so complex and always tries to retain its independence by balancing among different foreign relations that it may have. Mongolia is suspicious of China.

Without going through the whole list of 24 countries, they are all difficult, and each one presents a kind of unique management problem for Chinese security. Each one of them, if you think about it, presents a potential threat to some aspect of Chinese security.

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The **third ring** that we talk about is comprised*—*it gets more and more complicated*—*of six regional systems. So each of the 24 countries around China's borders is itself embedded in some complex regional system that includes other countries.

For example, the Northeast Asian regional system nowadays pivots around the troubles of the Korean Peninsula. China has a lot at stake in the way in which the Korean problem evolves. It cannot deal singly with the Korean problem. So when the United States has to deal with a country like Mexico, for example, it pretty much just has to deal bilaterally with Mexico. When China wants to deal with North Korea…it has to consider the interests and try to juggle and manage the interests there of Russia, South Korea, Japan, and the United States…

We divide Southeast Asia into two spheres: continental Southeast Asia, which is Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma; and maritime Southeast Asia, which is Vietnam again, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines. Of course there are times then those two regional systems come together in the 10-nation ASEAN [Association of South-East Asian Nations] grouping.

Every issue that is important to China in this area, the United States is again a major factor: the South China Sea issue, China's relations with the Philippines, China's relations with Vietnam, with Cambodia, with Burma. Every place that they look, they find that not only are there multiple countries that are jostling, and sometimes ganging up on China, as in the case of South China Sea issues…Not only do they have to juggle with multiple states, but in each case they also have to try to deal with American interests and American activism in all of these issues.

The fourth regional system is that of South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The big elephant for China really is the Pakistan-India relationship. Pakistan has been, since the 1950s, a major strategic asset of China, not because China cares so much about Pakistan or has any important economic interests in Pakistan, but because India, starting in the 1950s, aligned itself with the Soviet Union when China was at odds with the Soviet Union. China found the relationship with Pakistan was helpful to try to help it bring pressure to bear on India…

Then there is Central Asia, where China has important interests connected to the stability of Xinjiang and connected to oil and gas supplies, but has to tread carefully lest it arouse the suspicion of Russia, which considers Central Asia to be where it is indeed, an historic zone of Russian predominance.

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[The general orientation in the **fourth ring** is that China] needs to be friends with any government that comes to power, whether it's the Sudan regime or the Iranian regime, because it has to protect its economic interests in these countries.

We argue against those who have a nightmare that China will be somehow be putting major military forces into Africa or the Middle East or Latin America and really challenge American and European preeminence in these areas in the security dimension. Anything could happen in hundreds of years or in the indefinite future, but for the foreseeable future we think China's interests in the fourth ring are predominantly economic, together with certain important diplomatic concerns that may look a little bit small to us but are large to Beijing*—*and those are Taiwan and Tibet*.*

The Chinese foreign ministry has to make sure that all these 193 governments around the world understand the Taiwan issue, which is an issue that's hard to understand. Since Taiwan itself has a lot of economic relations with many of these governments and is continuously trying to win yardage in the diplomatic game around the world, Beijing has to make sure that all of these understaffed foreign ministries in all of these small countries really pay attention to Beijing's position on Taiwan and on the Dalai Lama. In those places where the government is tempted to offer a visa to the Dalai Lama, Beijing has to do a lot of work to make sure that that doesn't happen...

It's true that Chinese power has vastly increased. But at the same time, the security challenges that China faces are very, very large. So we think that for the foreseeable future China is not going to rule the world, and it is not going to present a fundamental threat to American interests.