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You're likely to read a lot of hot takes on the US-China talks in Alaska that explain China's behavior in terms of Xi's "overreach"

That's a fine explanation, but only takes us part of the way. The truth is: China's had wolf warriors as long as the PRC has had diplomats. [THREAD](#)

Here's a taste:

Time magazine described a speech one Chinese diplomat delivered at the United Nations in 1950 as "two awful hours of rasping vituperation"

In the 1960s, a Chinese diplomat wielded an axe outside the Chinese mission in London

The behavior of individual Chinese diplomats has also varied wildly

Yang Jiechi accompanied George HW Bush on a 1977 trip to Tibet:

"[Yang] was with us the whole time," said James Lilley, who later served as Bush's ambassador to Beijing. "We hit it off with him right away."

At other times, Yang has provided the model for today's wolf warriors

During a 1997 conversation with U.S. officials about Hong Kong, Yang became "visibly annoyed," according to a diplomatic cable, and asked rhetorically why Hong Kong needed a bill of rights if Britain did not"

Here's the key though: Yang's behavior is carefully controlled.

"He's a guy who has this ability to, when necessary, turn on extreme charm and when necessary turn on extreme outrage. He does both well," said [@dennisw5](#), one of Yang's long-term American interlocutors

Wilder's explanation?

"He's probably showing off to the rest of the delegation. They're all going to report on the meeting and it will go up the system"

"I have been in meetings that were just withering... But you never got the sense he was out of control"

That's a really crucial point if you want to understand "wolf warrior" diplomacy

Chinese diplomats have always focused first and foremost on their home audience. Yang in particular has always been skilled at delivering the message Beijing wants to hear

This was true in the early 1950s when Chinese diplomats had to figure out how to represent a closed and paranoid political system to a more open outside world

It was true in the late 1990s, as they sought to avoid accusations of weakness in the face of America's unipolar moment

In 2021, they need to figure out how they fit into a political system that has abolished presidential term limits and runs "re-education" camps in Xinjiang

They also need to grapple with the expectations of a leader who touts about the "obvious advantages" of China's system
In this sense, Yang's display in Alaska was both old and new

He showed us how decades-old insecurities play out when they're combined with a powerful sense that America's best days are behind it

The talks in Anchorage likely provide a flavor of things to come. ENDS.