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# DRAGON REJUVENATED: MAKING CHINA GREATEST AGAIN

VASCO RATO



Dragon Rejuvenated:  
Making China Greatest Again

Vasco Rato

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## **Abstract**

The paper explores China's rise to great power status. A central element of the analysis suggests that China's international ambitions and behavior are greatly influenced by the country's historical experience with the century of national humiliation and the modernization strategy of the Chinese Communist Party. Usually underappreciated, history and ideology continue to shape profoundly Beijing's view of the international system. The objectives guiding the current Chinese leadership have been defined in conformity with the legacy established by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. In effect, there is a tremendous amount of continuity in China's outlook on international relations. The paper also considers the United States' response to the emergence of China, as well as the issues separating the parts, and the impact of these divergences on the emerging regional order.

## **Resumo**

Este número do IDN Cadernos explora a ascensão da China como grande potência. Um elemento central da análise sugere que as ambições e o comportamento internacionais da China são influenciados pela experiência histórica do país com o século de humilhação nacional e a estratégia de modernização traçada pelo Partido Comunista Chinês. Usualmente subestimadas, a história e a ideologia continuam a moldar profundamente a visão de Beijing quanto ao sistema internacional. Os objetivos que norteiam a atual liderança chinesa foram definidos em conformidade com o legado estabelecido por Mao Zedong e Deng Xiaoping. Com efeito, há uma continuidade na visão chinesa sobre as relações internacionais. O caderno considera, também, a resposta dos Estados Unidos à emergência da China, bem como as questões que separam as partes, e o impacto dessas divergências na ordem regional emergente.



## Preface

“I’ve read hundreds of books about China over the decades. I know the Chinese. I’ve made a lot of money with the Chinese. I understand the Chinese mind”  
Donald Trump, *The Art of the Deal*

Entire libraries overflow with publications dissecting diverse aspects of Chinese history, politics, society and culture. Even so, scholarly production remains unabated, as evinced by recent monographs shedding new light on numerous critical events as disparate as the Opium Wars, the role of Yuan Shikai in modern Chinese political history, the global impact of Maoism and, as important, the implications of Xi Jinping’s rule<sup>1</sup>. Much of the interest in all things Chinese is a natural consequence of the country’s reemergence as a great power and its anticipated pivotal role in world politics. Scholarly fascination with China’s history surely also attests to how the past continues to mold China’s present and future<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps more so than in most countries, the specter of history haunts contemporary Chinese politics. China’s current preoccupations and behavior and, just as importantly, its grievances and ambitions, are shaped by historical narratives regarding the country’s considerable role in the world in bygone years and centuries<sup>3</sup>. The invariably partial but specific apprehension made by Chinese elites of the country’s proper place in the world provides a robust indicator illuminating current and future political choices and behavior.

Claims that political outcomes are produced by impersonal historical forces overdetermine history, an inherent flaw permeating a certain “vulgar Marxism” yet to be superseded by the Chinese leadership. Relying on a “scientific” historical materialism, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defines its role as one of consummating China’s inevitable path to greatness, brusquely interrupted by the “century of humiliation”. In fact, it has been remarked that the CCP sanctions the study of history “as a way of integrating the past with a political thought that is rooted in the present”<sup>4</sup>. Be that as it may, if it is

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1 Some of the more recent of these contributions include: Stephen R. Platt. *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China’s Last Golden Age*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018; Patrick Fuliang Shan. *Yuan Shikai: A Reappraisal*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018; Elizabeth C. Economy. *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018; George Magnus. *Red Flags: Why Xi’s China is in Jeopardy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018 and Julia Lovell. *Maoism: A Global History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.

2 See, *inter alia*, Sulmaan Wasif Khan. *Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018 and John W. Carver. *China’s Quest. The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

3 See, for example, Li Zhaojie, “Legacy of Modern Chinese History: Its Relevance to the Chinese Perspective of the Contemporary International Legal Order”, *Singapore Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 5, 2001, pp. 314-326, accessed at: <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/li-zhaojie-legacy-of-modern-chinese-history-its-relevance-to-the-chinese-perspective-of-the-contemporary-international-legal-order.pdf>

4 See, Jean Chesneaux. *China: The People’s Republic, 1949-1976*. New York: Random House, 1979, p. ix.

true than an overreliance on historical analysis leads to unavoidable analytical pitfalls, it is equally true that contemporary political outcomes are virtually incomprehensible unless they are scrutinized through the prism of sound historical knowledge and judgment. George Santayana's celebrated observation that "(I)hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" continues to be wise counsel for analysts and policy practitioners currently grappling with the complexity of the day<sup>5</sup>. Despite the insight underlying Santayana's words, history has been largely displaced as a useful analytical tool in Western political circles. And as Western nations take an ahistorical turn, democratic publics become unable to fathom the motivations, ambitions and behavior of China, Iran, Russia and other relevant powers.

With the benefit of historical hindsight, the rise of China may be characterized as a key – if not *the* key – turning point of the XX century. Since Deng Xiaoping's "opening" of China, the country's march to modernity has been nothing less than astounding. Still, notwithstanding the tremendous gains made by China during the post-Mao era, positing a liner march into a future of boundless power and sustainable prosperity is as rash as it is fraught with peril. Enduring cleavages and fault lines linger ominously beneath the surface. Not least of all, as history intermittently reminds the imprudent, "black swans" make periodic, undesirable intrusions<sup>6</sup>. At the time of this writing, in the midst of the world-wide attempt to contain the coronavirus pandemic, we are, once again, reminded of Robert Burns' admonition that "(I)he best laid schemes o' mice an' men/Gang aft a-gley,/An' lea'e us nought but grief a' pain/ For promised joy"<sup>7</sup>.

Historical China was a civilizational empire whose borders were surprisingly fluid<sup>8</sup>. Although Chinese identity is fundamentally a matter of "civilizational" belonging, the Han, comprising approximately ninety-two percent of the mainland population, are, by far, China's largest ethnic group. Non-Han Chinese confirm the imperial nature of China, an empire very much centered on the preservation of order and the avoidance of political instability that could unleash untold societal chaos and state disaggregation. Granted, China is not alone in placing such a pivotal emphasis on political order. Yet it is not excessive to suggest that the country has been the most consistent in so doing, even if it has not always been the most successful. For this reason, the contemporary Chinese state is conceived in a rather different light than is the case in the West, particularly in

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5 See, George Santayana. *The Life of Reason: Introduction and Reason in Common Sense*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011, p. 172.

6 See, Nassim Nicholas Taleb. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. New York: Random House, 2007.

7 See, John Wain (ed.). *The Oxford Anthology of English Poetry: Blake to Heaney*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 22.

8 On the concept of the "civilizational state" and its application to China, see, Weiwei Zhang. *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*. Hackensack. World Century Publishing Corporation, 2012; Weiwei Zhang. *The China Horizon: Glory and Dream of a Civilizational State*. Hackensack. World Century Publishing Corporation, 2016 and Christopher Coker. *The Rise of the Civilizational State*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019.

the United States (US), where the state is seen as potentially tyrannical and great effort is taken to prevent it from hampering the pursuit of individual freedom.

In contrast to Americans and Europeans, Chinese people are considerably more benevolent in their attitudes toward the state. Recurrent national experiences with disorder, and the devastating individual and collective consequences unleashed, ostensibly confirm the importance of a strong, centralized state. For instance, in the recent past, the collapse of the Qing dynasty initiated a period fraught with disorder, territorial disaggregation, tyranny, warlord rule, civil war, foreign intervention and Japanese occupation. Post-1911 republican institutions and incipient semi-democratic procedures were likewise tainted by their failure to resist Yuan Shikai's unbounded ambitions, thereby becoming perceived as a hindrance to the attainment of stability and the preservation of the state's unity and territorial integrity.

More recently, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution spawned a decade of unceasing violence, arbitrariness and rampant lawlessness that renewed generalized wariness of state collapse<sup>9</sup>. Similar fears resurfaced as the 1989 Tiananmen student protests spilled over to other sectors of society, including the country's working class. Having recently surmounted the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, and dreading contagion from events transpiring in the Soviet Union and communist Europe, the ruling elite responded by violently suppressing the demonstrations<sup>10</sup>. The ensuing decades witnessed a "normalization" of the regime and China's self-described "peaceful rise" gave way to Xi Jinping's "dream" of "making China great again". China has, apparently, superseded the "century of humiliation" and is set to play a preponderant role in fashioning a new, post-liberal international order. In a disorientating post-modern age devoid of moorings, modern nations, not unlike the tragic Gatsby, "beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past".

Lastly, a clarification. This work does not purport to be a history of China, an examination of the country's military capabilities nor an analysis of geopolitical events and scenarios. Rather, it is an extended, interpretative essay on China's rise to great power status. Some events and aspects of PRC domestic politics are covered; others, such as the Cultural Revolution, are not broached in any significant manner. Domestic politics are considered only to the extent that they explain the story of the country's rise. The essay also omits a discussion of Europe's relations with the People's Republic and the challenges posed by these ties at the European level as well as the specific challenges faced by individual European Union member-states. That is not the objective of the essay, although, obviously, it is a critical issue that will surely generate much ink in the post-Covid period.

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9 On the Cultural Revolution, see, *inter alia*, Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals. *Mao's Last Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006 and Frank Dikotter. *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

10 On the question of European "contagion", see, M. E. Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example", *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Fall 2012, pp. 156-182.

Yet, for obvious reasons, much emphasis is given to United States policy and the nature of the Sino-American rivalry in Asia and, in particular, the South China Sea, certainly the world's most dangerous flashpoint. Finally, the Covid outbreak swept the world as this work was in the final stage of completion. Although we are still in the midst of the crisis, it is readily apparent that much will change in the near future. China's handling of the pandemic, the number of dead and the massive damage done to the world economy will necessarily provoke a reexamination of relations with China. Some of those signs of change are already evident; others loom in a not too distant horizon. This work refrains from analyzing those issues; they more than justify an autonomous essay.

# PART I

## History as Present and Future

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past”  
William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

### A Heavenly Empire

The term “century of humiliation” (百年国耻) denotes the tumultuous period of Chinese modern history spanning from the 1839 First Opium War to the CPP’s 1949 conclusive victory over its nationalist Guomindang (GMD) rival, whose forced retreat to Formosa ended the country’s decades-long civil war. Mao Zedong’s civil war triumph underpins current official narratives positing that the “century of humiliation” terminated when, on 1 October 1949, speaking from atop of Beijing’s Gate of Heavenly Peace, the communist leader initiated a new era by solemnly proclaiming the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Shortly before, Mao announced that the country had “stood up”, in this manner drawing a curtain on a calamitous period of history marked by national weakness and virtual irrelevance in international politics<sup>11</sup>. In sum, the 1949 “liberation” heralded the reemergence of China and set the country on a course to achieve Xi Jinping’s “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (中华民族伟) as a great power<sup>12</sup>.

Current Chinese grand strategy and foreign policy, as well as the regime’s underlying claim to legitimacy, are incomprehensible in the absence of a broad grasp of the impact

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11 The statement was made on 21 September 1949, during Mao Zedong’s opening address to the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. Speaking to delegates at the Conference, Mao stated that: “we are all convinced that our work will go down in the history of mankind, demonstrating that the Chinese people, comprising one quarter of humanity, have now stood up. The Chinese have always been a great, courageous and industrious nation; it is only in modern times that they have fallen behind. And that was due entirely to oppression and exploitation by foreign imperialism and domestic reactionary governments. For over a century our forefathers never stopped waging unyielding struggles against domestic and foreign oppressors, including the Revolution of 1911 led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, our great forerunner in the Chinese revolution. Our forefathers enjoined us to carry out their unfulfilled will. And we have acted accordingly. We have closed our ranks and defeated both domestic and foreign oppressors through the People’s War of Liberation and the great people’s revolution, and now we are proclaiming the founding of the People’s Republic of China. From now on our nation will belong to the community of the peace-loving and freedom-loving nations of the world and work courageously and industriously to foster its own civilization and well-being and at the same time to promote world peace and freedom. Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up”. Mao Tse-tung, “The Chinese People Have Stood Up”, Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 5. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977, p. 17.

12 For an interesting, unconventional discussion of the 1949 “liberation” and its consequences, see, Frank Dikötter. *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Communist Revolution 1945-1957*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.

of the “century of humiliation” on the ruling communist elites’ *Weltanschauung* and the manner in which it continues to decisively frame that same world-view<sup>13</sup>. Today, the “century of humiliation” persists as a bedrock theme of the complex narrative of political legitimacy propagated by the Chinese Communist Party since 1949. In short, and the point bears emphasizing, the Chinese Communist Party, guided by the objective of making the PRC a modern, developed and strong state, provided strategic continuity from the Mao Zedong era to the Xi Jinping era. Indeed, not long after coming to power, Xi Jinping, in a July 2013 visit to Hebei province, affirmed that the country’s revolutionary history is the “best nutrient” to “ensure the color of red China will never change”<sup>14</sup>.

That such is the case should not be a source of undue perplexity since the “century of humiliation” constitutes a fundamental rupture with the country’s millennial history. For centuries, China positioned itself at the center of the world commanding “all under heaven” and oversaw a web of tributary relationships with neighboring political units<sup>15</sup>. However, in the years subsequent to the Opium Wars, foreign powers relegated the Middle Kingdom to a position of undisguisable weakness, dependence and subjugation. Encroached upon by a global system of nation-states and Westphalian power dynamics it manifestly was incapable of molding, China’s fate became increasingly conditioned by a host of alien actors. Yet, China was not a passive victim of foreign designs, a conclusion surreptitiously implied by the “century of humiliation” official narrative. Victimized by imperialist powers, China was equally victimized by elites, both imperial and republican, unwilling to embrace jarring new international realities.

Although not the first Europeans to visit the country, the Portuguese were the first foreigners to leave a lasting imprint on China. XV century breakthroughs in nautical technology allowed Vasco da Gama, in May 1498, to reach India by following a maritime route, a feat that “turned the Indian Ocean into a zone for cross-cultural contact between East and West”<sup>16</sup>. Further east of Calicut (Kozhikode), Portuguese sailors encountered Japan in 1549, introducing modern, sophisticated firearms and modernizing Nagasaki’s port. Straddling these two pivotal events, the Portuguese made their way to Ming China after consolidating their presence in the Orient through a system of trade entrepôts. In 1513, departing from Malacca, Jorge Álvares made landfall in Ling-Ting, becoming the first European to reach China by sea. Two years later, Rafael Perestrelo reached the Pearl River area, setting the stage for Portugal’s enduring commercial, military and

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13 See, Howard W. French. *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China’s Push for Global Presence*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

14 See, “Xi urges CPC members to keep China red”, *China Daily*, July 12, 2013, available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-07/12/content\\_16769833.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-07/12/content_16769833.htm).

15 See, for example, John King Fairbank and S. Y. Têng, “On the Ch’ing Tributary System”. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 1941, pp. 135-246, available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/57ec/010193f117d52f0ed428fd28b60db22bd80b.pdf>.

16 See, Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya. *The Portuguese in the East: A Cultural History of a Maritime Trading Empire*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2017, p. 1.

religious-ideological presence in Asia<sup>17</sup>. Under Lisbon's administration since 1557, Macao, Europe's last imperial outpost, was finally transferred to Chinese sovereignty in 1999, a portentous symbol ushering in what Beijing authorities expected to be the new "Chinese century"<sup>18</sup>.

Portuguese sailors arrived in Zhōngguó less than a century after the Middle Kingdom disengaged from the outside world. In the first half of the 1400s, Zheng He, the Muslim eunuch admiral, made seven celebrated voyages of discovery and engagement to the "Western Ocean", reaching Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Sanctioned by the Ming Yongle Emperor, these unprecedented voyages, the first of which involved sixty-two ships and 28,000 men, came to an abrupt end by order of the Xuande Emperor<sup>19</sup>. As a result of the Xuande Emperor's decision, the "Celestial Empire", the oldest and greatest civilization, closed itself off from the wider world. Beyond rare stones, exotic animals and enhanced geographical knowledge, the voyages failed to produce visible, long-lasting benefits. Today, the communist regime touts Zheng He as a symbol of the country's lasting tradition of exploration, peaceful intent and "openness" to the world<sup>20</sup>. The reality was otherwise: the empire was ambiguous, when not entirely xenophobic, in relation to the distant, barbarian lands beyond the Middle Kingdom.

Modern Chinese history largely coincides with Qing dynasty rule, spanning the period between 1644 and 1911/12, when Sun Yat-sen's republic emerged from the rubble of the imperial state<sup>21</sup>. Originating in Manchuria when the chieftain Nurhaci united the scattered Jurchen tribes, the Qing relentlessly marched south, along the way defeating or absorbing their rivals<sup>22</sup>. After waging regular attacks on the Ming for three

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17 On Portugal's imperial expansion, see, *inter alia*, C. R. Boxer. *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*. Hutchison and Co., 1969 and A. R. Disney. *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

18 On the background to Macao's transition to Chinese sovereignty, see, Richard Louis Edmonds and Herbert S. Yee, "Macao: From Portuguese Autonomous Territory to Chinese Special Administrative Region", *The China Quarterly*, No. 160, December 1999, pp. 801-817.

19 The voyages were actually terminated under the mandate of the Hongxi Emperor, reigning between 1424 and 1425. The Hongxi Emperor's son, the Xuande Emperor (on the throne between 1425 and 1435) would allow Zheng He to make one final voyage. Apparently, Zheng died on this seventh voyage and was buried at sea off the coast of India. See, Edward L. Dreyer. *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming, 1405-1433*. New York: Longman, 2006.

20 See, Mure Dickie, "A less Admirable Admiral", *Financial Times*, September 30, 2005, accessed at: <https://www.ft.com/content/6622ddee-2fcc-11da-8b51-00000e2511c8>.

21 For interpretations of modern Chinese history, see, *inter alia*, Jonathan D. Spence. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990; John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman. *China: A New History* (Second Enlarged Edition). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006; Jonathan Fenby. *The Penguin History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power, 1850 to the Present* (Third Edition). London: Allen Lane, 2008 and Klaus Mühlhahn. *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019; Also of interest is Henry Kissinger. *On China*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011.

22 See, William T. Rowe and Timothy Brook. *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

generations, the Qing finally succeeded in establishing their dominion over China in 1644, a year after the last Ming ruler, the Chongzhen Emperor, committed suicide after seeing Beijing captured by Li Zicheng's rebel army. When Li attacked Ming General Wu Sangui's army, assigned to guard the Great Wall at Shanhai Pass, Wu unlocked the gates to the Qing, thus enabling the final Manchu assault on Beijing<sup>23</sup>. The new Qing dynasty would produce two exceptional rulers – the Kangxi Emperor (ruled 1661-1772) and the Qianlong Emperor (ruled 1735-1796) – who oversaw “golden ages” of expansion and prosperity. Today, the Qing is remembered as the dynasty whose emperors reigned during the “century of humiliation” and presided over the collapse of a millennial empire.

During the first decades of the XVIII century, China's economic might accounted for an astounding one-quarter of world output<sup>24</sup>. Judged by any reasonable standard, the empire was a formidable power. Thus, all appeared harmonious as Zhōngguó surrounded itself with sinized colonies and tributary states, such as Vietnam and Korea, accepting, albeit reluctantly and to a greater or lesser degree, the suzerainty of the emperor. Following the conquest of Taiwan, in 1683, stability prevailed on the empire's eastern seaboard since, with the notable exception of Japan, the littoral states were enmeshed in tributary relationships. Qing political prudence usually dissuaded the exercise of overt political control in those alien lands, and therefore many of the states were able to conduct their affairs with a substantial degree of independence relative to the imperial court. China's relationship with Korea was atypical precisely because of the emperor's direct political influence in the country. Unchallenged by its neighbors, Qing China became a multicultural empire steeped in Confucianism. Outside of this structured, orderly and hierarchical world, the domain of barbarians untouched by Zhōngguó's millennial civilization was of little interest or consequence to the imperial court.

Reigning until 1799, the Qianlong Emperor expanded Chinese control over most of western Central Asia in the 1750s, and further integrated Tibet and Mongolia into the empire<sup>25</sup>. Despite the renowned successes, the empire was not shielded from periodic setbacks. Savage frontier military campaigns were conducted against Zungharia, a Mongol khanate stretching from the Mongolian heartland to the borders of Tibet. After seven decades of war, the Qianlong Emperor implemented an “extermination order” as part of an ominous “final solution” to the Zunghar problem<sup>26</sup>. Mass murder of the local population was sanctioned and a new frontier – the literal meaning of Xinjiang – was forcibly

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23 See, Angela N. S. Hsi, “Wu San-kuei in 1644: A Reappraisal”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1975, pp. 443–453.

24 For a discussion, see, Stephen N. Broadberry, Hanhui Guan and David D. Li, “China, Europe and the Great Divergence: A Study in Historical National Accounting, 980-1850”, CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP11972, April 2017, available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2957511](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2957511).

25 See, Peter C. Perdue. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 283-287.

incorporated into the empire<sup>27</sup>. Further south, in the 1760s, the Qianlong Emperor lost 70, 000 soldiers in a failed attempt to maintain Burma under imperial tutelage. Likewise, in Vietnam, the most sinized neighboring state, Qing influence diminished after the Qianlong Emperor backed the losing side in the civil war of the late 1780s, committing 200,000 troops to Lê Chiêu Thống's doomed attempt to regain his lost throne<sup>28</sup>. And although the Vietnamese were successful in petitioning a return to the payment of tribute, the Chinese were unable to avoid suffering a substantial loss of prestige.

Hazard also loomed on the empire's northern flank, where Qing China confronted a restless imperial power spanning from the European Plain to the vast Siberian wastelands<sup>29</sup>. Russia's sheer geographical extension, encompassing unending stretches of northern lands seemingly blessed with infinite resources, made the Tsarist Empire a formidable potential adversary. Russia could not simply be ignored. Confronted with such latent peril, the Qing, unsurprisingly, pursued diplomacy so as to forestall war and assure the maintenance of the *status quo* on its northern borders. Russia too was satisfied with the establishment of these diplomatic arrangements because the empire's geographical vastness posed, as it does today, considerable vulnerabilities for the exercise of full sovereignty in such an underpopulated region.

A border along the Amur was demarcated when Tsar Ivan V and the Kangxi Emperor signed the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk, the first such accord celebrated between China and a European power<sup>30</sup>. Creating conditions for cross-border trade between the two empires, the Treaty was unprecedented because the Chinese court had not previously extended recognition to a foreign monarch unbound by relations of tribute. Critically, the Treaty of Nerchinsk served to free the Kangxi Emperor to pursue westward expansion and quash the Zunghar rebellions<sup>31</sup>. In 1727, the Kiakhta Treaty reinforced the terms of the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk, as the Chinese authorities consented to extending border trade with their northern neighbor and accepted the presence of two hundred Russian merchants in Beijing every third year. The treaties were remarkable diplomatic achievements since war was prevented from breaking out between the two empires until the mid XIX century, when, buoyed by the Qing's undisguisable weakness, Russian expansionism set its sights on long-coveted Chinese lands.

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27 On the history of China's troubled Xinjiang, see, *inter alia*, Justin M. Jacobs. Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016; Nick Holdstock. China's Forgotten People. London. I.B. Tauris, 2015; Gardner Bovingdon. The Uyghurs: Strangers in their Own Land. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010 e James Milward. Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

28 See, Ben Kiernan. Việt Nam: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 261-262.

29 See, Michael Khodarkovsky. Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

30 See, V. S. Frank, "The Territorial Terms of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Nerchinsk, 1689", Pacific Historical Review, Vol. 16, No. 3, August 1947, pp. 265-270.

31 For greater detail, see, Fred W. Bergholz. The Partition of the Steppe: The Struggle of the Russians, Manchus, and the Zunghar Mongols for Empire in Central Asia, 1619-1758 – A Study in Power Politics. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

By the time the disastrous Opium Wars befell the Qing, the “golden ages” of the Qianlong and Kangxi Emperors were receding memories as the empire became mired in multiple, execrable predicaments. China’s stunted technological development allowed Western nations to surpass it militarily as European capitalism yielded leaps in technological innovation. Still, technological backwardness was not the sole reason accounting for China’s Opium Wars debacles. By the early XIX century, the empire’s frontier wars of expansion effectively produced “imperial overstretch”<sup>32</sup>. Concomitantly, the dynasty had made itself vulnerable to outside powers as a result of its generalized indifference, corruption and bureaucratic stasis. The Western offensive beginning in 1839 merely accentuated previously existing problems faced by the Qing as the dynasty failed to react to vertiginous change produced by novel internal and external realities.

## The Opium Wars

The remote origins of the Opium Wars are traceable to 1757, when the Qianlong Emperor, confronted with British attempts to expand commerce to northern Chinese ports, decreed that Canton was to be sole port where Western ships, albeit subject to significant restrictions, were permitted to dock and carry out trade<sup>33</sup>. Far from exemplifying free, unobstructed trade, the “Canton system” encompassed numerous restrictions: warships, firearms and foreign women were all prohibited from the city and Westerners were compelled to reside in “foreign factories” situated outside of the gates of Canton. Moreover, merchants could only visit the port during the October to March trading months and were obliged to dock at Huangpu, south of Canton, after procuring a permit in Macao. Most of these Western merchants were associated with the East India Company, whose trade with China was greatly stimulated by a seemingly insatiable British demand for tea, a beverage popularized by Catherine of Braganza, wife of Charles II. However, because the Chinese demanded payment in silver and refused to purchase British goods, London was forced to carry substantial balance of payments deficits.

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32 Paul Kennedy, in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, writes: “(T)he triumph of any one Great Power in this period, or the collapse of another, has usually been the consequence of lengthy fighting by its armed forces; but it has also been the consequence of the more or less efficient utilization of the state’s productive economic resources in wartime, and, further in the background, of the way in which that state’s economy had been rising or falling, relative to the other leading nations, in the decades preceding the actual conflict”. Paul Kennedy. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. New York: Random House, 1987, p. xv.

33 See, Paul Arthur Van Dyke. *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005 and Paul A. Van Dyke. *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011, pp. 7-30.

Against this background of British expansion in Asia, London, in 1793, sent the envoy George Macartney to petition for enhanced trade and diplomatic relations<sup>34</sup>. Presuming that the visitors to his court had come bearing tribute, the Qianlong Emperor was taken aback when Macartney solicited the stationing of permanent commercial representatives in the capital and the easing of existing trade restrictions. Outlining his reasons in a letter addressed to the British monarch, George III, the emperor dismissed Macartney's requests. The Qianlong Emperor's missive to George III, including the condescending manner in which the British monarch is addressed, justifies the length of the following extract from the emperor's letter: "You, O King, live beyond the confines of many seas, nevertheless, impelled by your humble desire to partake of the benefits of our civilization, you have dispatched a mission respectfully bearing your memorial... I have perused your memorial: the earnest terms in which it is couched reveal a respectful humility on your part, which is highly praiseworthy. In consideration of the fact that your Ambassador and his deputy have come a long way with your memorial and tribute, I have shown them high favor and have allowed them to be introduced into my presence. To manifest my indulgence, I have entertained them at a banquet and made them numerous gifts... As to your entreaty to send one of your nationals to be accredited to my Celestial Court and to be in control of your country's trade with China, this request is contrary to all usage of my dynasty and cannot possibly be entertained... Your proposed Envoy to my Court could not be placed in a position similar to that of European officials in Peking who are forbidden to leave China, nor could he, on the other hand, be allowed liberty of movement and the privilege of corresponding with his own country; so that you would gain nothing by his residence in our midst<sup>35</sup>".

Macartney's disastrous encounter – Britain's first mission to the Middle Kingdom – did not dissuade London from sending, in 1816, a second embassy to the court. Led by William Pitt, Lord Amherst, the second mission similarly ended in unmitigated disaster. Unrested from his voyage, Lord Amherst, on 29 August 1816, invoked an indisposition and abandoned the Old Summer Palace immediately prior to the audience conceded by the emperor. In point of fact, the abandonment resulted from Lord Amherst's refusal to kowtow to the emperor and thus acknowledge British subordination to the Heavenly dynasty<sup>36</sup>. The dissimilar manner in which each empire saw its place in the broader world and the proper manner of conducting state-to-state relations made for an unbridgeable chasm between the two powers.

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34 On the Macartney Mission, see, Mark Simner. *The Lion and the Dragon: Britain's Opium Wars with China, 1839-186*. Stroud: Fonthill, 2019, pp. 30-33 and Immanuel C. Y. Hsü. *The Rise of Modern China* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 155-163.

35 The emperor's letter, in its entirety, may be consulted at: <https://china.usc.edu/emperor-qianlong-letter-george-iii-1793>.

36 Gao Hao insightfully argues that the mission, during its four-month return trip to Canton from Beijing, would have a tremendous impact on British perceptions of China, which, in turn, shaped public and elite opinion of the Opium Wars. See, Gao Hao, "The Amherst Embassy and British Discoveries in China", *History*, Vol. 99, No. 337, October 2014, pp. 568-587.

China's reluctance to engage more fully with foreign powers was further compounded by the imperial court's concerns over the deluge of opium entering Zhōngguó<sup>37</sup>. By the end of the XVIII century, defying Chinese law, the East India Company was introducing copious amounts of opium into China<sup>38</sup>. Aiming to stem the massive inflow of the drug, the Yongzheng Emperor, in 1729, declared a comprehensive ban on the sale and smoking of the drug. The ban was reiterated in 1796 and, three years later, in 1799, the Jiaqing Emperor reissued the 1796 prohibition in stricter terms, outlawing the importation and cultivation of opium. Inexpensive and widely available in India, the amount of opium exported to China tripled in the 1820s, and its smuggling became a source of tremendous revenue for the East India Company and, as a corollary, a considerable drain on the emperor's treasury<sup>39</sup>.

British traders began to clamor for an easing of restrictions imposed by the "Canton system", demands that became more insistent following the August 1833 Act of Parliament abolishing the East India Company's monopoly on trade with China. Pressed by increasingly assertive British commercial interests, the Daoguang Emperor, having succeeded his father in 1820, refused to lift the ban and, in 1838, dispatched Lin Zexu to Canton with express orders to eliminate all contraband activities. Arriving at Canton in March 1839, Lin arrested the Chinese smugglers working with the foreigners, confiscated stocks and blockaded the port until foreign ships surrendered their opium cargos<sup>40</sup>. The serving British trade commissioner in Canton, Charles Elliot, advised foreigners to leave the city and attempted to organize a blockade. Aiming to broker a compromise, Lin offered to substitute opium for tea at fixed prices, but the offer was refused. Chinese troops were then ordered into the Western enclave to confiscate and destroy the vast, valuable opium stocks. Under the supervision of Lin Zexu, "20,281 chests, valued at between two and three millions, was destroyed with extra-ordinary precautions between 3rd May and 23rd May"<sup>41</sup>.

Later, in early September 1839, British and Chinese vessels clashed in the Kowloon Estuary and, in June 1840, the Royal Navy seized Canton and, as a result, the British proceeded to enter the Chinese interior through the Pearl River system. Unequivocal British military superiority, particularly naval power projected through the deployment of steam

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37 See, Chris Feige and Jeffrey A. Miron. "The opium wars, opium legalization and opium consumption in China", *Applied Economics Letters*, Vol. 15, No. 12, 2008, pp. 911-913, available at: <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11379703/miron-opium-wars.pdf?sequence=3>.

38 See, John F. Richard, "The opium industry in British India", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2/3, 2002, pp 149-180. On the rise of the East India Company, see, William Dalrymple. *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*. London. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

39 See, Sarah Deming, "The Economic Importance of Indian Opium and Trade with China on Britain's Economy, 1843-1890", Whitman College, Economics Working Papers No. 25, Spring 2011, available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.684.9923&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

40 See, Warren I. Cohen. *East Asia at The Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement With the World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 249-252.

41 See, Joshua Rowntree. *The Imperial Drug Trade*. London: Methuen and Co., 1905, p. 54.

ships and the novel ironclad *Nemesis*, permitted the bombardment of Chinese coastal cities. Shanghai was occupied the following year and, when British forces landed on Tianjin, the Daoguang Emperor was left with no alternative but to concede defeat. The First Opium war ended on 29 August 1842, with the signing the Treaty of Nanking, the first “unequal treaty”, and, one year later, the supplementary Bogue Treaty<sup>42</sup>. In addition to financial reparations, the treaties forced China to cede Hong Kong and a number of smaller islands to the British “in perpetuity”. While Canton and four other ports – Shanghai, Ningpo, Foochow and Amoy – were opened to foreign merchants, those British traders that had previously abandoned Canton were awarded compensation for losses incurred. One year later, the British pressed their advantage and obtained most favored nation status and extraterritoriality provisions in all of Zhōngguó. Buoyed by British success, the French, in 1843 and 1844, imposed treaties outlining concessions virtually identical to those extended previously to the British. Similar concessions granted to the United States were codified by the July 1844 Treaty of Wanghsia, which would remain in force until 1943.

Military defeat at the hands of Western powers accentuated internal instability, including the onset of the Taiping Rebellion<sup>43</sup>. Claiming to be Jesus Christ’s younger brother, Hong Xiuquan declared, on 11 January 1851, the establishment of Taiping Tianguo, the “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace”. Mobilizing followers with a messianic message of salvation and Christian unity, Hong’s explicit goal was to drive the foreign Manchus from power and unify China with fellow Christian nations in a universal Christian state<sup>44</sup>. The religious/ideological dimension of the movement was fused with concrete social demands over land and taxation underpinning peasant discontentment. After spreading to much of southern China, the Rebellion was finally quashed in 1864, when the emperor’s forces captured Nanjing, the rebel capital. Over 20 million people lost their lives in what arguably was the bloodiest civil war in world history<sup>45</sup>. Although Taiping Tianguo was suppressed, the rebellion was to have an enduring influence on Mao Zedong and the Chinese communist movement.

As the Qing began to mobilize resources to quash the Taiping rebels, Western powers seized the opportunity to extract yet more concessions. The French had been particularly incensed by events beginning in late February 1856, when French missionary Auguste Chapdelaine was arrested, tried and beheaded for preaching Christianity, an incident

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42 For a discussion, see, Dong Wang, “The Discourse of Unequal Treaties in Modern China”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 3, Fall, 2003, pp. 399-425.

43 On the Taiping Rebellion, see, Jonathan D. Spence. *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*. New York: Norton & Norton, 1996 and Stephen Platt. *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War*. London: Atlantic Books, 2013.

44 On the religious/ideological dimension of the Taiping movement, see, Rudolf G. Wagner. *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1982.

45 Nanjing was taken by the Taiping on 19 March 1853 and recaptured by the Imperial Army on 19 July 1864. Estimates suggest that, during the fighting for control of the city, 150, 000 rebels were killed.

leading Paris to side with the British in calling for the legalization of the opium trade and other long-sought concessions<sup>46</sup>. In this climate of incessant tensions, on 8 October 1856, Chinese imperial authorities boarded the *Arrow*, a British flagged Hong Kong vessel, and detained most of the crew<sup>47</sup>. Hong Kong-flagged vessels allowed Chinese merchants to trade in surrounding ports on the same terms as Merchant Navy ships, a privilege not extended to Chinese-flagged vessels. The imperial authorities claimed that the *Arrow's* British registration had expired and, as a consequence, the ship was a *de facto* Chinese vessel and thus subject to imperial jurisdiction<sup>48</sup>.

Such legal arguments were largely moot because the British Consul in Canton, Harry Parkes, claimed the Union Jack had been insulted by the imperial authorities during the detention of the *Arrow's* crew. Called upon to apologize for his alleged affront to the British flag, Canton governor-general, Ye Mingchen, refused. Consequently, Hong Kong's Governor and Superintendent of Trade, John Bowring, implored the British naval authorities to take retaliatory action. The Navy duly obliged by bombarding the Commissioner's compound. In a fit of imprudence and mandarin arrogance, Ye escalated the crisis by publicly proclaiming "to all the military and people, households and others, that you should unite with all the means at your command to assist the soldiers and militia in exterminating these troublesome English villains, killing them whenever you meet them, whether on shore or in their ships"<sup>49</sup>.

Accused of warmongering and subject to tremendous opposition in the House of Commons from William Gladstone and the Whigs, Prime Minister Palmerston approved a military response. Ensuing clashes led to the capture of Pearl River forts guarding the entrance to Canton and, subsequently, to the seizure of Canton itself by British and French forces. The end result of these multiple clashes was the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin, on 26 June 1858, foreseeing the payment of reparations for the recent war, allowing foreign ambassadors to take up residence in Beijing, opening ten additional ports to European commerce and settlement, permitting foreigners to travel to China's inner regions, assuring freedom of movement for Christian missionaries and, finally, legalizing the opium trade<sup>50</sup>. Although the concessions were significant, partially explaining why the Qing court did not rectify the treaty, the British insisted on the presence of military forces in Beijing, a demand rejected by the Chinese and a *casus belli* for the resumption of war.

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46 See, Harry G. Gelber. *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 173-174.

47 See, Y. J. Wong. *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

48 Gelber describes Ye Mingchen as a "fat, intelligent, sourpuss of a man with a taste for astrology and a reputation for cruelty, he was especially hard on rebels and their families, whom he seems to have executed as soon as he could lay hands on them. At times he probably had up to 200 heads a day lopped off". Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals*, p. 173. On this episode, see, Robert Bickers. *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914*. London: Allen Lane, 2011, pp. 138-144 and Paul U. Unschuld. *The Fall and Rise of China: Healing the Trauma of History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2013, p. 55.

49 See, Mark Simner. *The Lion and the Dragon*, p. 153.

50 See, Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 148.

A 20,000 strong Anglo-French force landed in northern China in the summer of 1860, and upon defeating the emperor's troops proceeded to Beijing. Seeking retribution for the torture and murder of thirteen British and seven French nationals by order of the Xianfeng Emperor, the Europeans destroyed Beijing's Gardens of Perfect Brightness, the Old Summer Palace (Yuanming Yuan)<sup>51</sup>. Completed in 1750 and serving as the main residence of the imperial court, the Gardens of Perfect Brightness symbolized Qing power and expressed the grandeur of China's civilization and universalist aspirations. In fact, the destruction of the Old Summer Palace evinced incontrovertible Western military supremacy and, as a corollary, demonstrated that China was no longer the center of "all under heaven". It was also an omen suggesting the Qing's "mantle from heaven" had been revoked in the littered ruins of the Yuanming Yuan. Today, more than a century later, the ruins of hundreds of buildings looted and burned by the Anglo-French force are preserved as a reminder of past foreign aggression and belittlement.

By signing the October 1860 Beijing Convention, China effectively agreed to ratify the Treaty of Tianjin, celebrated two years previously<sup>52</sup>. Under the terms of the Beijing Convention, a large portion of Kowloon Peninsula was to be ceded to the British, while the French, assuming a self-ascribed role as defenders of the Christian faith, obtained the return of religious and charitable property previously confiscated by the Chinese authorities<sup>53</sup>. As for Russia, the Qing relinquished the Ussuri krai and part of Outer Manchuria. Having successfully extracted new territories from the Chinese through the Beijing Convention, Moscow proceeded to further weaken the Qing by lending assistance to Xianjing's Moslem rebellions, subdued only in 1878 through violent, unrelenting suppression. Concomitantly, in the empire's southern flank, the French moved into Indochina and, in 1883, assumed control of the tributary state of Vietnam. The Qing replied by sending troops into northern Vietnam as French naval forces landed in Taiwan and the Fujian coast, destroying a significant part of the emperor's naval fleet. Only when the French attempted to penetrate into Guangxi province, in 1885, were they repelled and forced to retreat to Hanoi. As disaster was compounded by ever-greater disaster, Chinese imperial elites became profoundly distressed by events transpiring in Japan.

## Imperial Rising Sun

Under orders from President Millard Fillmore, Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan to "open" the country's ports to trade and thereby end Japan's two centuries of isolation<sup>54</sup>. On 31 March 1854, Perry signed the Convention of Kanagawa, opening

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51 See, Paul U. Unschuld, *The Fall and Rise of China*, p. 58.

52 The October 1860 Beijing Convention comprises the three treaties signed between the Qing and the British, French and Russian governments.

53 Warren J. Cohen, describing this *mission religieuse*, describes the French as "perceiving themselves to be the military arm of the Vatican". See, Warren Cohen, *East Asia at the Center*, p. 266.

54 See, Peter Booth Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

a number of Japanese ports to American vessels and establishing a consulate in Shimoda. In turn, Perry's "opening" of the country set the stage for the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Under the Meiji regime, accelerated industrialization was accompanied by military modernization, pursued in the wake of the abolishment of the samurai, defeated during the 1877 rebellion by the new, Imperial Army<sup>55</sup>. Fully aware of its comparative weakness and vulnerability, the Meiji state was determined to modernize so as to redefine its relationship with the West; that is to say, Japan sought to confront European powers on an equal plane, as a powerful nation in its own right. As a result of adopting conscription as well as Western tactics, training and weaponry, the newly-created Imperial Japanese Army (and the Imperial Japanese Navy, modeled on its British counterpart), secured unprecedented military successes during the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894/5 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/05. Meiji Japan had seized the opportunity to achieve national expansion and joined the imperialist powers at the expense of its weak, traditionalist neighbors. The measure of Japan's success became obvious to all: in 1902, the land of the rising sun entered into alliance with the premier European power, the empire where the sun never set.

Following the outbreak of the 1894 Donghak Rebellion, China and Japan both sent troops to Korea to bolster the fortunes of besieged king Gojong<sup>56</sup>. However, Japan's superior expeditionary force allowed Tokyo to appoint a reliable pro-Japanese regent. The Chinese did attempt to reinforce their troop contingent, but, confronted with a modern military behemoth, the effort came to naught. Exhausted by the fighting, in October, Japanese troops made a daring strategic gambit by crossing the Yalu River into Chinese territory. After a number of disastrous military encounters, the humbled Qing accepted the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, announced publicly in April 1895. Under the terms of this treaty, China was obliged to pay massive indemnities and to concede four additional treaty ports, including Chongqing, to the Japanese. Additionally, the Qing renounced suzerainty over Korea and recognized the country's "full and complete independence", effectively making Korea a Meiji protectorate. An entire province, Taiwan, was ceded "in perpetuity" to Tokyo, as were the Pescadores and the Liaodong Peninsula of southern Manchuria (subsequently nullified under Western pressure)<sup>57</sup> .

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55 Originally published in 1940, Herbert Norman's book on the Meiji continues to be an excellent source of information and clarity. Herbert Norman. *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State: Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Period*. (60th Anniversary Edition), Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.

56 See, Larisa Zabrovskaja, "Qing China's Misguided Foreign Policy and the Struggle to Dominate Korea (According to Russian Archive)", *Korean Studies*, Vol. 44, 2020, pp. 80-96.

57 In April 1895, following China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki enshrined the cession Formosa and the Pescadores (Penghu) islands to Japan. However, local notables declared the unilateral establishment of the Republic of Formosa, with the Qing governor-general, Tang Jingsong, becoming its first – and only – president. However, the nascent republic was brittle, commanded little popular support within and outside of Formosa. Neither did it obtain diplomatic support from Beijing, at that moment attempting to convince the Japanese to relinquish the Liaotung Peninsula, similarly ceded to the Japanese under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Japanese forces landed on the northern coast of the Island, in the proximity of Keelung, in late May 1895. Chinese forces and Hakka militias resisted during five months of guerrilla warfare, but, on 21 October, the fall of Tainan to the invaders effectively sealed the outcome of the conflict.

For Beijing, the humiliation provoked by the treaty's terms outstripped that of the Opium Wars. After all, China had gone down to defeat against an inferior *wojen* – “dwarf people”, the derogatory Chinese term used to refer to the Japanese<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, and just as unfathomable, the unequivocal military defeat inflicted on the Middle Kingdom occurred after two decades of “self-strengthening” reforms initiated by the Qing in the aftermath of the Opium War<sup>59</sup>. In the wake of the First Sino-Japanese War, it was obviously impossible for the Chinese Heavenly Court to continue to regard itself as the center of the world. Not unexpectedly, Japan's success emboldened other rapacious imperialist states. France established a base on Hainan Island and, in 1900, the United States announced its “Open Door” policy. Surveying these multiple defeats, the Chinese reform movement of 1898 concluded that Western technology and knowledge had to be embraced if further humiliation at the hands of the great powers was to be avoided.

Regional geopolitical rivalries intensified and, in February 1904, conflict broke out between Russia and Japan to determine which of the two powers would control Korea and Manchuria. Under the command of Admiral Zinovy Rozhdestvensky, the Russian fleet sailed 18,000 nautical miles to the Far East, only to be met, on 27/28 May 1905, by a smaller Japanese force in the Tsushima Strait. At the end of the two-day battle, Japanese Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō prevailed. The dazzling victory sparked world-wide awe and admiration because, since the Middle Ages, no Asian power had vanquished a European state<sup>60</sup>. As a consequence, the myth of Western invincibility was shattered. Unsurprisingly, the wars transformed the Japanese Empire into the region's leading power, an inspiration for the stirring, nascent Asian anti-colonial movements, for whom it was “the Battle of Tsushima that seems to have struck the opening chords of the recession of the west”<sup>61</sup>.

The wars waged by Japan, in turn, testified to China's impotence and its progressively precarious security environment. In marked contrast to Japan's rapid march to modernity initiated by the Meiji, the First Sino-Japanese War denounced the Middle Kingdom's blatant failure to adapt to modernity<sup>62</sup>. China's humiliating loss to Japan, a former tributary state (whose culture was deemed “inferior” for it was “derived” from Chinese culture), was nothing less than a cataclysm bound to unleash widespread

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58 See, Chalmers Johnson, “How China and Japan See Each Other”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 4, July 1972, pp. 711-721.

59 See, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 216-222.

60 Orlando Figes, in his monumental telling of the Russian Revolution, writes “... the Tsar and his advisors took victory for granted. Kuropatkin claimed he would need only two Russian soldiers for every three Japanese, so superior were they to the Asians. Government posters portrayed the Japanese as puny little monkeys, slit-eyed and yellow-skinned, running in panic from the white fist of a robust Russia soldier”. See, Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution*. New York: Viking, 1996, p. 168.

61 See, Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*. New York: Picador, 2012, p. 6.

62 See, Wei-Bin Zhang, *Japan versus China in the Industrial Race*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

self-doubt and recrimination. As a matter of fact, and irrespective of the European powers' "unequal treaties", it was China's submission to Japan that ultimately jarred the elites from their lengthy complacency.

On the eve of World War I, the political and commercial penetration of China was evinced by the existence of forty-eight treaty ports in foreign hands. Most were in the possession of France and Great Britain, but Germany, Japan and the United States had also wrangled concessions. Even European minor powers such as Belgium and Italy, with no enduring ties to China, carved out a presence at Tientsin (Tianjin) and Beihai. These enclaves allowed foreign nationals to live and trade under rules of extraterritoriality; that is, subject only to their respective consuls and thus immune to Chinese sovereignty. For good measure, the Chinese were kept at bay by gunships that, on occasion, bombarded the cities. These infamous "unequal treaties" did not mean that benefits did not trickle down to select Chinese nationals. Local merchants prospered and some Chinese cities, most notably Shanghai, were modernized as a result of exposure to foreign ideas and capital. Indeed, both the CCP and GMD would later be at pains to condemn many of these Chinese business interests, charging them with collaborating in the subjugation of the Chinese people.

Republican China joined the allied war effort, sending 100,000 laborers to the Western front. Quite naturally, as a member of the winning war coalition, China expected that the peace settlement would address its concerns and interests. At the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, Chinese interests were effectively ignored as London ensured that the former German concessions in the country were transferred to Japan, a British ally that, from Beijing's perspective, had not contributed sufficiently to the allied war effort<sup>63</sup>. Reaction in China, particularly from intellectuals, was immediate as demonstrators unleashed their ire on the Japanese and voiced their acute sense of betrayal at the hands of the Western democracies. Woodrow Wilson, whose Fourteen Points were widely praised prior to Versailles, was seen as having hypocritically abandoned his promises of self-determination. Thus was born the May Fourth Movement, a part of the broader New Culture Movement, marked by student demonstrations against Yuan Shikai's government. Students and urban elites turned to innovative ideas breaking with tradition and custom in such areas as science, technology, politics and lifestyles<sup>64</sup>. Politically, as evinced by Mao's own, personal political evolution, the May Fourth Movement popularized anarchism and Marxism, viewed as formidable instruments for transcending Chinese backwardness.

The post-World War I years witnessed an intensification of America's presence in Asia<sup>65</sup>. In the 1920s and 1930s, the United States was actively engaged in enhancing trade and investment ties in the Far East. To guarantee equal access to substantial commercial

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63 See, Margaret MacMillan. *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*. New York: Random House, 2002, pp. 322-344.

64 For an interesting discussion, see, Rana Mitter. *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

65 See, John Pomfret. *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*. New York: Henry Holt, 2016, pp. 150-203.

opportunities in China, the “Open Door” principle was reaffirmed. However, American policy was effectively challenged on 18 September 1931, when an explosion near the Chinese city of Mukden (Shenyang) destroyed a section of the Japanese-owned rail track, precipitating events that would ultimately terminate with Japan’s stunning conquest of Manchuria, the northeast region of China ruled by the warlord Zhang Xueliang<sup>66</sup>. Chinese nationalists were blamed for the destruction and the “incident” was invoked to justify Japan’s retaliatory invasion of Manchuria. Within a few short months of the “incident”, the Japanese Army overran the entire region, encountering virtually nothing more than token resistance from an untrained, ineffective Chinese military. On 1 March 1932, Japanese occupation forces established the nominally independent state of Manchukuo, under *de facto* control of the local Japanese Army, and enthroned Xuantong (Pu Yi), the Qing emperor deposed by the republic twenty years before. Seeking to meet the needs of the imperial economy, massive Japanese investment, particularly in infrastructure and resource development, flowed into Manchukuo<sup>67</sup>.

Japan’s Manchuria offensive was, at least in part, motivated by the concern that the province, under the rule of the warlord Zhang, was exceedingly vulnerable to invasion by Bolshevik Russia. Indeed, Moscow’s tutelage over Outer Mongolia had been recently reinforced with the 26 November 1924 creation of the Mongolian People’s Republic, ruled by the communist Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party. To preempt further Soviet expansion, and to prevent the CCP from assuming power in China proper, the Japanese opted for military action<sup>68</sup>. Although the invasion of Manchuria was obviously self-serving, Tokyo’s suspicions regarding Soviet intentions were certainly not fantastical. Moscow, during the preceding decade, had taken firm steps to reassert control over Central Asia by suppressing multiple nationalist rebellions. Having reasserted its power in Central Asia, Moscow then promoted communist expansion in the Far East through the Comintern’s opening of a “second front” in the colonial world. Failing to spark revolution in Europe, Lenin famously exhorted his Bolshevik followers to “turn our faces towards Asia” in the expectation that “the East will help us conquer the West”<sup>69</sup>. To this end, in China, Soviet aid was channeled to both the Guomindang and the Chinese communists.

After waging two devastating wars destined to preempt Russian expansionism in Korea and Manchuria, Japan’s geopolitical aims and rapacious behavior consubstantiated, from the Kremlin’s perspective, a vital security concern. Soviet authorities were firmly convinced that, having colonized Korea, Tokyo harbored secret designs on Mongolian and Chinese territory. These suspicions were reinforced by the fact that, during

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66 See, S. C. M. Paine. *The Wars for Asia, 1911-1959*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 13-14.

67 After World War I, Japan made massive investments in China’s rail system. For example, between 1912 and 1920, 1,500 km of rail was added to existing infrastructure. About one-third of this total was constructed in Manchuria and financed primarily by Japanese capital. S.C.M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911-1959*, pp. 14-34 and Wei-Bin Zhang, *Japan versus China in the Industrial Race*, p. 96.

68 See, S.C.M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911-1959*, pp. 22-25 and Peter Hopkirk. *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin’s Dream of an Empire in Asia*. New York: Kodansha International, 1984, pp. 37-51.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the Russian civil war, the Japanese had sent thousands of troops into Siberia (indeed, Japan contributed the largest contingent of foreign fighters) to support the Whites. For the Russian Bolsheviks, Japan was a pivotal country for another reason. Marxist theory suggested that Japan possessed tremendous, latent revolutionary potential because Meiji modernization and the capitalist transition that had rapidly swept the land of the rising sun spawned a large industrial working class not unlike the European proletariat. Japan's revolutionary potential therefore contrasted markedly with the rest of the countries in the region, where mere anti-imperialist, nationalist revolutions were the best outcome anticipated by Marxist theory. At any rate, under these geopolitical conditions, the invasion of Manchuria was construed as a dress rehearsal for Japan's full-fledged 1937 strike on China<sup>70</sup>. That strike came in 1937, a full two years before Adolf Hitler's divisions would blitzkrieg into Poland, and allowed China to emerge as one of the victorious states of the post-1945 peace.

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70 See, Rana Mitter. *China's War with Japan, 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival*. London: Allen Lane, 2013.

## PART II

# Unfurling the Red Banner

“The point, as Marx saw it, is that dreams never come true”

Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*

### In The Shadow of the Comintern

Mao Zedong’s Chinese Communist Party seized power in a country impoverished and brutalized by decades of civil war, foreign occupation and territorial dismemberment. The PRC’s devastation and dire need of assistance led Mao to immediately procure an alliance with Joseph Stalin. Yet, relations between these two communist titans had never been entirely free of acrimony and mutual suspicion<sup>71</sup>. Since the CCP’s 1921 founding, “fraternal relations” between Chinese and Soviet “sister parties” had been systematically marred by Moscow’s boorishness, ongoing interference in CCP internal matters and, beginning in the summer of 1923, consistent Soviet backing for the Guomindang. However, the robust post-1945 United States military presence in Asia tempered both Mao and Stalin and, as a consequence of new geopolitical realities, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was sealed on 14 February 1950<sup>72</sup>. The importance of the treaty is evinced by the fact that Mao traveled to Moscow for the final negotiations and signing ceremony, the first of only two times he was to leave Chinese soil. Although it would prove reasonably short-lived, the alliance heralded a profound alteration of the regional balance of power and the underlying dynamics of the nascent Cold War.

The remote origins of the Chinese Communist Party date to the waning days of Qing rule and the dawning of the republic<sup>73</sup>. An uprising of railway workers sparked a military mutiny in Wuchang on 10 October 1911, setting the stage for the Xinhai Revolution led by Wu Zhaolin’s New Army, a force under the influence of the Tongmenghui, founded in 1905 by Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing while both were living in Japan. Since the Qing had pressured Japan to expel the two revolutionaries, Sun Yat-sen found himself in Denver, Colorado when the uprising broke out. Immediately returning to

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71 See, Maurice Meisner. *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, pp. 114-117.

72 On the alliance spawned by the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, see, Austin Jersild. *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

73 On the origins of the Chinese Communist Party, see, *inter alia*, Robert C. North. *Moscow and Chinese Communists*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953; Jacques Guillermaz. *A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1949*. London: Methuen and Co., 1968 and Lee Feigon. *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983 and Ishikawa Yoshihiro. *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

his native country, Sun, on New Year's Day 1912, proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of China with Nanjing as its capital and himself as provisional president. However, lacking support from the national military, Sun offered to cede the office to Yuan Shikai, head of the powerful Beiyang army, in exchange for the general's defection to the nascent republic<sup>74</sup>.

At the end of January 1912, with southern China in the hands of the Nanjing government, dozens of Yuan's Beiyang commanders called upon the six-year-old Xuantong Emperor (Pu Yi), to establish a republic. Having lost the backing of the military, the emperor abdicated on 12 February, and, the following day, Sun Yat-sen fulfilled his promise to transfer the presidency to Yuan Shikai. With violent clashes occurring in Beijing, Yuan insisted on assuming the presidency in the imperial seat of government rather than in republican Nanjing, symbolically anointing himself as China's legitimate ruler, the successor to the last Qing emperor. In this manner, the Sun Yat-sen republican government was relegated to little more than a rump devoid of legitimacy. Monopolizing power and ruling autocratically, Yuan would later attempt to restore the empire with himself as emperor, a move earning him the enduring enmity of both nationalists and communists. In the process of consolidating his personal power, Yuan was forced to cede ample power to the country's warlords, allowing a number of these to establish *de facto* independent fiefdoms in various regions. Given the realities on the ground, it is not excessive to conclude that "(T)he republic that emerged in the dynasty's place was a myth; China was a mix of warring states and alien powers"<sup>75</sup>.

The October 1911 events in Wuchang, and the 1917 Russian Bolshevik seizure of power, persuaded Mao Zedong that, in the absence of broad class alliances, the Chinese proletariat, even if it were able to seize the government, was unlikely to maintain power in a largely rural, feudal country plagued by extensive territorial dismemberment. Under these conditions, Mao's heterodox emphasis on the historical role of the peasantry was unsurprising. Mao observed that "the scale of peasant uprisings and peasant wars in Chinese history has no parallel anywhere else. The class struggles of the peasants, the peasant uprisings and peasant wars constituted the real motive force of historical development in Chinese feudal society"<sup>76</sup>. Mao's observation rested on the fact that China had spawned numerous millenarian movements, starting with the 1796 White Lotus Rebellion, a minor tax revolt that rapidly encompassed all of central China and mutated into a decade-long challenge to the imperial order. Subsequently, devastating civil wars swept the country in the 1850s and 1860s, the bloodiest of which was the Taiping Rebellion, lasting from 1851 to 1864. Mao himself would highlight the centrality of the Taiping civil war, characterizing it as an unfinished "mass revolutionary movement primarily directed

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74 See, Patrick Fuliang Shan. Yuan Shikai, pp. 144-164.

75 See, Sulmaan Wasif Khan, Haunted by Chaos, p. 11.

76 See, Mao Tse-tung, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party", Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 2. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, p. 308.

against the foreign Manchu”<sup>77</sup>. Given the revolutionary impulse driving these peasant movements, Chinese communism, from its inception, diverged from the classical Marxist-Leninist model emerging from substantially disparate European realities molded by the twin processes of industrialization and urbanization.

Mao’s glorification of the peasantry as a revolutionary agent configured a palpable departure from orthodox Marxist thought<sup>78</sup>. In the 1852 *The Eighteenth Brumaire* of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx had been dismissive of the peasantry’s capacity for revolutionary action, famously describing the peasantry as “a sack of potatoes”<sup>79</sup>. Yet, China’s history of multiple peasant rebellions could not but leave a lasting imprint on the CCP’s understanding of the party’s tasks. Many of the concerns and demands underlying these peasant movements were embraced by the communists, including the call for land redistribution, the condemnation of moral corruption and, in particular, an ingrained anti-foreigner sentiment. Having absorbed the messianism so pervasive in these peasant movements, and fusing it with Marxist-Leninist historical materialism, the CCP would, quite naturally, seek to “purify” China through a revolutionary crucible that reached its most intense expression during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. As it sought to fashion a new society, the CCP would preserve the utopianism underlying this peasant millennialism, expressed as “ideological purity” and as a preference for the “action of the masses”<sup>80</sup>.

Mao’s heterodoxy, which would not become dominant in the CCP until the completion of the Yan’an Rectification Movement, may be partially explained by the late arrival of Marxist thought in China. Translated by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* appeared in print only in 1908<sup>81</sup>. Prior to the creation of the CCP,

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77 See, Mao Tse-tung, “On Protracted War”, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 2, p. 190. Mao characterizes the Taiping as a peasant revolutionary war waged against the feudal rule and national oppression of the Ching Dynasty. Mao Tse-tung, “Bankruptcy of Idealist Conception of History”, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 4. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961, p. 459.

78 On Mao’s “peasant communism”, see, *inter alia*, Mary C. Wright, “The Chinese Peasant and Communism”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 1951, pp. 256-265; Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962; Richard Baum, *Prelude to Revolution: Mao, the Party, and the Peasant Question*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975 and Asish Kumar Roy, “Lenin, Mao and the Concept of Peasant Communism”, *China Report*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1978, pp. 29-41.

79 See, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*”, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 479.

80 Regarding this matter, Chairman Mao stated that “However active the leading group may be, its activity will amount to fruitless effort by a handful of people unless combined with the activity of the masses”. See, Mao Tse-tung, “Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership”, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 3. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, pp. 118. In the same text (p. 119), Mao added that: “In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily ‘from the masses, to the masses.’ This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study rum them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action”.

81 See, Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 14 and Ishikawa Yoshihiro, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*, pp. 16-17.

Marxist theoretical debate was limited and largely superficial, restricted to small study groups throughout the country's main cities and conducted through publications such as *New Youth*, edited by Chen Duxiu, the future leader of the Chinese communists. And while the national bourgeoisie had established the republic under Sun Yat-sen's guidance, the ensuing chaos and Yuan Shikai's usurpation of power served to highlight the weakness and limited autonomous revolutionary potential of a miniscule industrial working class in a largely feudal and rural country. Post-1911 events similarly exposed the tremendous weakness of the national bourgeoisie, by itself incapable of bringing to fruition the "national democratic revolution" preceding the "socialist revolution" anticipated by Marxist ideologists. China, in short, was not Russia.

In many critical respects, the CCP's understanding of Marxism owed more to Chinese history, cultural tradition and recent experience such as the May Fourth Movement than to the rigors of Marxian dialectics and class analysis. In contradistinction, the pivotal impact of the Great October Revolution in the development of Chinese Marxism was highlighted by Mao in his 1949 "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship". Regarding the colossal impact of the Bolshevik seizure of power, Mao states: "(It) was through the Russians that the Chinese found Marxism. Before the October Revolution, the Chinese were not only ignorant of Lenin and Stalin, they did not even know of Marx and Engels. The salvoes of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism. The October Revolution helped progressives in China, as throughout the world, to adopt the proletarian world outlook as the instrument for studying a nation's destiny and considering anew their own problems"<sup>82</sup>. Quite unsurprisingly, China's embryonic communist movement was more than receptive to the guiding hand extended by the Communist International (Comintern).

As Russian communists fought for their survival against White Russian forces, the destiny of the Chinese national revolution intersected with the Bolshevik revolution. Vladimir Lenin became increasingly convinced that the fate of the October Revolution was intimately bound to anti-imperialist victories in the colonial world<sup>83</sup>. This strategic turn to the colonial world was decided in the aftermath of the squashing of workers' movements in Germany, Hungary and Turkey and the failure of the proletarian revolution to materialize in the industrialized nations of the West as predicted by Marx<sup>84</sup>. In this context, in 1920, Lenin instructed the Comintern, created the previous year under the auspices of the Russian Bolsheviks, to open a "second front" against imperialism in the colonial world<sup>85</sup>. In the Spring of 1920, with preparations underway for the September

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82 See, Mao Tse-tung, "On The People's Democratic Dictatorship", Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 4, p. 413.

83 For a discussion of Lenin's theoretical understanding of the new context, see, Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*, Part 1. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 46-102.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 247-260.

85 See, Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin*. London: Macmillan press, 1996, pp. 160-161.

1920 Baku Congress of the Toilers of the East, Comintern agents Grigory Voitinsky and Yang Mingzhai arrived in China to foment and supervise the creation of a local Bolshevik party<sup>86</sup>. Assured that the broad ideological and organizational precepts set out by the Comintern's Twenty-one Points were being respected, Voitinsky, the secretary of the Department for Eastern Affairs of the Communist International, entrusted the May Fourth activist and Peking University intellectual Chen Duxiu with defining the organizational contours of a Leninist "party of a new type"<sup>87</sup>. To that end, in May 1920, Duxiu established a provisional Central Committee tasked with preparing the creation of the new Communist Party.

On 1 July 1921, in a modest girls' school located in Shanghai's French Concession, twelve men, representing a grand total of fifty-seven communists, met to form the Chinese Communist Party<sup>88</sup>. Stalked by the police, the delegates soon abandoned the school and reconvened in various locations, terminating the founding Congress in a rented tourist boat on South Lake in Jiaying. Absent from the First Congress were Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, the party's dominant personalities in the years to follow<sup>89</sup>. The 28 year-old Mao Zedong was one of the delegates that selected (*in abstentia*) Chen Duxiu as General Secretary of the self-described "militant and disciplined party of the proletariat" organized to "call on the proletariat to take part in and to lead the bourgeois democratic movement"<sup>90</sup>. Refraining from prematurely calling for a "socialist revolution", the CCP sought to "lead the bourgeois democratic movement" until objective conditions ripened for revolutionary a seizure of power.

A semi-feudal society, China was to pass through a "national democratic revolution" before a "socialist revolution" could be contemplated. Despite conforming to Comintern

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86 See, Stephen White, "Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920". *Slavic Review*. Vol. 33, no. 3, September 1974, pp. 492-514.

87 See, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 320-325; Conrad Brandt. *Stalin's Failure in China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958, pp. 201-21 and Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party*, pp. 164-165.

88 See, Jacques Guillermaz, *A History of the Chinese Communist Party*, p. 58. Some incongruences exist as to the exact number of delegates present at the First Congress, as well as the number of communists they represented. Some sources suggest 12 delegates and 53 members, others suggest 13 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 323. Commenting the CCP's founding, Guillermaz writes "(T)he First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party is still shrouded in mists, which the official historians seem unwilling to dispense. The anniversary of 1 July is celebrated each year, but is never accompanied by any details to clarify this important event. This reticence is easily explained. At least six of the twelve who took part were to leave the Party, whereas a future apostate, Ch'en Tu-hsiu (Chen Duxiu), was selected Secretary-General. As for Mao Tse-tung, who was 28 at the time, the unobtrusive part he played was unworthy of the great destiny awaiting him; legend has nothing to gain by following history too closely" (Guillermaz, p. 57).

89 Chen Duxiu would be removed for the party's leadership during a special party conference, held on 7 August 1927, accused of opportunism and being responsible for the collapse of the United Front. See, Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party*, p. 191. Chen would subsequently come under the influence of Leon Trotsky. For Chen's defense of his actions, see his 1929 "Appeal to All the Comrades of the Chinese Communist Party", available at: <https://www.marxist.com/chen-du-xiu-appeal-comrades-ccp.htm>

90 Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists*, p. 58.

orientations, the revolutionary rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party could not mask its lack of strategic clarity. Indeed, the delegates were divided between building a conspiratorial party primarily dedicated to organizing factory workers or building a mass party openly participating in the republic's politics. And although the minority manifest its opposition to any alliance with Sun Yat-sen, the majority, goaded by the Comintern's delegate, proposed "non-Party collaboration" with the intent of fueling "further collaboration between the Communist Party and the Guomindang and for the development of the anti-militarist and anti-imperialist movement"<sup>91</sup>. The formulation was, in many respects, an astounding admission of the Chinese Communist Party's political impotence. Many of these issues bearing on the party's theory and *praxis* would be definitively resolved only with Mao's *de facto* ascension to the CCP leadership at the January 1935 Zunyi Conference<sup>92</sup>.

Remarkably, these ambiguities and contradictions would not prevent the CCP from, soon after, playing a significant role in Chinese politics since, at this juncture, fortune intervened in the form of Joseph Stalin. At this time, having arisen as Lenin's uncontested successor after defeating his party rivals, the Georgian tyrant could have chosen to throw his support behind either the CCP or the nationalist Guomindang, for both organizations courted Soviet favor. Instead, Stalin, ever the shrewd calculating pragmatist, dispatched Comintern delegate Maring (Dutch national Hent Sneevliet, also known as Ma Lin) to convince both parties to form a United Front alliance capable of consolidating the national democratic, anti-imperialist revolution that the Comintern saw unfolding in the country<sup>93</sup>. For Stalin, conditions were not yet ripe for a socialist revolution; therefore, the prevailing task of the CCP was to ally with the nationalist, bourgeois and anti-imperialist Guomindang so as to jointly carry the national democratic revolution to its fruition. Strapped for funds, numbering 200 members and deferring to the strategic orientation of his Comintern overlords, General Secretary Chen Duxiu abided by Maring's instruction and, on 22 August 1922, at a special CCP plenary session, the Comintern's strategy was ratified<sup>94</sup>.

Stalin's United Front strategy of cooperation between nationalists and communists aimed to overturn "foreign imperialism" and build a strong and unified Chinese state, both necessary preconditions for the realization of the national democratic revolution. Convinced that the time was not yet ripe for a socialist revolution in China, the Soviet autocrat revealed himself unreceptive to CCP requests for aid destined toward the creation of a formidable fighting force capable of displacing the Guomindang's military wing, arguing that the latter incorporated "capable people who still direct the army and lead it against imperialists"<sup>95</sup>. The denial of aid was not entirely unsurprising since, at this point, the Soviets were unambiguously backing the Nationalist military and its institutions,

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91 Ibid., p. 59.

92 Ibid., pp. 173-178.

93 See, Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 165-169.

94 See, Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party*, pp. 169-170.

95 See, Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 53.

including the Whampoa Military Academy, where Soviet nationals instructed the republican army's officer corps. Stalin's prudence also reflected his skepticism relative to the CCP's capacity to dispute power and his determination to instrumentalize the GMD as a more efficient vehicle for containing Japanese expansionism in China.

Under the terms of the First United Front, CCP members joining the Guomintang would be exempt from swearing personal allegiance to Sun Yat-sen, until then a precondition for membership in the organization. While Stalin's self-interest was fully served by the arrangement, the alliance posed significant problems for both Chinese political parties. The nationalists were suspicious of CCP intentions, while the communists, whose membership was in the hundreds, quite rightly feared being engulfed by their rivals. Still, the CCP argued that the alliance with the Guomintang, albeit tactical in nature, was imperative for it was destined to combat "warlords of the feudal type"<sup>96</sup>. Once the national democratic revolution had been accomplished, the alliance would become superfluous as the CCP led the working class to "the dictatorship of the proletariat allied to the poor peasants against the bourgeoisie"<sup>97</sup>. Needless to say, the Guomintang did not share this view as to how China's future should unfold.

Disbanding the Revolutionary Party in 1919, Sun Yat-sen immediately formed the National People's Party (Guomintang). Even though the party initially lacked both a mass following and a robust military apparatus, these limitations were partially compensated by the tremendous personal authority garnered by Sun Yat-sen during his years of political activism and exile. Imbued with Sun's authority and guided by the Comintern delegate Grigory Voitinsky, the GMD adopted a Leninist organizational structure, buttressed by a mandatory vow of personal allegiance to Sun Yat-sen. Unambiguously autocratic, the Guomintang's ideological cohesion rested upon Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of Nationalism, Democracy and Livelihood<sup>98</sup>. Taking a significant step to consolidate the party's influence, the Soviet leadership decided, in March 1923, to provide the Guomintang with financial aid, advisors and military training<sup>99</sup>. In so doing, the Kremlin constrained the CCP's autonomy, effectively binding it to the fortunes of the faction-ridden Guomintang emerging after the death of its founder and leader. With the death of Sun Yat-sen, in March 1925, the Guomintang's leadership passed to Chiang Kai-shek, a dauphin of Sun who had received military training in the USSR and commanded the Whampoa

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96 See, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 325.

97 Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists*, p. 63 and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 325.

98 First enunciated in 1905, Sun's lectures on the Three Principles of Nationalism, Democracy and Livelihood were delivered in 1924. Sun rejected ethno-nationalism, envisioning a Chinese nationalism congregating all ethnic groups to attain independence from imperialist domination. Sun's concept of democracy was roughly equivalent to Western constitutional. As for socialism, it suggested a preoccupation with social welfare and a more equitable society. However, it did not necessarily imply the nationalization of the commanding heights of the economy. For a discussion, see Audrey Wells, *The Political Thought of Sun Yat-sen: Development and Impact*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 61-101.

99 See, Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 80.

Military Academy<sup>100</sup>. Soon, it would become apparent that Chiang was far from being a communist sympathizer or even a fellow traveler. By 1928, facing down a challenge from the Guomindang's left-wing, Chiang's grip on the party leadership had been firmly consolidated and the generalissimo was free to turn his attention to the communists.

The United Front achieved its zenith in 1926/7, when the Communists joined with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army in the Northern Expedition to squash the warlords impeding the formation of a cohesive central government. Chiang's military success in the Northern Expedition permitted the creation, in April 1927, of a national republican government in Nanjing once the city was liberated from the warlord Sun Chuanfang<sup>101</sup>. One of the "capable" nationalist soldiers previously praised by Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek, in April 1927, rose up and unleashed the "White Terror" against his erstwhile communist allies. Many of the CCP's leading cadres were arrested; numerous others were summarily executed during the Shanghai massacre<sup>102</sup>. The extent of the devastation is captured in the following evaluation made by the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee on occasion of the party's 60th anniversary: "The total membership of the Party, which had grown to more than 60,000, fell to a little over 10,000"<sup>103</sup>. For years to come, the disaster suffered at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek would bedevil the CCP leadership. The "White Terror" also provoked two immediate consequences: Chen Duxiu was suspended as General Secretary on 12 July 1927 and the party's leadership entered a phase of conspiratorial in-fighting as it battled for survival in the Chinese countryside.

By 1936, as the drums of war loomed, the urgent need to quash warlord uprisings and the ongoing communist insurrection prevented Chiang Kai-shek's government from marshalling resources for the anti-Japanese struggle. Apprehensive over Chiang's focus on domestic threats rather than on active resistance to the Japanese, in December 1936, in a bizarre turn of events subsequently known as the "Xi'an Incident", a group of Nationalist generals led by Zhang Xueliang abducted Chiang and pressured him to reach

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100 An excellent, balanced biography of Chiang Kai-shek is, Jay Taylor. *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

101 On the "Nanjing decade", see, Rebecca Nedostup and Liang Hong-Ming, "Begging the Sages of the Party-State: Citizenship and Government in Transition in Nationalist China, 1927-1937", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 46, No. S9, December 2001, pp. 185-207, accessed at: [https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/024E4859AC3F2821AD50F106BBE47DF3/S0020859001000372a.pdf/begging\\_the\\_sages\\_of\\_the\\_partystate\\_citizenship\\_and\\_government\\_in\\_transition\\_in\\_nationalist\\_china\\_1927\\_1937.pdf](https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/024E4859AC3F2821AD50F106BBE47DF3/S0020859001000372a.pdf/begging_the_sages_of_the_partystate_citizenship_and_government_in_transition_in_nationalist_china_1927_1937.pdf).

102 On this period, Harold Isaacs' study, published in 1938, warrants attention, particularly Chapter 18 on the 1927 Shanghai massacre. See, Harold Isaacs. *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009 and Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo*, pp. 64-68.

103 Although the numbers are almost certainly inflated, they do provide an indication of the disaster befalling the CCP at that particular point in time. "On Questions of Party History – Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China (Adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981)", *Beijing Review*, No. 27, July 6, 1981, p. 10.

a settlement with the Red Army<sup>104</sup>. Humiliated, Chiang Kai-shek acquiesced to Zhang Xueliang's demands and, under these quite inauspicious circumstances, the Second United Front was, at least on paper, consummated.

Nationalist forces had occasionally skirmished with the Japanese Imperial Army during the Northern Campaign, but it was the 7 July 1937 Marco Polo Bridge Incident that ultimately triggered the Second Sino-Japanese War and the bitter fighting that followed, including the atrocities committed during the "rape of Nanjing"<sup>105</sup>. While the dire political situation stemming from Japan's aggression made it impossible to reject calls for "unity" between nationalists and communists, the memories of the failed First United Front and the subsequent "White Terror" proved insurmountable. Rather than concentrate on combating the Japanese, Chiang sought to contain the despised communists. Mao, in turn, continued to undermine the GMD so as to expand the CCP's influence in the countryside. Torn asunder by these stresses, the Second United Front remained little more than a formal partnership. Not unexpectedly, the 1945 defeat of the Japanese imperial project set the stage for another round of China's unending civil war.

During the first week of February 1945, months before the Pacific war came to a conclusion, in the Crimean resort of Yalta, China's post-war destiny was decided by the "Big Three"<sup>106</sup>. At Yalta, Stalin, empowered by the "realities on the ground" in Eastern Europe and thus no longer bargaining from a position of weakness, pressed his claims in the Far East, claims which could not simply be dismissed by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt. The agreements reached at Yalta were partially determined by Washington's necessity to bring Stalin's divisions into the Pacific war. Anticipating a protracted and costly invasion of the Japanese Home Islands, the US sought to guarantee the deployment of Stalin's armies in the opening of a second front against the Japanese in mainland China and Korea. The Soviet autocrat, however, extracted a steep price for agreeing to enter the Pacific war. In exchange for Stalin's pledge to initiate hostilities against Tokyo three months after fighting terminated in Europe, the British prime-minister and the American president acquiesced to restituting the *status quo ante* in the Far East. Accordingly, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to restore Soviet "rights" violated by Japan in 1904, including the devolution of southern Sakhalin Island and the Kurile islands. In other words, territories lost during the Russo-Japanese War were to be returned to Moscow. Moreover, Port Arthur and Dairen, as well as the Chinese Eastern and the South Manchurian Railways, were all to be transferred to Soviet control. Under the terms of the

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104 Zhang Xueliang, the instigator of this plot, died in 2001, after spending over half a century under house arrest, first in the mainland and then in Taiwan. On the Xi'an Incident and preceding events, see, Aron Shai. Zhang Xueliang: The General Who Never Fought. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 31-67 and Jay Taylor. The Generalissimo, pp. 124-137.

105 On the Japanese destruction of the city and its population, see, Iris Chang. The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

106 The best treatment of the Yalta Conference is S. M. Plokhy. Yalta: The Price of Peace. New York: Viking Press, 2010. The fate of China had begun to be drawn at the Cairo Conference, but was definitively decided at Yalta.

proposed alliance treaty, Moscow's satellite, the independent Mongolian People's Republic (Outer Mongolia, a part of China until 1912) was to remain under Soviet tutelage, an effective buffer state alleviating Soviet security concerns in Central Asia.

Promising recognition of the Guomindang government and the cessation of aid to the CCP, Stalin obtained Chiang Kai-shek's agreement to sign a Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. Satisfied with his impressive gains on the diplomatic front, the Georgian dictator then turned his attention to persuading Mao to reach a broad understanding with the Guomindang leadership. Skeptical of the capacity of Mao's Red Army to inflict a military defeat on the Guomindang, and unprepared to provoke Washington's ire, Stalin maintained a prudent distance in relation to the CCP. However, Yalta's Far East settlement virtually came undone when the United States announced that it would assume exclusive responsibility for the occupation of Japan. Unceremoniously excluded from the occupation of the Japan, Stalin responded by supplying the Chinese communists with weapons just as the United States intensified aid to Chiang Kai-shek. Notwithstanding these opportunistic adjustments to his Far East strategy, Stalin, on the eve of Mao's civil war triumph, still advocated the formation of a CCP-GMD coalition government and counseled the removal of the Red Army from the Yangtze River.

As in Europe, Stalin's commitment to socialist revolution and proletarian internationalism was balanced against (and invariably subordinated to) the Soviet Union's security and national interest. Revolution was, for Stalin, "a means to power rather than a goal in itself" and, after all, post-1945 soviet foreign policy was driven by the imperative to demarcate spheres of influence and the avoidance of instability that could undermine Moscow's strategic interests<sup>107</sup>. For all intents and purposes, the fragile pre-war Bolshevik state metamorphosed into an assertive post-war Soviet great power. Stalin's strategic insecurity, largely stemming from his fear of capitalist encirclement, would henceforth frame relations with Mao, whom the Georgian expected to make sacrifices for the sake of advancing Soviet "socialist construction". Stalin's rather undisguisable utilitarian view of the "fraternal" communist parties, amply demonstrated by the Comintern's shifting strategic orientations in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as by the tragic fate of foreign communists whose opinions did not coincide with Stalin's own, once again came to the forefront in his dealings with the CCP.

These multiple slights and simmering tensions did not immediately surface because Mao's dedication to Marxist-Leninism was predicated on the conviction that the revolutionary transformation of state and society would restore China to the rightful place in the world denied to it by the imperialist powers. Restoring China's rightful standing would, in turn, require the new PRC government to undo the legacy of the "century of humiliation"; that is to say, to recast relations with the Western powers. To meet the revolution's domestic aims, anti-imperialism was an unavoidable foreign policy orientation. In short, the CCP's foreign and domestic policies were indivisible and mutually reinforcing.

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107 See, Chen Jian. *Mao's China and the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001, p. 4.

Indeed, it is striking to note the extent to which the CCP's nationalism, primarily defined by the rejection of the legacy of the "century of humiliation", dovetailed perfectly with the anti-imperialist lexicon of the Comintern's Marxist-Leninist parties. The inter-party solidarity inherent to membership in the international communist movement provided Mao with allies prepared to defend the Chinese revolution and insert the country into a non-capitalist international system hostile to Western rules of state behavior. To attain these ends, Mao, irrespective of the personal bitterness provoked by Russian chauvinism and Stalin's "bad manners", was dependent on Stalin's peculiar understanding of proletarian internationalism<sup>108</sup>.

Looking back on the Cold War, there is a natural tendency to underscore the Sino-Soviet schism and China's subsequent, seemingly inexorable pursuit of independence from Moscow as preordained. Yet, such an outcome was not inevitable. A 1950's Chinese slogan, affirming the "USSR of today is the China of tomorrow", captured the essence of Chinese expectations and ambitions during the immediate post-1949 period. Irrespective of past differences straining relations between the two parties, Mao saw the Soviets as the "big brothers" of socialist construction and the USSR as the beacon illuminating China's own modernization trajectory. As crucially, Moscow was a source of indispensable capital and technical aid for China's reconstruction and industrialization. The CPP remained genuinely convinced that it had much to learn from their more experienced Soviet comrades, and that Moscow's assistance was essential for building Chinese socialism and restoring the country's status as a great world power. To that end, in February 1950, the two communist states celebrated a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance providing China with, *inter alia*, long-term credits and the Soviets with use of port and railroad infrastructures in Manchuria<sup>109</sup>. Mao, of course, was delighted with an alliance withdrawing the PRC from the capitalist world-system and propelling the country's integration into the Soviet-led "socialist camp".

Mao's proclamation of the People's Republic of China occurred against a backdrop of intensifying Cold War tensions accentuated by events transpiring in Eastern Europe and Greece. In response to these events, on 12 March 1947, Harry Truman, speaking to a joint session of Congress, outlined a "containment doctrine" affirming that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted

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108 In a 4 January 1923 addendum to his political testament, Vladimir Lenin claimed that "Stalin is too crude, and this defect which is entirely acceptable in our milieu and in relationships among us as communists, become unacceptable in the position of General Secretary. I therefore propose to comrades that they should devise a means of removing him from this job and should appoint to this job someone else who is distinguished from comrade Stalin in all other respects only by the single superior aspect that he should be more tolerant, more polite and more attentive towards comrades, less capricious, etc." See, Robert Service. *Lenin: A Biography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 469.

109 In Moscow, on December 16, 1949, Stalin and Mao discussed Soviet assistance and the terms of the new treaty. The transcript of that conversation, obtained from the Archive of the President, Russian Federation, may be consulted at: "Conversation Between the Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin and China's Mao Zedong, 1949", accessed at: <https://china.usc.edu/conversation-between-soviet-unions-joseph-stalin-and-chinas-mao-zedong-1949>.

subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure”<sup>110</sup>. Mirroring Truman’s universalism, Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) ideologist Andrei Zhdanov, during the 22 September 1947 founding meeting of the Cominform, outlined a “two camps” doctrine positing the inevitability of war between the “imperialist and anti-democratic” camp led by the United States and the “anti-imperialist and democratic” bloc led by the Soviet Union<sup>111</sup>. The “anti-imperialist and democratic” camp encompassed the world’s worker’s parties, communist parties and liberation movements in the colonial world. In this fashion, the traditional Marxist-Leninist concept of “two systems” gave way to the Cold War concept of “two irreconcilable camps”<sup>112</sup>.

Mao and Stalin’s hostility to the capitalist world, and exaggerated suspicions of imperialist plots engineered by Washington, created incentives for the two autocrats to ally in an attempt to balance the United States. Beijing was primarily interested in securing support from Moscow to offset Washington’s maneuvers to isolate the PRC. For Moscow, Mao’s “leaning to one side” meant that Stalin could count on Asia’s largest nation as an ally, thereby tilting the balance of power in a zone of rapidly intensifying American military power<sup>113</sup>. Lastly, and certainly not an insignificant matter, CCP support for the Soviet Union and the acknowledgment of the CPSU as the leading party of the international communist movement solidified Stalin’s claims to leadership of the communist world. If not a perfect match, it was an alliance securing the immediate political objectives of both men.

## The East is Red

The 1966-1976 Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was the greatest cataclysm that befell the People’s Republic of China, “a watershed, the defining decade of half a century of Communist rule in China”<sup>114</sup>. Those tumultuous years continue to cast a long, appalling shadow over the Chinese Communist Party and its historical role. In the post-Mao

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110 See, David McCullough. Truman. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992, p. 548. See Kennan’s “X article” for the “containment” concept, George Kennan (X), “The sources of Soviet conduct”, Foreign Affairs. Vol.26, No. 2, July 1947, pp. 566-582. On George Kennan’s contribution to the “containment doctrine”, see, for instance, David Mayers. George Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

111 For the full contents of the Zhdanov speech, see, “Speech by Andrei Zhdanov (member of the Soviet Politburo) at the founding of the Cominform (a Communist International Organization) in September 1947”, accessed at: <http://educ.jmu.edu/~vannorwc/assets/ghist%20102-150/pages/readings/zhdanovspeech.html>.

112 See, *inter alia*, Frederic S. Burin, “The Communist Doctrine of the Inevitability of War”, The American Political Science Review, Vol. 57, No. 2, June, 1963, pp. 334-354 and Vojtech Mastny, “Stalin and the Militarization of the Cold War”, International Security, Vol. 9, No. 3, Winter 1984-1985, pp. 109-129.

113 See, Dieter Heinzig. The Soviet Union and Communist China, 1945-1950. New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 119-122.

114 See, Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals. Mao’s Last Revolution, p. 1.

period, the CCP sought to come to grips with the legacy of that frightful decade during the June 1981 Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. A CCP document examining key historical events and party experiences (“On Questions of Party History – Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China”) quite unambiguously stated that “(T)he “cultural revolution”, which lasted from May 1966 to October 1976, was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic. It was initiated and led by Comrade Mao Zedong.. The history of the “cultural revolution” has proved that Comrade Mao Zedong’s principal theses for initiating this revolution conformed neither to Marxism-Leninism nor to Chinese reality. They represent an entirely erroneous appraisal of the prevailing class relations and the political situation in the Party and state”<sup>115</sup>. Such an official judgment was made because Deng Xiaoping’s reforms presupposed a public denouncement of the “errors” committed by the CCP during the Cultural Revolution. That meant, basically, placing the blame on the shoulders of Mao Zedong and discarding the radical utopianism of the Maoist faction of the party opposed to economic modernization.

The origins of the Cultural Revolution are traceable to the fallout from the “destalinization” process initiated at the February 1956 Twentieth Congress of the CPSU<sup>116</sup>. Khrushchev’s “secret speech” at the Congress, undermining the cult of personality and a host of other pillars of Stalinism, led Mao to fear that “some ‘Chinese Khrushchev’ would rise up in the CCP and throw Mao, much as Khrushchev had thrown Stalin, into the thrash pit of history and turn Communism in China into nothing more than a formula for economic growth and prosperity”<sup>117</sup>. Politically astute, Chairman Mao was not entirely incorrect in his guarded reading of the political situation. Unlike Joseph Stalin, Mao, although a *primus inter pares*, could not resort to systematic terror to stifle dissident voices within the party. Purges and factional infighting were endemic to the CCP, but the generalized terror employed by Stalin to decimate the CPSU was not replicated within the ranks of the Chinese party. Mao rightly feared that his adversaries within the CCP would effectively sideline him from positions of power in party and state. Taking the offensive, Mao initiated the Hundred Flowers Campaign in May 1956 with the intent of exposing adversaries bold enough to denounce his leadership errors.

Derived from the poem “let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend” (百花齐放,百家争鸣), the Hundred Flowers Movement encouraged

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115 See, “On Questions of Party History – Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China (Adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981”, Beijing Review, No. 27, July 6, 1981, pp. 20-21.

116 See, Richard Lowenthal, World Communism, pp. 23-28 and William Taubman. Khrushchev: The Man and His Era. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017, pp. 270-275.

117 See, Gao Wenqian. Zhou Enlai: The Last Perfect Revolutionary. New York: PublicAffairs, 2007, p. 90.

intellectuals to initiate a discussion on socialist culture with the ultimate aim of demonstrating the superiority of socialism over capitalism and, thereby, accelerating socialist development. Mao's appeal for constructive criticism was outlined in "On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People", published in late February 1957<sup>118</sup>. Months later, Mao renewed the call for criticism of the bureaucracy and the government. Public critique soon mushroomed; for instance, a "Democracy Wall" arose on the Peking University campus openly denouncing CCP policy and unwarranted *nomenklatura* privileges. The extent and scope of the contestation undoubtedly caught Mao and the senior party leadership by surprise and, in July 1957, the brief experiment was aborted. Intellectuals that had dared to raise their voices against the regime's excesses and abuses were suppressed during the Anti-Rightist Movement, enthusiastically supported by Deng Xiaoping, that followed on the heels of the Hundred Flowers Campaign<sup>119</sup>.

The regime would, in the wake of this episode, resist future calls for the liberalization of speech. That same fear of losing political control would again be on display during the 1989 Tiananmen events. The lessons of the Hundred Flowers also explain why, during the Cultural Revolution, herculean efforts were undertaken to guarantee adherence to the "correct" party line, largely by circumscribing the parameters of acceptable ideological discourse as outlined in Mao's theoretical writings and later symbolically codified in the Little Red Book. Events transpiring outside of China's frontiers in the second half of the 1950s also encouraged Mao to resist the politico-ideological destabilization inherent to Soviet "revisionism". Khrushchev's demystification of Stalin, as well as the 1956 anti-communist Hungarian Uprising, demonstrated the extent to which the CCP's ideological edifice could be dynamited if the party did not narrow the frontiers of acceptable discourse<sup>120</sup>. Examination of the recent past would invariably lead to increased contestation corrosive of the fundamental ideological pillars upon which regime legitimacy and authority rested. By 1956, one of these pillars was Mao himself, the "liberator" and founder of the People's Republic. If imperialism threatened socialism from the outside, revisionism was the insidious internal enemy lurking in the darkest shadows.

Mao's program for agricultural collectivization and rapid industrialization – alternatively known as The Great Leap Forward or the 1958-62 Second Five Year Plan – was meant to ignite a "reckless advance" to communism. Resting on the labor of the country's immense population, that advance would allow China to overtake Britain in fifteen years. The Great Leap Forward was the outcome of an ongoing intra-party debate that had raged since the establishment of the PRC over the pace of land distribution, collectivization and industrialization. Inspired by 1930s Stalinist collectivization, Mao favored

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118 The content of the speech would later be substantially edited to conform to the post-Hundred Flowers Campaign "anti-rightist" campaign.

119 Jonathan Spence characterizes it as a dispute within the CCP as to how to deal with dissent. See, Johnathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 508-513.

120 See, Richard Lowenthal. *World Communism: The Disintegration of a Secular Faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 54-69.

rapid industrialization by extracting maximum agricultural surplus and, to that end, advocated accelerated collectivization (in other words, the establishment of people's communes). In contrast, Li Shaoqi, accompanied by Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, emphasized pragmatic economic planning over ideological utopianism. They emerged as the principal advocates of industrial planning and a slower pace of collectivization. To settle the policy differences stemming from this cleavage within the CCP leadership, the 17/30 August 1958 enlarged Central Committee meeting, held at Beidaihe, sided with Mao and decided to expand people's communes and "backyard furnaces", with the former being "the fundamental policy to guide the peasants to accelerate socialist construction, complete the building of socialism ahead of time, and carry out the gradual transition to communism"<sup>121</sup>. The "backyard furnaces" aimed to double steel production within the year while, in parallel, the people's communes advanced toward greater egalitarian, communal social relations. At a second Central Committee meeting, held in Wuchang, in late November, Mao, despite the increasing evidence to the contrary, insisted on accelerating the communalization of rural China.

Mao's immovability is not incomprehensible because, in 1957, Khrushchev was engaged in a ruthless political struggle with an "Anti-Party Group" – Georgy Malenkov, Viatcheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, and Dmitri Shepilov – seeking to depose him<sup>122</sup>. All former loyal collaborators of Stalin, these men had supported Khrushchev during Stalin's succession. Spurning liberalization, the excesses of "destalinization" and denouncing Khrushchev's hypocrisy by recalling his proximity and complicity with Stalin, the "Anti-Party Group" sought to depose him. On the foreign policy front, Khrushchev's proposed "peaceful coexistence" was deemed a capitulation to the capitalist camp that would weaken the USSR and generate an unfavorable international correlation of forces prejudicial to all socialist states. Since the "Anti-Party Group" possessed a majority on the Presidium, Khrushchev called a special June 1957 meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU where, with the support of the celebrated war-hero Defense Minister Georgy Zhukov, he was able to survive as First Secretary and secure, by way of a unanimous vote, the expulsion of the "Anti-Party Group". Determined to enhance his internal party legitimacy after neutralizing the "Anti-Party Group", Khrushchev convoked, in late January and early February 1959, the CPSU's Extraordinary Twenty-first Congress. Prior to leaving for the Congress, Zhou Enlai was warned that Khrushchev planned to announce a policy of peaceful coexistence and abandon the "two rival camps" doctrine. Although the Chinese conveyed their discomfort with alteration of Soviet policy, China and the USSR attenuated the tension by signing a program of enhanced economic cooperation.

Wary of developments in the USSR, Mao was also facing mounting economic problems arising from the failure of Great Leap Forward that sapped his political authority.

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121 See, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 579.

122 On this episode, see, Carl Linden. *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966 and William Taubman, *Khrushchev*, pp. 310-324.

In April 1959, during the National People's Congress, Mao, under intense political pressure from his senior comrades, acquiesced to being substituted as PRC State Chairman by his nemesis, Liu Shaoqi. Two other advocates of pragmatic economic development were also reinforced politically: Zhou Enlai was confirmed as Premier and Deng Xiaoping was appointed General Secretary of the CCP. Although weakened, Mao was not entirely sidelined and was able to preserve his position as Chairman of the Central Committee. An uneasy balance between pragmatic and radical factions, the new correlation of power within the CCP would be tested soon after, at the July/August 1959 Lushan Conference<sup>123</sup>.

At Lushan, a major challenge to Mao's authority emerged in the guise of open, albeit limited, disapproval of Great Leap Forward policies. Uncomfortable with Mao's policies, senior party leaders, cognizant of the steep price to be paid for openly countering the Chairman, sought political refuge in a self-imposed, prudent silence. The exception was Peng Dehuai, minister of Defense and one of the PLA's ten marshals. A communist fighter since 1928, Peng became celebrated as the commander of the People's Volunteer Army during the Korean War. Imbued with a personal and political authority derived from such achievements in the cause of socialism, Peng must have certainly been under the impression that he was immune to being purged when he wrote Mao a private, lengthy letter critical of the Great Leap Forward. Suggesting that the "reckless advance" should be slowed, Peng's "Letter of Opinion" observed that "some people do not have sufficient food and clothing... wastage of food and materials is pervasive... the quality of autumn harvest was bad, and the cost of cultivation was too high"<sup>124</sup>. Accusing Mao of "petty bourgeois fanaticism", the marshal demanded an end to Great Leap Forward policies. For two weeks, Mao patiently sat and listened to Peng's criticisms<sup>125</sup>. Then he distributed Peng's letter to the Central Committee.

Responding on 23 July, Mao and his allies – Lin Biao, Peng Zhen, Bo Yibo and An Ziwen – began an unrelenting attack on Peng, characterizing the dispute as a "life and death class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie that had been in progress for a decade"<sup>126</sup>. Mao charged the marshal with organizing a "military clique" to overthrow the government. Challenging the Defense minister's authority over the army, Mao ominously threatened to "go to the countryside to lead the peasants to overthrow the government. If those of you in the Liberation Army won't follow me, then I will go and find a Red Army, and organize another Liberation Army. But I think

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123 The Lushan Conference was actually two gatherings: the Enlarged Politburo meeting of 2 July to 1 August 1959 and the Eight Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, held between August 2 to 16. On the background to the Lushan Conference, see, Franklin W. Houn. *A Short History of Chinese Communism*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973, pp. 232-246.

124 The letter is reproduced in Christopher Howe and Kenneth R. Walker. *Foundations of the Chinese Planned Economy: A Documentary Survey, 1953-65*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, pp. 88-94.

125 See, Han Suyin. *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, pp. 275-276.

126 See, Michael Dillon. *Zhou Enlai: The Enigma Behind Chairman Mao*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2020, p. 222.

the Liberation Army would follow me”<sup>127</sup>. Mao and his allies accused the PLA marshal of leading an attack on the Chairman (and, by extension, the CCP) on behalf of an “anti-party group”, a designation that effectively placed Peng’s criticism of Mao beyond the pale of acceptable opinion. The attacks and the self-criticism would be prolonged for two weeks, during which Peng was denounced as a “bourgeois” and a “rightist opportunist”. On August 17, Peng Dehuai was dismissed as Defense minister, chief of the general staff and purged from the all-powerful Central Military Commission. Lin Biao, succeeding Peng as Defense minister and First Deputy Chairman of the critical Central Military Commission, immediately proceeded to reinforce his grip over the military. To balance Lin Biao’s power, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were tasked with undoing the economic damage provoked by the Great Leap Forward. The stage was thus set for the intra-party confrontation that was to mark the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

On the foreign front, Nikita Khrushchev’s rebuke of Mao Zedong also intensified<sup>128</sup>. Using the June 1960 Bucharest Conference of workers and communist parties to attack Mao’s China, the Soviet leader demonstrated the extent to which the CCP was out of step with the international communist movement<sup>129</sup>. Indeed, at Bucharest, Chinese positions were echoed only by Enver Hoxha’s Party of Labor of Albania; while North Koreans and North Vietnamese steered a middle course between the CCP and the CPSU<sup>130</sup>. Led by Peng Zhen, the CCP delegation failed to reach agreement with the Soviets, increasingly vocal in their admonishment of the “dangerous adventurism” of the Great Leap Forward. Attempting to forestall further isolation, the Chinese signed the final Conference communique. Since the Bucharest document basically restated the general aims and strategy of the 1957 Moscow meeting, which, in effect, constituted an explicit rebuke of Maoist positions, the CCP’s capitulation at Bucharest mirrored its isolation<sup>131</sup>. Perhaps seeking to diminish the impact of the Bucharest communique, the CCP publicized a written statement attacking Khrushchev by name, the first time it did so<sup>132</sup>.

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127 The full text of Mao’s 23 July 1959 Lushan Conference speech may be consulted at: [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8\\_34.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_34.htm).

128 On events preceding the Bucharest Conference, and Khrushchev’s growing antagonism towards the Chinese communists, see, Edward Crankshaw. *The New Cold War: Moscow v. Peking*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965, pp. 83-96.

129 On the Bucharest Conference, see, Richard Lowenthal, *World Communism*, pp. 177-180.

130 For the Albanian position, see, Enver Hoxha, “Real Unity is Achieved and Strengthened only on the basis of Marxist-Leninist Principles”, August 27, 1960, accessed at: [http://www.enver-hoxha.net/librat\\_pdf/english/selectedWorksIII/1960/2.august-october.pdf](http://www.enver-hoxha.net/librat_pdf/english/selectedWorksIII/1960/2.august-october.pdf). See, also, Hoxha’s speech at the Moscow preparatory meeting, Enver Hoxha, “Reject the Revisionist Theses of the XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Anti-Marxist Stand of the Khrushchev’s Group! Uphold Marxism-Leninism”, Speech Delivered by Enver Hoxha as Head of the Delegation of the Party of Labor of Albania Before the Meeting of 81 Communist and Workers Parties, Moscow, 16 November 1960, accessed at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hoxha/works/nov1960.htm>.

131 For the full text, see, “Statement of 81 Communist and Workers Parties Meeting in Moscow”, accessed at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/other/1960statement.htm#2>.

132 See, Danhui Li, “Open Struggles and a Temporary Truce, 1959-1961”, In Zhihua Shen (ed.). *A Short History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 240-241 and Edward Crankshaw, *The New Cold War*, pp. 113-117.

In response, the USSR announced the withdrawal of all 1,390 development advisors from China<sup>133</sup>. A definitive break between the two parties had yet to be consummated, but the parts had diverged to the point where reconciliation became an increasingly distant mirage.

Mao Zedong lost no time in exploiting the conflict with the CPSU and thereby constrain his CCP opponents. As the rift with the Soviets over international policy and, more importantly, the acceptable path of socialist construction intensified, opposition to Mao's radicalism became virtually synonymous with "revisionism". Thus, disagreements over economic policy were transfigured into theoretical differences as to the merits of Chinese socialist construction versus the Soviet model. Revisionism was not a mere ideological deviation; it became synonymous with siding with the Soviets against the CCP. In short, policy disagreements emerged as continuous tests of loyalty not only to Chairman Mao, but, more critically, to the CCP and the People's Republic itself. Disagreeing with Mao became tantamount to committing treason against country and socialism. Still, within these mammoth constraints, there nevertheless remained a sliver of light allowing limited room for the Liu Shaoqi reformist faction to maneuver as the economy evinced demonstrable signs of deterioration.

Liu and Premier Zhou Enlai sought to reorient economic policy while observing Maoist rhetoric expressing unswerving personal loyalty to the Chairman. Once Mao secured Peng Dehuai's downfall, Zhou Enlai was able to seize the opportunity to reveal his "Twelve Articles", a series of decommunization measures including the restoration of limited private plots, rural agricultural markets and a wage-based system<sup>134</sup>. Presented to the Politburo for approval on 29 October 1960, and to the January 1961 Ninth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP for ratification, the "Twelve Articles" sought to reverse the disastrous agricultural policies of the Great Leap Forward<sup>135</sup>. One year later the "sixty Articles" consolidated the reduction of communes that in the meantime has occurred<sup>138</sup>. Mao, however, would not be allowed to retreat with such minimal

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133 On the reasons underlying the Soviet decision, see, Alfred D. Low. *The Sino-Soviet Dispute: An Analysis of the Polemics*. London: Associated University Presses, 1976, pp. 118-121.

134 See, Byung-Joon Ahn, "The Political Economy of the People's Commune in China: Changes and Continuities", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, May 1975, pp. 631-658.

135 See, Jean Chesneaux. *China: The People's Republic, 1949-1976*, pp. 106-107. As to the monumental human cost of the Great Leap Forward, Chang and Halliday suggest that: "This was the greatest famine of the twentieth century – and of all recorded human history. Mao knowingly worked and starved these tens of millions of people to death...Mao had actually allowed for many more deaths. Although slaughter was not his purpose with the Leap, he was more than ready for myriad deaths to result, and had hinted to his top echelon that they should not be too shocked if they happened". See, Jung Chang and John Halliday. *Mao: The Unknown Story*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2005, p. 457. For a devastating portrayal of the atrocities of a period Dikötter claims led to the death of more than 45 million people, see, Frank Dikötter. *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010, p. x.

136 On the political consequences of this debate, see, Marc Blecher. *China: Politics, Economics and Society*. London: Frances Pinter, 1986, pp. 76-80.

political losses. Exploiting the Chairman's vulnerability, State Chairman Liu Shaoqi, during the 11 January/7 February 1962 Seven Thousand Cadres Conference, rebuked Mao in no uncertain terms. On January 27 Liu Shaoqi's report to the Conference acknowledged that the problems faced in the economic sphere were a consequence of policy, of the "the shortcomings and mistakes in our work since 1958"<sup>137</sup>. In a three hour report to the gathering, Liu recognized that "the people have inadequate food, clothing and other necessities... industrial output also decreased, by at least 40 percent"<sup>138</sup>. Liu also rejected Mao's formula that "mistakes are only one finger whereas achievements are nine fingers", observing that "(I)n a portion of places all over the country, it could be said that shortcomings and errors outnumber accomplishments" and therefore proposed a 7:3 ratio; the economic disaster was 30% the fault of nature, 70% was human error<sup>139</sup>.

Other leaders participating at the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference were considerably more indulgent with Mao. Zhou Enlai, ever the prudent politician determined to avoid a frontal clash with the Chairman, exempted Mao from blame, as did Lin Biao. As a matter of fact, Lin Biao went further, claiming that "(I)f we had listened to Chairman Mao and learned from him, we would have made fewer wrong turns, and would be facing fewer difficulties today"; unsurprisingly, Mao replied that "Comrade Lin Biao spoke very well regarding the party's line and the party's military policies", then ordered the speech to be put into print<sup>140</sup>. Despite Lin Biao's sycophancy, Mao was backed into a political corner. Left without a viable alternative, Mao underwent a session of self-criticism and relinquished a large degree of policy-making to Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and the pragmatists. Foreshadowing the divisions that would emerge during the Cultural Revolution, the CCP leadership split. Mao, Chen Boda and Ke Qingshi continued to support the broad aims of the Great Leap Forward. Liu, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Peng Dehuai, Deng Zihui, Li Fuchun, Zhang Wentian and Li Xiannian supported discarding the policies directly leading to the cataclysm. As ever, Zhou Enlai, broadly favoring an abandonment of the Great Leap Forward, remained equidistant from both groups.

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137 See, Michael Dillon. Zhou Enlai, p. 232.

138 See, Yang Jisheng. Tombstone: The Untold Story of Mao's Great Famine. London: Allen Lane, 2012, p. 501.

139 Ibid., p. 502.

140 Ibid., p. 503.

## PART III

### Deng Crossing the River

“Growltiger was a Bravo Cat, who travelled on a barge/In fact  
he was the roughest cat that ever roamed at large”

T. S. Elliot, *Growltiger's Last Stand*

#### Thermidor from Jiangxi

Proletarian internationalism is usually juxtaposed to nationalism, but, the interplay between the two is considerably more complex than is suggested by such a Manichean view. Because the party's nationalist discourse has always consistently dovetailed with the lexicon of Marxism-Leninism, Chinese nationalism and CCP proletarian internationalism were complementary and mutually reinforcing. During the republican period, due to their shared anti-imperialist outlook, both the Guomindang nationalists and the Chinese Communist Party gained admission to the Comintern. Understanding imperialism as Lenin's “last stage” of capitalism, both concluded that imperialism had extended its rapacious logic to China. As a result, both regarded the “century of humiliation” as an attempt to expropriate China's wealth and degrade its international standing.

The difference separating the GMD and the CCP did not reside with this narrative of China's recent past. They differed as to the way forward; that is, the divergence was over how to overcome China's weakness and achieve modernity. The Guomindang proposed the country's insertion into the capitalist world-system, with a unified post-feudal, authoritarian developmentalist government as the vehicle for securing national modernization. Essentially, the same model implemented in Taiwan by Chiang Kai-shek following the nationalist retreat to the island. From Mao's prism, the GMD path of authoritarian capitalist development would, once again, place the country at the mercy of the leading imperialist nations. National independence therefore presupposed a break with the capitalist world-system and the launching of socialist construction rooted in proletarian internationalism. Ultimately, Taiwan's economic and political success disproved Mao's predictions, one of the reasons that the existence of a democratic capitalist system in Formosa to this day remains such an irritant to the Beijing regime.

Driven by incessant hostility toward the imperialist powers responsible for inflicting a “century of humiliation” on the country, Mao, after 1949, pursued a path to modernity resting upon rapid industrialization and self-sufficiency. Suspicion of outside capitalist powers, frequently veering on unmitigated xenophobia, informed the CCP's path of development and served to legitimize the party's monopoly on power. Meant to shield the country from a world economy dominated by the capitalist West, China's ties with the USSR were a *sine qua non* condition for cementing the CCP's chosen road to development. Indeed, Chinese modernization could not dispense with external capital and know-how

supplied by the Soviet Union. Aware that a withdrawal from the world-capitalist system would generate increased reliance on the Soviet Union, the Chinese communists minimized the potential dangers by claiming that the Soviet Union was not a “normal” European power. Put simply, Lenin’s assumption of power in 1917 meant that the Russian empire had been superseded by a socialist state whose external behavior rejected the logic of imperialism.

At great cost, the Bolsheviks had withdrawn from the international capitalist system to preserve Russia’s new, Soviet course. Imperialism, in turn, had reacted to the October 1917 revolution with military intervention, much as it had done in China after the proclamation of the republic. That common history of anti-imperialist struggle, and the shared ideological bond it forged, made it highly unlikely that the Kremlin would ally with the imperialist powers to overthrow communist rule in China<sup>141</sup>. From the perspective of the PRC’s new leaders, latent threats engendered by reliance on Moscow were manageable and, surely, less perilous than continued dependency on the capitalist states. Not all anxieties had been fully dissipated: Soviet chauvinism plagued Sino-Soviet relations and the Kremlin’s arrogance and paternalism, stemming from its status and legitimacy as the first socialist country, was to incense Mao and other PRC leaders over the years. Still, Mao and the Chinese Communist Party were willing to “lean to one side” and replicate the Soviet model, learning from their “big brothers” if that was the price demanded for developing the country independently of Washington, Tokyo, London and Paris<sup>142</sup>.

Mao Zedong’s death, on 9 September 1976, intensified the ongoing factional infighting plaguing the top tier of the CCP leadership in the years of Cultural Revolution prior to the Chairman’s physical demise<sup>143</sup>. As Mao’s health visibly deteriorated, a bitter battle of succession ensued as factions jockeyed for advantage. Between 1976 and 1978, the outcome of the power struggle remained highly contingent. This, then, was the

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141 This is part of the reason the Chinese reacted with such vehemence to Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of “peaceful coexistence”. For Mao, such appeasement of the “paper tigers” raised the possibility of the USSR abandoning the PRC in the event of an imperialist offensive.

142 The “lean to one side” policy was outlined by Mao in speech delivered on 30 June 1949 to commemorate the twenty-eighth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. In the relevant passage, Mao affirms: “You are leaning to one side. Exactly. The forty years’ experience of Sun Yat-sen and the twenty-eight years’ experience of the Communist Party have taught us to lean to one side, and we are firmly convinced that in order to win victory and consolidate it we must lean to one side. In the light of the experiences accumulated in these forty years and these twenty-eight years, all Chinese without exception must lean either to the side of imperialism or to the side of socialism. Sitting on the fence will not do, nor is there a third road. We oppose the Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries who lean to the side of imperialism, and we also oppose the illusions about a third road”. See, Mao Tse-tung. “On The People’s Democratic Dictatorship”, Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 4, p. 415.

143 Some of the more useful Works on the immediate post-Mao period include, *inter alia*, Immanuel C. Y. Hsü. *China Without Mao: The Search for a New Order* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Lowell Dittmer. *China under Reform*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994; Richard Baum. *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994 and Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun. *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

complex milieu enveloping Deng Xiaoping's rise to power<sup>144</sup>. Having joined the CCP in 1924, Deng was a nimble political gladiator and a resilient survivor of internal factional feuding<sup>145</sup>. Accused of "rightist opportunist" mistakes, Deng was first purged in 1933 and reinstated one year later, during the Long March. He would again fall from grace in 1966, an early victim of the Cultural Revolution. Charged with being the party's "No. 2 capitalist roader" due to his proximity with Liu Shaoqi, Deng (and his entire family) was sent to labor in Jiangxi. Deng's long-time, reliable ally, Zhou Enlai, in a bid to mold Mao's succession, reinstated him in 1973 as Vice-Premier, but, in 1976, as a result of the "first Tiananmen incident" of 5 April 1976, Deng was once more relieved of all his party and state posts<sup>146</sup>. Finally, in March 1977, the Central Committee endorsed his "return to work".

Deng Xiaoping, however, was far from a hapless victim of party rivals; rather, he was a scarred veteran of unrelenting internal party intrigue and an extremely adroit maneuverer in the battle for Chairman Mao's succession. Deng's considerable political skills perhaps explain why Henry Kissinger, in private, referred to him, perhaps not unflatteringly, as "a nasty little man"<sup>147</sup>. Astutely, Deng had positioned himself for the leadership struggle well before Mao's death, arguing, in 1974, that Maoist self-sufficiency did not oblige China to retreat from engagement with the rest of world. That is to say, the autarky glorified by Mao and his followers did not constitute the sole path for achieving socialism and self-sufficiency. As a corollary, since an isolationist economic policy was quite obviously not a requisite for socialist construction, some degree of openness was acceptable as the country modernized. Although a cautious formulation within the context of the revolutionary Maoist orthodoxy prevailing during that period, Deng's views came under severe attack in 1976. At that time, the radical Maoist Gang of Four initiated the "criticizing Deng" (Pi Deng)

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144 A number of biographies of Deng Xiaoping have been published, including Richard Evans. *Deng Xiaoping and the Making of Modern China*. New York: Viking, 1993; Ezra F. Vogel. *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011; Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine. *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 and Michael Dillon. *Deng Xiaoping: The Man Who Made Modern China*. London: I.B Tauris, 2015.

145 Various dates are given for Deng's adhesion to the CCP. Ezra Vogel, in his monumental biography, writes: "Deng was brought onto the executive committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League in Europe. At their meeting in July 1924, in accordance with a decision by the Chinese Communist Party, all of the members of this executive committee, including Deng, automatically became members of the Chinese Communist Party. At the time, the entire Chinese Communist Party, in China and France together, had fewer than a thousand members and Deng was not yet twenty years old". Deng, as well as Zhou Enlai and a number of other students, later prominent communists, studied in France at this time. See, Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 22.

146 Sparked by Zhou Enlai's death, earlier in the year, the First Tiananmen Incident occurred on 5 April 1976, during the Qingming Festival, the traditional Chinese day of mourning. Protests held in Tiananmen Square were characterized as "counterrevolutionary" gatherings by the Gang of Four and suppressed. Deng was accused of masterminding the incident and, as result, was placed under house arrest. See, Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine. *Deng Xiaoping*, pp. 296-300.

147 See, Lucian W. Pye, "An Introductory Profile: Deng Xiaoping and China's Political Culture", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 135, September 1993, pp. 412-443 and Steven W. Mosher. *Bully of Asia: Why China's Dream is the New Threat to World Order*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2017, p. 116.

campaign, reproving him for seeking to “reverse the correct verdict of the Cultural Revolution”; thus, to defeat Deng was to “repulse the right-deviationist wind”<sup>148</sup>.

Mao, in the months prior to his death, had been extremely critical of Deng, leading the Vice-Premier to submit a letter of resignation in January 1976. In April of the same year, Deng was removed from all party posts as “Mao cleared the way for Hua to lead the country”<sup>149</sup>. The Chairman’s decision to anoint Hua Guofeng as his successor was, according to Ezra Vogel, dictated by the fact that “Mao had no better choice who would be loyal to Mao’s reputation and who had the potential to get along with radicals and senior officials”<sup>150</sup>. Hua was not unacceptable to most senior party and military cadres; but neither was he the object of political devotion. After Mao’s death, Hua Guofeng, unable to prevent Deng’s return to party activity, joined with him to oppose the Gang of Four, the self-proclaimed heirs to the Chairman’s radical egalitarianism<sup>151</sup>. Led by Mao’s widow, Jiang Qing, and encompassing Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan, the Gang of Four, increasingly alarmed that the rehabilitation of the “capitalist roaders” purged during the Cultural Revolution would deal a mortal blow to the Maoist experiment initiated in 1949, sought to consolidate its grip on power.

Jiang Qing’s quest for power had in fact been largely neutralized when Mao selected the relatively obscure Hua Guofeng as his successor<sup>152</sup>. Unflinching in his loyalty to Mao’s political line, Hua, having risen to some prominence during the Cultural Revolution, was expected to uphold Mao’s legacy. One month after Mao’s death, the power struggle came to an abrupt end. On 6 October 1976, the principal elements comprising the Gang of Four were arrested in the middle of the night in a move that, for all intents and purposes, amounted to a coup executed by one wing of the party with the support of the People’s Liberation Army<sup>153</sup>. Under the orders of Marshal Ye Jianying, Defense Minister and a Vice-Chairman of the CCP Central Committee, the military was instrumental in deposing the Gang of Four<sup>154</sup>. Indicating the extent to which the country had become exhausted by a decade of strife accompanying the onset of Cultural Revolution, the overthrow of Jiang Qing and her allies failed to spark an outpouring of popular support. Even in

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148 The full name of the campaign was “Criticize Deng and Combat the Right Deviationists’ Attempt to Reverse Verdicts”. Kwok-sing Li. *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People’s Republic of China*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995, pp. 310-313. Also, Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 40-41 and Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun. *The End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 456-461.

149 See, Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 170. Also, see, Dorothy Grouse Fontana. “Background to the Fall of Hua Guofeng”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 3, March 1982, pp. 237-60.

150 See, Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 170.

151 See, Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *China Without Mao*, pp. 16-19 and Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun. *The End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 536-594.

152 For biographical detail on Hua Guofeng, see, Ting Wang. *Chairman Hua: Leader of the Chinese Communists*. London: C. Hurst and Company, 1980 and Robert Weatherley. *Mao’s Forgotten Successor: The Political Career of Hua Guofeng*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

153 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-25

154 See, Alan P. L. Liu, “The ‘Gang of Four’ and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 9, September 1979, pp. 817-837.

Shanghai province, where the group's primary power-base was situated and where party radicals had, during the 1966 January Storm, endorsed the zealotry of the "Shanghai People's Commune", mobilization in defense of the Gang of Four failed to materialize.

Given the heterogeneity of the various sectors coalescing to neutralize the Gang of Four, the anti-radical coalition soon splintered as Deng and the party elders moved against Hua Guofeng. Although Hua sanctioned the arrest of the Gang of Four, whom he saw as rivals for power, his base of support was fragile, resting largely on cadres loyal to Mao's indication of Hua as his successor. These, in turn, pressured Hua to remain faithful to Mao's political and ideological legacy. To appease the Maoists, in February 1977, Hua published his "Study the Documents Well and Grasp the Key Links", outlining the "two whatevers" (两个凡是) doctrine. Meant to reaffirm Hua's commitment to Mao, the "two whatevers", were resumed by the slogan "(W)e will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave"<sup>155</sup>. Taking the offensive against Hua, Deng characterized the dogmatism of the "two whatevers" as un-Marxist, adding that "for us to apply what Comrade Mao Zedong said on one particular question to another, to apply what he said in one particular place to another, to apply what he said at one particular time to another, or to apply what he said under one particular condition to another – all this certainly will not work! Comrade Mao Zedong himself said on several occasions that some of his own statements were wrong"<sup>156</sup>.

In an article titled "Practice is the Sole Criterion for Judging Truth", presented as a "correct" and "comprehensive" understanding of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping claimed that "the only way to evaluate truth was by the broad social experience of the people... Marxism must continually be reinterpreted as a result of experience...but if experience reveals errors, changes should be made"<sup>157</sup>. Employing this formulation, Deng "accepted the authority of Mao, while asserting, in effect, that Hua Guofeng was not the only one who had the authority to interpret Mao's views"<sup>158</sup>. Moreover, Deng posited that Mao Zedong Thought interpreted the current situation, concluding that Maoist class struggle and continuous revolution should be discarded due to the disastrous results produced in the recent past. Formally affirming the relevance of "Mao Zedong Thought", "Practice is the Sole Criterion for Judging Truth" was actually a veiled assault on Maoist orthodoxy, the legacy of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's selection of Hu as the Chairman's successor.

In addition to the ideological differences between the various factions, the confrontation also evinced a generational cleavage within the party. Hua's supporters were generally

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155 The statement was made by Hua in October 1976 and published on February 7, 1977 in the People's Daily, the Red Flag and PLA Daily. See, Kwok-sing Li, A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China, pp. 235-237.

156 See, Deng Xiaoping, "The 'Two-Whatever Policy Does Not Accord With Marxism", Peking Review, May 24, 1977, available at: [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/nation/txt/2009-05/26/content\\_197547.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/nation/txt/2009-05/26/content_197547.htm). Alexander V. Pantsov, Deng Xiaoping, 325-328

157 See, Ezra F. Vogel, Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China, p. 211.

158 Ibid., p. 195.

younger, and included former Red Guards responsible for purging the older party members rehabilitated by Deng after Mao's death. As the shadow of the Great Proletarian Revolution began to recede, "most of the elders rejected not only Mao's utopian visions of the egalitarian society of the Great Leap Forward and the unending class struggle of the Cultural Revolution but also the Stalinist model of state control of the economy, collectivization of agriculture, and emphasis on heavy industry that had followed since the 1950s"<sup>159</sup>. Ironically, Mao's ideological intractability and political adventurism provoked the boomerang effect the Chairman had consistently sought to avoid: revolutionary mass action and utopian communism had become thoroughly discredited. Having successfully sidelined Hua, Deng assured the Maoists "that he would not become China's Khrushchev", adding that the Chairman's contributions were vital, and therefore, the CCP "should not launch an attack on Mao like Khrushchev's attack on Stalin"<sup>160</sup>. Despite the assurances, the way was open for the reemergence of the "capitalist roaders" Mao unrelentingly combated until his death. The Great Helmsman's decades-long dread that a "Chinese Khrushchev" would emerge to undo his legacy was prescient; yet, the Chairman was fortunate that Deng bore a greater resemblance to Khrushchev than to Gorbachev.

In effect, Deng Xiaoping and his victorious allies made the historical choice of "opening" China to the world economy. That said, the trajectory delineated by Deng to attain national development was not inevitable. A number of alternative paths were, at that particular junction, theoretically possible. First, albeit highly improbable, the party elite could have opted for democratization through full capitalist development along the lines of Japan (the same path later undertaken by Taiwan and, most importantly, South Korea in the 1980s)<sup>161</sup>. Second, modernization could have been pursued through the

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159 See, Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, "Dynamic Economy, Declining Party-State", In Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar (eds.), *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 4-5.

160 See, Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 241.

161 Chiang Kai-shek was succeeded in 1975 by his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, today credited with Taiwan's 1978/88 "economic miracle". Prior to his death, in January 1988, Chiang Ching-kuo ended thirty-eight years of martial law imposed by his father. This first step in the direction of political reform was followed by a gradual extension of civil and political liberties. Democratic politics came to Formosa in 1996, with the holding of free presidential elections. The Southern Korean transition process was also extended in time. Chosen as the candidate of the authoritarian military regime, Roh Tae-woo, confronted with mass protests, pledged, in a 29 June 1987 speech, to support the drafting of a new constitution guaranteeing direct presidential elections. When the poll was held, in December 1987, Roh emerged victorious over a splintered opposition. Inaugurated in February 1988, the Roh administration proceeded to dismantle the country's authoritarian state structures and expand political and civic freedoms. In 1992, when Roh Tae-woo's mandate came to an end, Kim Young-sam was elected president. From the vast literature on these transitions, see, *inter alia*, Yangsun Chou and Andrew J. Nathan, "Democratizing Transition in Taiwan", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 3, March 1987, pp. 277-299; Tun-jen Cheng, "Democratizing a Quasi-Leninist Regime in Taiwan," *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 4, July 1989, pp. 471-499; Masahiro Wakabayashi, "Democratization of the Taiwanese and Korean Political Regimes: A Comparative Study", *The Developing Economies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, December 1997, pp. 422-439; Shelley Rigger, *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy*. London: Routledge, 1999; Larry Diamond and Byung-Kook Kim (eds.), *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000 and Hahm Chaibong, "South Korea's Miraculous Democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3 July 2008, pp. 128-142.

building of *chaebols* enforced by military dictatorship along the lines of South Korea's Park Chung Hee or Suharto's Indonesian New Order<sup>162</sup>. Such a model was not entirely implausible in light of the PLA's preponderance within the party and the personal authority commanded by Marshal Ye Jianying. Granted, the PLA was the Chinese Communist Party's armed wing and Mao's adage exhorting the "party to command the gun" expressed the CCP's tradition of civilian supremacy over the military. Nonetheless, a scenario of military dictatorship was not unthinkable given the central role of the PLA during the latter phase of Cultural Revolution and in the downfall of the Gang of Four<sup>163</sup>. However unlikely, for it presupposed the restoration of power in the hands the radical Maoists, a third path was also available: the puritanical, xenophobic communism and genocidal logic of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, an ideological derivative of Maoism<sup>164</sup>. All of these options presented different dangers and opportunities, but the point, of course, is that Deng's reformism and "socialism with Chinese characteristics" was not a pre-ordained outcome.

The nature and scope of the transformation proposed by Deng was clarified during the historic December 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the

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162 On Park Chung Hee, see, Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (eds.). *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. On the background to the Park era, see, Carter J. Eckert. *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism, 1866-1945*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016. On Suharto and the New Order, see, Harold Crouch. *Army and Politics in Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978 and Robert E. Elson. *Suharto: A Political Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. On the human cost of Suharto's rule, see, Geoffrey B. Robinson. *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-66*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. For two contrasting views on Pinochet's Chile, see, Carlos Huneeus. *The Pinochet Regime*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2007 and Marcus Taylor. *From Pinochet to the 'Third Way': Neoliberalism and Social Transformation in Chile*. London: Pluto Press, 2006.

163 See, Alan P. L. Liu, "The 'Gang of Four' and the Chinese People's Liberation Army", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 9, September 1979, pp. 817-837 and Richard D. Nethercut, "Deng and the Gun: Party-Military Relations in the People's Republic of China", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 8, August 1982, pp. 691-704. Mao, in a 1938 speech, stated that: "Every Communist must grasp the truth. 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun'. Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party. Yet, having guns, we can create Party organizations, as witness the powerful Party organizations which the Eighth Route Army has created in northern China". See, Mao Tse-tung. "Problems of War and Strategy", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 2, pp. 224-225.

164 On relations between China and the Khmer Rouge, see, Pao-min Chang, "Beijing versus Hanoi: the diplomacy over Kampuchea" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1983, pp. 598-618; Andrew Mertha. *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*. Ithaca Cornell University Press, 2014 and Wang Chenyi, "The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: An Ideological Victory and a Strategic Failure". *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Working Paper #88*, December 2018, available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-chinese-communist-partys-relationship-the-khmer-rouge-the-1970s-ideological-victory>. For an overview of the Pol Pot years, see, *inter alia*, Ben Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Philip Short has written an extremely insightful biography of Pol Pot. See, Philip Short. *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004.

Chinese Communist Party<sup>165</sup>. The top leadership group surfacing from that momentous gathering revealed the extent to which Deng Xiaoping and his supporters had achieved decisive control of the Central Committee, thus securing the political preconditions for rolling back Maoist notions of national autarky, central planning and people's communes. Managers during the early 1950s golden age of CCP economic success prior to the recklessness of the Great Leap Forward, and presiding over the brief interlude between the Lushan Conference's recognition of the Great Leap Forward's failure and the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, Deng and the party elders were imbued with historical authority and legitimacy to proceed with reform. Collectively, they harked back to earlier successes, when rural markets played a substantial role within a centrally planned economy overseen by the administrative apparatus. History had, after all, vindicated Deng and the elder cadres.

Taking power in the post-Mao/Hua era, this generation of leaders was cognizant of China's military, economic and techno-scientific vulnerabilities, particularly disquieting in light of the fact that the country shared one of the world's largest land borders with a superpower bent on expanding politically and ideologically. By the late 1970's, the Soviet Union did not seem like a country a mere decade away from imploding; rather, Moscow actually appeared to be at the zenith of its power and influence with Soviet allies on the march in Ethiopia, Nicaragua, South Yemen, Afghanistan and numerous other countries. Most CPP leaders also recognized that the Soviets, the Taiwanese, the South Koreans and others in the immediate neighborhood had outdistanced the PRC in practically all development indicators. As these rival states outperformed China, the regime's failure to provide a way out of poverty and backwardness threatened to undermine the CCP's legitimacy<sup>166</sup>. More than a decade earlier, China's strategic debility had similarly underpinned Premier Zhou Enlai's exhortation, articulated at Shanghai's January 1963 Conference on Scientific and Technological Work, to implement the "Four Modernizations": agriculture, industry, science and technology and defense<sup>167</sup>. Zhou's concern with the fragility of these strategic sectors also justified Deng Xiaoping's 1973 rehabilitation and appointment as Vice-Premier. In the realm of security, the incontrovertible deterioration of

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165 See, Tan Zongji, "The Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee Is a Major Turning Point in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China", *Chinese Law and Government*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1995, pp. 5-87. Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 63-65 and Alexander V. Pantsov, *Deng Xiaoping*, pp. 341-343.

166 During the 1992 "southern tour", Deng continued to emphasize the utter necessity of overtaking the neighboring states. The paramount leader insisted that "Guangdong is trying to catch up with Asia's 'four little dragons' in 20 years, not only in terms of economic growth, but also in terms of improved public order and general social conduct -- that is, we should surpass them in both material and ethical progress. Only that can be considered building socialism with Chinese characteristics". See, Deng Xiaoping, "Excerpts from talks given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai", January 18 – February 21, 1992, consulted at: [https://cpcchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/26/content\\_13918381.htm](https://cpcchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/26/content_13918381.htm).

167 The Four Modernizations was first defined by Zhou Enlai on 23 September 1954 at the First National People's Congress. See, Kowk-sing Li, *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China*, pp. 422-423 and Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, pp. 833-835.

Sino-Soviet relations, greatly accentuated by the March 1969 border clashes on Zhenbao Island and the Ussuri River, provided a formidable incentive for further rapprochement with the United States. In sum, Mao's death made it clear that the preservation of the post-Cultural Revolution *status quo*, personified by Hua Guofeng, was no longer feasible if China was to achieve national development and lessen its vulnerabilities in a rapidly changing regional environment.

Ideologically, the December 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee replaced Maoism utopian egalitarianism through class struggle with an as yet ill-defined "market socialism with Chinese characteristics". During his 1992 "southern tour", Deng, in a revealing admission, stated that "(I)n studying Marxism-Leninism we must grasp the essence and learn what we need to know. Weighty tomes are for a small number of specialists; how can the masses read them? It is formalistic and impracticable to require that everyone read such works. It was from the Communist Manifesto and The ABC of Communism that I learned the rudiments of Marxism...Marxism is the irrefutable truth. The essence of Marxism is seeking truth from facts. That's what we should advocate, not book worship"<sup>168</sup>. Preserving dogmatic Marxism was impossible given the abandonment of the command economy and the need to accommodate a private non-state sector, foreign investment and other elements of marketization. Maoist ideological dogmatism was thus replaced by a more flexible approach to ideology, but one just as uncompromising relative to the role of the party and its stated mission of making China great again. Despite all of the theoretical adaptations promoted by Deng, the post-Mao CCP continued to trace its ideology to 1921 and, just as when it was founded, the CCP remained committed to building a modern, prosperous and powerful (rejuvenated) China.

On 30 March 1979, months after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping delivered his "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles" speech<sup>169</sup>. The new leader began by affirming that the CPP had freed itself "from the effects of the decade of turmoil created by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four and secured a political situation marked by stability and unity; this situation is both a prerequisite and a guarantee for our socialist modernization"<sup>170</sup>. The new phase of socialist economic development required "reform and the open door policy" within the parameters drawn by the Four Cardinal Principles: the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, Communist Party leadership and, fourth, Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. As a matter of fact, the success of the four modernizations presupposed the upholding of the Four Cardinal Principles, conceived as "the basic prerequisite for achieving modernization"<sup>171</sup>.

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168 Deng Xiaoping, "Excerpts from talks given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai", January 18 – February 21, 1992.

169 See, Kowk-sing Li, A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China, pp. 438-439; Richard Baum, Burying Mao, pp. 79-81 and Alexander V. Pantsov, Deng Xiaoping, pp. 355-356.

170 See, Deng Xiaoping, "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles", March 30, 1979, available at: [https://cpccchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/15/content\\_13918193.htm](https://cpccchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/15/content_13918193.htm)

171 Ibid.

According to Deng, the need to uphold these principles “continues because some Party comrades have not yet freed themselves from the evil influence of the ultra-Left ideology of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four”<sup>172</sup>. Deng’s fusion of market reforms with centralized party control was sanctioned by the Third Plenum in the following fashion: “the plenary session calls on the whole Party, the whole army and the people of all our nationalities to work with one heart and one mind, enhance political stability and unity, mobilize themselves immediately to go all out, pool their wisdom and efforts to carry out the new Long March to make China a modern, powerful socialist country before the end of the century”<sup>173</sup>. Later, receiving a delegation from Romania, Deng put it even more plainly: “The purpose of socialism is to make the country rich and strong”<sup>174</sup>.

At the same 1978 Third Plenum, Deng forcibly argued that Chinese development could no longer dispense the introduction of market mechanisms. However, he refrained from presenting the Plenum with any detailed, structured plan for fostering economic growth through the adoption of these same mechanisms. There was, in effect, no detailed roadmap indicating the concrete reforms to be pursued. Deng’s “black cat, white cat” formulation, essentially a recapitulation of Mao’s dictum “seek truth from facts”, constituted a pragmatic approach to change rather than a comprehensive reform agenda. Quite simply, reforms would be consolidated and expanded if they succeeded, discarded if they failed. Change, at least initially, was necessarily experimental and incremental rather than a consequence of a “big bang”, a rupture with prior practices. Pragmatic, flexible and evaluated by success, the reform agenda sought to impose economic rationality on a centrally planned economy and rural communes while simultaneously preempting disruptive social dislocation and unrest.

Since “openness and reform” encouraged local producers to experiment with agricultural production, agricultural output in the people’s communes was rapidly overtaken as a result of the adoption of market mechanisms. Agriculture was the sector most in need of immediate reform because grain output had not yet recovered from the cataclysmic Great Leap Forward. In fact, by 1978, the country had ceased to be self-sufficient in grain production. To stimulate output, the CCP embraced the “responsibility system”, peasant households were provided with land plots in exchange for a quota purchased by the state at guaranteed prices. Farm prices paid to producers rose by 25 and 40 percent in 1979, sparking increased production and enrichment of the households<sup>175</sup>. Grain production grew from 305 million tons in 1978 to a record 407 million in 1984. Another critical

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172 Ibid.

173 See, “Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China – Adopted on December 22, 1978, Peking Review, Vol. 21, No. 52, December 29, 1978, p. 11.

174 See, Fox Butterfield, “Mao and Deng: Competition for History’s Judgment”, The New York Times, November 15, 1987, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/15/weekinreview/the-world-mao-and-deng-competition-for-history-s-judgment.html>.

175 See, Susan L. Shirk. *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 38-44.

reform was the introduction of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)<sup>176</sup>. Foreign companies were induced to relocate to SEZs by a special incentives regime, including a reduced tax burden and a flexible regulatory framework. Concomitantly, bloated and unproductive state-owned enterprises were increasingly subject to rationalization and, if they failed to turn a profit, were allowed to fold. The industrial state sector was not dismantled by governmental decree, but it was gradually obliged to compete with private firms and turn a profit in a new competitive environment. Many large state-owned enterprises adapted to the new circumstances and still thrive as global players, many others were forced to close their doors.

Since reform was circumscribed by severe political constraints, perhaps no viable alternative existed to Deng Xiaoping's incremental, experimental approach<sup>177</sup>. At the end of 1978 Deng's standing and authority within the CCP, and within the leadership of the all-important PLA, were neither unquestionable nor unconditional. Resistance to reform was still palpable in those sectors of the party committed to Mao's utopian vision as well as from regional cadres reluctant to implement reforms impinging on their personal fiefdoms. As for the PLA, Deng was no stranger to the military, having served in Guangxi as a political commissar in the Second Field Army in the early 1930s. However, since the onset of the Cultural Revolution, the institution had become a significant autonomous power base playing an important role in factional CPP politics<sup>178</sup>. Powerful as he was at that particular junction, Deng could not exclude the possibility of being deposed by adversaries still holding key positions in state and party and waiting their opportunity.

To alleviate the concerns of the more recalcitrant sectors of the *nomenklatura*, Deng was forced to offer guarantees relative to the continuation of the CCP's monopoly on power, the party's ultimate red line. These assurances, however, necessarily lacked credibility unless accompanied by a decoupling of economic and political reform. In short, the exclusion of political reform became the main precondition for advancing with economic reform. Deng Xiaoping's "opening" evidently implied some degree of administrative reform, but such change was to be implemented by the party *nomenklatura* rather than against it. Deng's strategy was to co-opt party cadres to the cause of reform rather than to confront them with reforms that state and party vested interests would otherwise invariably attempt to block. Since the CCP could, at some point in the future, choose to undo Deng's "openness", the party was willing to concede him latitude to proceed with reform as long as success remained on the horizon. Deng's power was thus conditional on positive economic performance within a set of clearly circumscribed, albeit not entirely static, political parameters. Years prior to Mikhail Gorbachev's 1985 ascension to the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Deng Xiaoping was left with

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176 See, Clyde D. Stoltenberg, "China's Special Economic Zones: Their Development and Prospects", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 6, June 1984, 637–654.

177 See, Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *China Without Mao*, p. 168.

178 See, June Teufel Dreyer, "Deng Xiaoping: The Soldier", *The China Quarterly*, No. 135, September 1993, pp. 536–550.

no alternative but to stipulate the fundamental bounds of China's reform model. Clearly then, the limits of acceptable reform were defined a full decade before the Tiananmen protesters began to demand extensive liberal "political reforms" that Deng was simply unable (and, most likely, unwilling) to grant.

Marking a symbolic reconciliation with the country's tumultuous recent past, the Fifth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, meeting during 23/29 February 1980, rehabilitated Liu Shaoqi, the state president that had died in 1969 from injuries inflicted by Red Guards. Rehabilitating such a prominent Mao adversary and victim of the Cultural Revolution amounted to nothing less than a very public rebuke of the Chairman's complicity with the economic devastation, generalized persecutions and violence of the period<sup>179</sup>. Given long political association with Liu, Liu's post-mortem rehabilitation was, also, a political statement conveying the "correctness" of Deng's reforms and the establishment of a historical lineage of those reforms with the policy choices pursued by Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi. In that sense, Liu Shaoqi's rehabilitation served to signal the type of leadership and policy shifts Deng and his coalition were seeking to implement.

Months later, from 30 August to 10 September 1980, the third session of the Fifth National People's Congress met in Beijing, complementing the critical personnel changes in the top leadership consummated during February's Fifth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee. Certain as to the cohesion of his party coalition, Deng resigned his vice-premiership, a move designed for force the "voluntary resignation" of several revolutionaries of the older generation, including Li Xiannian, Chen Yun, Xu Xiangqian and Wang Zhen<sup>180</sup>. This "voluntary" resignation of party elders enabled Deng, retaining control of the crucial Central Military Commission, to place his allies in power in party and state and thus "remove actual and potential obstacles to reform"<sup>181</sup>. The most significant of these alterations was the naming of Deng protégé and economic reform supporter Hu Yaobang as General Secretary. One of the victims of this renovation process was Hua Guofeng, virtually powerless at this point, substituted as Premier by Zhao Ziyang. Described by Deng as his "left and right hands", Hu and Zhao were promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee, the summit of party and state.

Having secured his power-base, Deng Xiaoping, throughout the 1980s, came to rely on Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang to carry out "reform and openness"<sup>182</sup>. From his post

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179 Philip Short, in his biography of Mao Zedong, makes a damning judgment of the Chairman's responsibility in Liu Shaoqi's death: "The Chairman did not give a direct order for Liu's death, any more than he ordered the deaths of He Long or Tao Zhu, or of Peng Dehuai who died several years later in a prison hospital. But he did not move a finger to prevent them". See, Philip Short. *Mao: A Life*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999, p. 585.

180 See, Lowell Dittmer, "Patterns of Elite Strife and Succession in Chinese Politics", *The China Quarterly*, No. 123, September 1990, pp. 405-430.

181 See, Michael Dillon, *Deng Xiaoping*, p. 258.

182 A critical document to understanding Hu's role is his report to the 1982 Twelfth Party Congress, see, Hu Yaobang, "Create a New Situation in all Fields of Socialist Modernization – Report to the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, September 1, 1982, *Beijing Review*, Vol. 25, No. 37, September 13, 1982, pp. 11-40.

as General Secretary of the CCP, Hu was tasked with shoring support for Deng among the cadres that had risen to prominence during the Cultural Revolution. Some of these, still clinging to Maoist egalitarianism and class struggle, were co-opted; others were substituted by more reliable advocates of reform. Premier Zhao assumed responsibility for the state apparatus charged with implementing reform policy and, later, would replace Hu Yaobang as CCP General Secretary. Gradually, Deng and his allies came to dominate the party apparatus, a process culminating in the CCP's November 1987 Thirteenth Congress. As the 1980s came to a close, both men ran afoul of the conservative hard-liners. As the economic reforms intensified, both also diverged with Deng's incrementalism and came to view extensive political reform as a necessity if national development was to meet with success. Unsurprisingly, given their doubts relative to the Chinese Communist Party's continued monopoly of power, both men suffered the same fate: Deng Xiaoping dismissed Hu in early 1987 and Zhao, accused of being excessively lenient with the Tiananmen protesters, in May 1989.

By the mid 1980's, the spectacular growth produced by Deng's reforms was accompanied by price increases, inflation and generalized corruption. In 1985 alone, China witnessed 20 percent growth in industrial production<sup>183</sup>. Perhaps not unexpectedly, such impressive growth was accompanied by a bleaker trend: "bursts of inflation increased the cost of basic necessities by 30 percent in the early months of 1985, depressing the living standards of the less affluent sectors of the urban population, especially factory workers and lower-level governmental employees"<sup>184</sup>. A tsunami of foreign investment, an explosion of consumer goods and a regime signaling that "to get rich was glorious" (the simplified version of Deng's "let some people get rich first") made for an environment propitious for rampant corruption. In short, "because the market reforms that sparked China's economic dynamism were not accompanied by a regulatory framework or fundamental political reforms of the Communist party-state, they gave rise to rampant corruption, growing social inequalities, regional disparities, and widespread environmental pollution"<sup>185</sup>. A centralized, bureaucratic state with an entangling web of Kafkaesque regulations stimulated official corruption and, consequently, a surge in social discontentment. As debate mounted over the form of addressing popular dissatisfaction, deep cleavages were produced within the top leadership tier of the Chinese Communist Party.

Against this backdrop, the Thirteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was held in Beijing from 25 October to 1 November 1987. The party congress reaffirmed the "correctness" of Deng's "openness and reform" approach adopted during the December 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee. In addition to validating Deng's broad orientation, the Thirteenth Congress proved to be a watershed as

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183 See, Maurice Meisner. *Mao's China and After. A History of the People's Republic*, (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press, 1999, pp. 484-485.

184 *Ibid*, p. 485.

185 See, John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Second Enlarged Edition), p. 410.

the CCP leadership was further renovated by way of yet more “voluntarily resignations” of elder party cadres. In a replay of the 1980 Third Session of the National People’s Congress, notorious opponents of reform such as Peng Chen, Chen Yun and Li Xianni-an retired from their posts. Generational renovation also swept the Politburo, as nine of its twenty members were, for all intents and purposes, forcibly retired from that crucial leadership body. Seeking to set the example, Deng, retaining the crucial chairmanship of the Central Military Commission but refusing all formal posts, elevated Zhao Ziyang to first vice-chairman. Subject to a titanic political reversal, the conservatives succeeded in maintaining Li Peng on the Politburo Standing Committee. Concomitantly, Hu Guofeng, although allowed to conserve his seat on the Central Committee, was deprived of his scant, remaining power.

Deng Xiaoping’s decade-long quest to dominate the Chinese Communist Party had come to fruition at the Thirteenth Congress. Yet the gathering witnessed another sea-change when the main report to the Congress, delivered by General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, “reiterated the party’s policy on intensifying and expanding economic reforms and outlined ways for political restructuring”<sup>186</sup>. Claiming that China entered the “primary stage” of socialism and that the CCP was building “socialism with Chinese features through practice”, Zhao added that such an undertaking “in a big, backward Eastern country like China is something new in the history of the development of Marxism”<sup>187</sup>. We are not in the situation envisaged by the founders of Marxism, in which socialism is built on the basis of highly developed capitalism, nor are we in exactly the same situation as other socialist countries. So we cannot blindly follow what the books say, nor can we mechanically imitate the examples of other countries”<sup>188</sup>. The full implication of these words had been revealed days before the opening of the Congress when, meeting with Arthur Dunkel, director general of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Zhao affirmed that “only about 30 percent of China’s economy will remain subject to central planning in two or three years time”<sup>189</sup>. The message was clear: China’s path would deviate significantly from the “really existing socialism” of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

To confront the challenges posed by the building of a unique “socialism with Chinese features”, the party was charged with rationalizing bureaucratic regulations and procedures stifling growth. Political reform was to be surgical, aimed at making the Chinese state responsive to the exigencies of economic reform<sup>190</sup>. Zhao describes the

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186 For the full Report, see, Zhao Ziyang, “Advance Along the Road of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics – Report Delivered at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 25, 1987”, *Beijing Review*, Vol. 30, No. 45, November 9-15, 1987, pp. i-xxvii. See, also, Lev P. Deliusin, “Reforms in China: Problems and Prospects”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 11, November 1988, pp. 1101-1106.

187 See, Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 218-220.

188 See, Zhao Ziyang, “Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics – Report Delivered at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 25, 1987”, p. iv.

189 See, “Planning to Rule Only 30% of Economy”, *Beijing Review*, Vol. 30, No. 45, November 9-15, 1987, p. 6.

190 See, Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 220-222.

process by suggesting that “(E)conomic structure makes reform of the political structure increasingly urgent. The process of developing a socialist commodity economy should also involve the building of a socialist democracy. Without reform of the political structure, reform of the economic structure cannot succeed in the end. The Central Committee of the Party believes that it is high time to put reform of the political structure on the agenda for the whole Party”<sup>191</sup>. However, developing “socialist democracy” was not synonymous with developing liberal, bourgeois democracy; instead, it was understood as state reform with a view to maximizing economic efficiency. Leaving no margin for doubt, Zhao warned that “(N)either can we interpret reform and the open policy as something bourgeois liberal, lest we deviate from the path of socialism. In the primary stage when the country is still underdeveloped, the tendency towards bourgeois liberalization, which rejects the socialist system in favor of capitalism, will persist for a long time”<sup>192</sup>.

For all intents and purposes, China’s backwardness, its “primary stage”, actually raised the specter of increased demands for bourgeois democracy. Concomitant with Deng’s reforms social dislocation increased, repression loosened and a new class demanding a national voice arose. Until socialism was fully consolidated, Western, liberal democracy remained a threat that the CCP would therefore have to guard against. Considering that Zhao would become the principal political victim of the Tiananmen Spring, the formulation, outlined a little more than a year before the squashing of the protestors, actually contributed to legitimizing the use of force against the demonstrators in June 1989. In an ironic twist, Zhao seemed to be confirming the “modernization theory” that, a few years later, would guide American presidents (particularly Bill Clinton) in their drive to absorb China into a globalized world. Yet by the time Clinton entered the White House, the possibility of the regime democratizing had since passed. The CCP would extend its party membership to new societal groups and, in this fashion, party meetings replaced the streets as arenas for the articulation of new interests. In line with Samuel Huntington’s views, the institutions avoided decay by absorbing new social demands. Perhaps looking for institutional change at the state level, the West failed to appreciate that CCP’s opening, the effective creation of a “party of the whole people”, was actually more important than change at the state level. After all, the state was subordinate to the party.

Practically a decade after the initiation of the Deng era, Zhao’s theoretical formulation was meant to assure the party as to the continuity of the reform process within the parameters of CCP-led socialist construction. That assurance was provided in the following terms: “Adherence to the four cardinal principles – that is, keeping to the socialist road

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191 Zhao Ziyang, “Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics – Report Delivered at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 25, 1987”, p. xv.

192 Zhao Ziyang, “Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics – Report Delivered at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 25, 1987”, p. vi.

and upholding the people's dictatorship, leadership by the Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought – is the foundation underlying all our efforts to build the country. Adherence to the general principle of reform and the open policy has been a new development of our Party's line since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee and has added to the four cardinal principles new content appropriate to our time"<sup>193</sup>. The formula captured Deng Xiaoping's incremental approach to change while simultaneously excluding any rupture with fundamental CCP principles. The essential continuity of the system was unquestionable, but it was possible to tweak it so as to make it economically more efficient through the introduction of market mechanisms. Irrespective of unfounded Western expectations that China was gradually "evolving" toward capitalism and liberal democracy, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" would continue to be socialism under one-party rule. As a matter of fact, only the party was capable of guiding reform while preserving social stability and "socialism". The alternative to the CCP's monopoly of power was capitalist restoration and the inevitable social instability that could ultimately terminate in the country's dismemberment.

Not explicitly addressed in Zhao's report, Mao's political and ideological legacy was, by this point, generally summed up in the formulation "Mao was 70 percent right, and 30 percent wrong". The formula gained currency and became a sort of shorthand assessment of the Mao years. Essentially, it suggests that Chairman Mao was "right" in unifying China under a centralized state, in attributing a central leadership role to the CPP and in backing early PRC economic policy developed by Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. In contrast, the 30 percent "wrong" stemmed from the Chairman's dogmatic insistence on ideological struggle and its consequences: primarily, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, episodes during which ideology and class struggle were elevated over sensible economic management. The 70/30 assessment also reconciled two politically key objectives. On the one hand, a critical appreciation of Mao was necessary to legitimize Deng's reforms. On the other hand, a full debunking of Mao would undermine the very legitimacy of the CCP and the PRC, both inseparable from Mao's ideological and personal legacy. Squaring the circle, the Deng leadership celebrated Mao's contribution to the founding of the state, to securing the party's guiding role, as well as to the pragmatic economic management undertaken at specific points in time. All that was associated with the political and economic catastrophes of the Great Leap Forward and the cultural Revolution was ejected. Quite naturally, the 70 percent "right" provided the politico-ideological cover needed by Deng and his allies to continue along the reformist path.

An important consequence of the orientation defined at the Thirteenth Congress was Zhao Ziyang's strategy for coastal economic development, unveiled in early 1988. To the chagrin of the increasingly dissatisfied conservative, hardline wing of the party,

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193 Zhao Ziyang, "Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics – Report Delivered at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 25, 1987", p. vi.

the strategy posited that the country's coastal areas, whose drivers were the SEZs, were to expand export-oriented manufacturing. This alteration was deemed feasible due to China's vast abundance of labor, particularly the dislocation of workers from rural to urban areas. There were, of course, resistances to a strategy that presupposed an end to Maoist "self-reliance" as the country was forced to procure commodities in international markets. A greater reliance on foreign commodities provoked apprehensions over the vulnerabilities inherent to globalized supply chains, particularly since there was no way of knowing if the world economy would absorb China's output or if protectionist measures would be imposed against Chinese goods.

Deng's 1992 "southern tour" would overcome these concerns and re-launch "reform and openness" in the aftermath of the conservative backlash following the 1989 Tiananmen Spring. During the tour, Deng, having garnered the military's backing, challenged the hardliners by calling for the party to deepen economic reforms by replacing "politics in command" with "economics in command"<sup>194</sup>. Upturning the Maoist understanding of the primacy of political struggle over economics, went on the offensive against the conservative ideologues grouped around Li Peng that had systematically sought to undo reform. Yet Deng sought to assure the party by reiterating that "(T)here is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy"<sup>195</sup>. In effect, "markets" were "socialist markets" to be employed in the "construction of socialism", under the guidance of the CCP, a position that has been upheld by all subsequent CPP leaders. The "southern tour" was to be the paramount leader's last decisive contribution to Chinese politics.

Still, the stability at the top of the leadership group exhibited at the Thirteenth Congress was not to last long. Having substituted Hua Guofeng as Chairman of the CCP in 1981, Hu Yaobang became General Secretary when the chairmanship was abolished the following year. A veteran of the Long March and, in one excessively charitable description, "one of those rare leaders of a Leninist party who had come to champion democratic values and procedures", Hu was encircled by hard-liners criticizing him for being indulgent with pro-democracy demonstrators and for his outreach to Japan<sup>196</sup>. Hu finally resigned on 15 January 1987, replaced as General Secretary by Zhao Ziyang. Accumulating the post of General Secretary, head of the party, with that of Premier (head of government), Zhao's influence transformed him into the country's most senior ad-

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194 See, Xing Li, "From 'Politics in Command' to 'Economics in Command': A Discourse Analysis of China's Transformation", *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, 18 August 2005, pp. 65-87, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279680382\\_From\\_'Politics\\_in\\_Command'\\_to\\_'Economics\\_in\\_Command'\\_A\\_Discourse\\_Analysis\\_of\\_China's\\_Transformation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279680382_From_'Politics_in_Command'_to_'Economics_in_Command'_A_Discourse_Analysis_of_China's_Transformation). For additional background on this issue, see, Stuart R. Schram, "Economics in Command? Ideology and Policy Since the Third Plenum, 1978-1984", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 99, September 1984, pp. 417-461.

195 The statement, made in an October 1985 interview to *Time* magazine, is reproduced in, "There is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy", *China Daily*, October 21, 2010, available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2010-10/21/content\\_29714520.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2010-10/21/content_29714520.htm).

196 Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, pp. 483-484.

vocate of Deng's reforms and the paramount leader's likely successor. Yet, he too would soon be forced to abandon his leadership posts as the anti-reformist rollback intensified. In November 1987, Politburo member Li Peng, spokesman for the more conservative sectors of the party, assumed the premiership and began to challenge Zhao's liberal orientations and authority. When the hard-liners finally forced Zhao's removal in the Spring of 1989, Deng Xiaoping lost the last of his "left and right hands" and the CPP reformist wing lost its most prominent spokesman.

## Big Brother Goes Rogue

In May 1989, forty years after the last Soviet leader visited China, Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in Beijing for a four-day trip to restore normality to the bilateral relationship. That visit was to be anything but routine. Immediately before Gorbachev's arrival, protestors took to Tiananmen Square, swelling to two hundred thousand by the time Gorbachev reached the city. As the protestors expressed their support for the Soviet leader in defiance of the authorities' order to evacuate Tiananmen Square, the scheduled red carpet ceremony was cancelled. The regime had been made to endure a tremendous loss of face. After Gorbachev's visit, indicating that the CCP would not share the fate of the CPSU and the European sister parties, on the night of June 4 troops were sent into Tiananmen Square to quell the demonstrations. The Beijing Spring came to an abrupt, tragic end<sup>197</sup>.

To this day, the Soviet reform process launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid 1980s remains a highly pertinent matter for the CCP leadership. Evaluating the dismal outcome of that historical experiment with reform, Xi Jinping asserted that "the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was nevertheless a great party, was dissolved like a flock of sparrows... This is the lesson we retain from the errors of the past"<sup>198</sup>. Xi's words left no room for misunderstanding: he would not be cast as a Chinese Gorbachev. Following in Deng Xiaoping's footsteps, the new "core leader" was unambiguously outlining the limits of "reform" within the broad parameters of "socialism with Chinese characteristics"; that is, Xi too was excluding any substantial process of "liberal, bourgeois" political reform. Xi's remarks essentially reiterated what had been the CCP's

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197 On the Tiananmen crisis, see, *inter alia*, Lowell Dittmer, "The Tiananmen Massacre", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 38, No. 5, September/October 1989, pp. 2-15; Andrew J. Nathan, "The Political Sociology of the Beijing Upheaval of 1989", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 38, No. 5, September/October 1989, pp. 16-29; Richard H. Yang (ed.). *PLA and the Tiananmen Crisis*. Kaohsiung: SCPS Papers, No. 1, October 1989; Timothy Brook. *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998; Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link (eds.). *The Tiananmen Papers*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 2001; Louisa Lim. *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*. Oxford Oxford University Press, 2001 and Philip Cunningham. *Tiananmen Moon: Inside the Chinese Student Uprising of 1989*. Landham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009.

198 See, François Bougon. *Inside the Mind of Xi Jinping*. London: C. Hurst and Co., 2018, p. 39.

long-standing position. His predecessor, Hu Jintao, in September 2004, immediately prior to replacing Jiang Zemin as head of the Central Military Commission, similarly excluded reform susceptible of eroding the CPP's monopoly of power and openly acknowledged that Western, liberal democracy was a "dead-end" for the People's Republic of China<sup>199</sup>.

Even so, as Xi assumed the leadership of the CCP, Western media tended to portray him as a Gorbachev-like reformer prepared to democratize China's communist autocracy. For instance, John Simpson, a senior BBC foreign correspondent, present at the CCP's November 2012 Eighteenth Congress, likened the gathering to the decisive June 1988 Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and confessed to being struck by the parallels between Xi and Gorbachev. Extending the analogy, Simpson, judging the country "on the verge of radical change", added that "(I)n the Soviet bloc in 1988, most intellectuals felt divorced from the processes of formal Marxist-Leninist politics. And very soon the old, brittle system had cracked because of its utter lack of relevance to the lives of real people"<sup>200</sup>. Despite all else, Simpson was correct in observing that any meaningful discussion versing contemporary China must invariably begin with an obvious fact: the PRC is a communist autocracy led by a party unwilling to abandon the fundamental tenets of Leninism, including "democratic centralism" and the party's "leading role". Simpson failed to appreciate that, irrespective of the CCP's pragmatism, the party's monopoly of power is a non-negotiable red line that cannot be crossed by any leadership group nor by any "core" leader, irrespective of his power.

Media accounts infrequently examine the ruling party's historical legacy and ideological specificities, as if these were inconsequential matters bearing no relevance to contemporary Chinese politics. The minimization of the ideological profile of the Chinese regime should, perhaps, not be entirely surprising. As a matter of fact, the first serious Western account of Mao and the CCP, Edgar Snow's 1937 *Red Star Over China*, the journalist, while not negating Mao's communist convictions, rather naively portrayed the communists as agrarian reformers rather than violent revolutionaries<sup>201</sup>. Failure to acknowledge the elementary nature of the CCP all too often leads to the erroneous conclusion that the country is a capitalist (or a state capitalist) economy on the path to political democratization. China, in effect, is a communist autocracy whose market mechanisms are insufficient to characterize the country as a market economy. If the CCP does not preside over a market economy, neither does it oversee a traditional authoritarian regime susceptible to gradual liberalization terminating in democratization

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199 See, "China – What price reform?" *The Economist*, September 23, 2004, accessed at: <https://www.economist.com/asia/2004/09/23/what-price-reform>.

200 See, John Simpson, "New leader Xi Jinping opens door to reform in China", *The Guardian*, August 10, 2013, accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/10/china-xi-jinping-opens-door-reform>.

201 See, Edgar Snow. *Red Star over China: The Classic Account of the Birth of Chinese Communism* (Revised Edition). New York: Grove Press, 1968.

as theorized by mainstream political science<sup>202</sup>. The PRC continues to build socialism under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party and barring seismic changes to the party's organization and self-understanding, regime change is therefore unlikely unless it occurs through cataclysmic collapse. The party's historical, steadfast rejection of political reform generated an impasse that cannot be superseded without major, regime-threatening disruption. Gradualist change in the direction of liberalism and pluralist politics has ceased to be possible.

Until the final dissolution of Soviet power, most practitioners of the dark arts of Sovietology disparaged studies highlighting the importance of ideology, particularly when the findings were expressed in the language of totalitarianism<sup>203</sup>. Authors of these studies were derided in the academy and the media, usually dismissed as ranting cold warriors<sup>204</sup>. At the same time, "revisionists" influenced by "convergence theory" argued that the Soviet system was capable of successful reform and persistence<sup>205</sup>. When reality finally imposed itself, many were surprised to discover that the regime's ideological frame of reference was a – indeed, *the* – crucial element for understanding Soviet behavior<sup>206</sup>. In relation to China, the same blinders lead to unrealistic policy choices such as engagement and democracy promotion. Unless ideology is placed at the core of analysis of Chinese behavior, the country and its regime remain either impenetrable enigmas or unending sources of frustrated expectations.

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202 Juan Linz defined authoritarian regimes as: "Political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones". See, Juan J. Linz, "An Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Spain", in Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan (eds.). *Mass Politics: Studies in Political Sociology*. New York: Free Press, 1970, p. 255.

203 On totalitarianism, see, *inter alia*, Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968; Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski. *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (2nd rev. ed.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965; Abbot Gleason. *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995 and Leonard Schapiro. *Totalitarianism*. New York: Praeger, 1972. For an interesting discussion, see, Matt Killingsworth. *Civil Society in Communist Eastern Europe: Opposition and Dissent in Totalitarian Regimes*. Colchester: ECPR Press, 2012. A stimulating study arguing for the applicability of the totalitarian model to post-Mao China is: Sujian Guo. *Post-Mao China: From Totalitarianism to Authoritarianism*. Westport: Praeger, 2000.

204 One of these scholars, Richard Pipes, relates a number of such incidents. See, Richard Pipes. *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, pp. 224-225.

205 Some of the better "revisionist" works on the Gorbachev reforms and their significance include: Stephen F. Cohen. *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; Timothy J. Colton. *The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1986 and Jerry F. Hough. *Russia and the West: Gorbachev and the Politics of Reform*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

206 See, for example, Martin Malia, "From Under the Rubble, What?", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 41, No. 2, January-April 1992, pp. 89-95 and Peter Rutland, "Sovietology: Notes for a Post-Mortem", *The National Interest*, No. 31, Spring 1993, pp. 109-122. For an opposing view, see, George Breslauer, "In Defense of Sovietology", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1992, pp. 197-238.

Cold War “end of history” triumphalism and the “unipolar moment” fostered post-ideological narratives negating the centrality of ideology<sup>207</sup>. However, in more recent times, attention has, once again, been recast on the centrality of ideology. An indication of the extent to which the matter is assuming a pivotal role in foreign policy circles is provided by Mike Pompeo’s October 2019 “China speech” delivered at the Hudson Institute. During that address, Donald Trump’s Secretary of State affirmed that “it is no longer realistic to ignore the fundamental differences between our two systems and the impact, the impact that those two systems have, the differences in those systems have on American national security”, adding that “we’re finally realizing the degree to which the Chinese Communist Party is truly hostile to the United States and our values, and its worse deeds and words and how they impact us”<sup>208</sup>. Pompeo’s perspective coincides with those of other leading Trump Administration officials and republican elders<sup>209</sup>. Indicative of a “new normal” in Sino-American relations, the turn to ideology also coincides with the emphasis Xi Jinping, perhaps the most ideologically driven leader since Mao Zedong, places on the matter<sup>210</sup>.

Comprehending contemporary, post-Deng Chinese communism and the CCP’s shrewd understanding and employment of power requires a prior examination of Beijing’s reading of Mikhail Gorbachev’s failed attempt to reform the Soviet Union in the late 1980s<sup>211</sup>. That reading does not correspond to Western interpretations of Gorbachev as a courageous reformer whose peaceful dismantling of the USSR opened the way for Russia’s

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207 See, Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, No.16, Summer 1989, pp. 3-18. For one of the numerous rebuttals to Fukuyama, see Robert Kagan. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. New York: Knopf, 2008. Surprisingly, Charles Krauthammer’s highly influential “The Unipolar Moment” article was virtually silent about China’s role in the unipolar moment. In that article, Krauthammer resumes his view in the following words: “There is today no lack of second-rank powers. Germany and Japan are economic dynamos. Britain and France can deploy diplomatic and to some extent military assets. The Soviet Union possesses several elements of power – military, diplomatic and political – but all are in rapid decline. There is but one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival it”. See, Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, Winter 1990/1991, p. 24. In an article published ten years later, China warrants a significant amount of Krauthammer’s attention. See, Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited”, *The National Interest*, No. 70, Winter 2002/03, pp. 5-17.

208 See, “2019 Herman Kahn Award Remarks: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on the China Challenge”, delivered at the Hudson Institute, October 30, 2019, available at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Transcript\\_Secretary%20Mike%20Pompeo%20Hudson%20Award%20Remarks.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Transcript_Secretary%20Mike%20Pompeo%20Hudson%20Award%20Remarks.pdf).

209 A good example is the recent book by Newt Gingrich, a former Speaker of the House. See, Newt Gingrich. *Trump vs. China: Facing America’s Greatest Threat*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019.

210 See, “Xi stresses ideological and political education in schools”, *Xinhua*, March 18, 2019, accessed at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/18/c\\_137905379.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/18/c_137905379.htm); Jamil Anderlini, “The return of Mao: a new threat to China’s politics”, *Financial Times*, September 29, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.ft.com/content/63a5a9b2-85cd-11e6-8897-2359a58ac7a5>; and, Jie Lu, “Ideological and Political Education in China’s Higher Education”, *East Asian Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2017, pp. 78-91.

211 The literature on Mikhail Gorbachev and the reform process by him initiated is, of course, voluminous. The definite Gorbachev political biography is William Taubman. *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2017. On the Soviet experience contextualizing Gorbachev’s reforms, see, *inter alia*, Mikhail Geller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich. *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*. New York: Summit Books, 1982; Moshe Lewin. *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*:

democratic experiment; rather, “in China Gorbachev is viewed as a disaster – and a cautionary tale”<sup>212</sup>. For Beijing’s communist mandarins, developments transpiring in Gorbachev’s Soviet Union and in the European “really existing socialism” states underscored the colossal dangers wrought by political reform. In light of China’s turbulent experience during the latter Qing years and the republican period, the implosion of the Soviet state and the concomitant disintegration of the Russo/Soviet empire constituted an ominous warning. The crumbling of Soviet power sparked the fragmentation of the empire as the center became incapable of maintaining its hold over the regions. The centrifugal forces unleashed by Gorbachev’s democratization program led to the weakening of the CPSU’s heretofore undisputed power. If the CCP pursued the type of reformist path tread by Soviet communists, similar outcomes would be produced in a country historically beleaguered by weak central authority and the threat of territorial dismemberment<sup>213</sup>.

Soviet reform was a top-down policy choice, launched by the party leadership and forced upon the broader society. Gorbachev’s reform agenda was sequenced: economic restructuring (*perestroika*) preceded political openness (*glasnost*). As the former floundered and evinced unequivocal signs of failure, the latter was intensified<sup>214</sup>. Frustrated by opposition to *perestroika* from within the ranks of the CPSU, Gorbachev sought to subdue party opposition by deepening liberalization and appealing to extra-party mobilization. Arriving at a crossroads between accelerating the pace and extension of economic reform or seeing it fail, Gorbachev decided to open the political sphere to civil society, placing politics beyond the strict confines of the party. As *glasnost* became practically unmanageable due to increasingly vocal contestation of the ideological underpinnings of the communist system, particularly in the wake of the renewed 1986 “destalinization” campaign, a window opened, and was rapidly seized, for contestation of the CPSU’s monopoly on power. Once the party’s leading role was compromised, the entire communist edifice ceased to be viable and power dissipated.

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A Historical Interpretation. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988; Zbigniew Brzezinski. The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1989; Alec Nove. An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991. London: Penguin Books, 1992; Martin Malia. The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991. New York: The Free Press, 1994; John L. H. Keep. Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union, 1945-1991. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Christopher Read. The Making and Breaking of the Soviet System: An Interpretation. New York: Palgrave, 2001; Stephen Kotkin. Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; and, Serhii Plokhy. The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union. New York: Basic Books, 2014

212 See, Matt Schiavenza, “Where is China’s Gorbachev?” The Atlantic, August 14, 2013, accessed at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/08/where-is-chinas-gorbachev/278605/>.

213 For a comparison of the reform processes in the PRC and USSR, see, Minxin Pei. From Reform to Revolution. The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. On the Soviet reaction to events in China, see, Alexander Lukin, “The Initial Soviet Reaction to the Events in China in and the Prospects for Sino-Soviet Relations”, The China Quarterly, Vol. 125 / No. 1, March 1991, pp. 119-136.

214 See, Chris Miller. The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

In broad strokes, the process played out in the USSR was virtually identical to the wave of change enveloping Eastern Europe, where the communist parties capitulated before the protestors taking to the streets throughout 1989. The choice not to resort to an expressive use of force emboldened the opposition and communist rule became untenable as the Marxist-Leninist parties, in Xi's words, "dissolved like a flock of sparrows"<sup>215</sup>. Xi's characterization is somewhat misleading since Gorbachev, unlike most European communist leaders, did not go down without a fight. He attempted, particularly after Fall 1990, to ride the tiger and pursue reform within the parameters of the country's federal constitutional framework. In fact, the August 1991 hardline coup was sparked by Gorbachev's intention to sign a new Union Treaty. Prior to that event, Gorbachev did resort to violence: in Georgia in 1989, Azerbaijan in 1990 and Lithuania in 1991. He did not, however, authorize force to disperse demonstrators congregating in the streets of Moscow in 1990 and early 1991.

By the Summer of 1991, the loyalty of the military was no longer assured even if the choice to resort to violence had been made. Boris Yeltsin's mobilization of sectors of the police and the armed forces to counter the August 1991 coup exposed the profound cleavages within the ranks of the military. The key moment of the Soviet process appears to have occurred in the Fall of 1990, with the approval of the reforms outlined in Stanislav Shatalin's radical 500-day-plan<sup>216</sup>. Mikhail Gorbachev backtracked from supporting the plan when tensions between conservatives and reformers became impossible to reconcile within the CPSU. But it was too late since the defection of the conservatives from Gorbachev's coalition in protest against the Shatalin plan definitively isolated the Soviet leader. The failed August 1991 coup evinced Gorbachev's estrangement from both the conservative putschists and the liberal reformers rallying around Boris Yeltsin on the streets of Moscow. From that point forth, Gorbachev's political demise was virtually preordained.

It was precisely the path trodden by the European communist parties, culminating in the loss of their monopoly of power, that the Chinese leadership was determined to avoid as it fought to reconcile Deng's reformism with the leading role of the party. How, then, was it possible to preempt popular challenges to party rule as the society became more complex and demanding as a consequence of economic development? How was the political sphere to be isolated from dynamics provoking destabilizing social change produced by rapid modernization? Cognizant of the tremendous repercussions generated by Soviet and East European reformism, other ruling communist parties faced the same conundrum: how to reform without sparking regime collapse. The complex puzzle needed to be worked out in Beijing, but also in Havana, Hanoi, Vientiane and Pyongyang.

These issues were all too familiar to the CCP leadership; indeed, they were a source of concern for decades prior to the events that swept the European communist parties

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215 See, François Bougon. *Inside the Mind of Xi Jinping*, p. 39.

216 On this matter, see, Merton J. Peck and Thomas J. Richardson (eds.). *What Is To Be Done? Proposals for the Soviet Transition to the Market*. New Haven. Yale University Press, 1991.

from power in the *annus mirabilis* of 1989. Much earlier, reflecting on the French Revolution, Alexis de Tocqueville identified the paradox, observing that, “generally speaking, the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways”, because “it is not always when things are going from bad to worse that revolutions break out”<sup>217</sup>. In 1968, Samuel Huntington addressed the same dilemma in his *Political Order in Changing Societies*<sup>218</sup>. Although not the first political scientist to analyze the issues of order, change and modernization, Huntington advanced a critical insight: change *per se* did not generate instability; rather it was the pace of change and institutional responses to mobilization produced by new social forces that made the difference. Political “decay” took root when, over a long period, social mobilization outpaced institutional adaptation. In contradistinction, when institutions are afforded sufficient time to change so as to absorb new societal demands, regime collapse becomes avoidable. Starting with Deng Xiaoping, the CCP addressed the issue by attempting to contain popular mobilization by delivering strong economic performance at the same that institutional adaptation was undertaken with a view to enhance state capacity<sup>219</sup>. Under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the CCP broadened considerably its membership, opening the party to new sectors and social groups that, fundamentally, articulated new interests within the party’s structures. In a sense, corporatist “interest group politics” began to be articulated within the confines of the CCP rather than through the streets or through electoral politics<sup>220</sup>. More recently, the regime has chosen to extend the scope of social control by way of mass surveillance and “social credit”<sup>221</sup>.

Two disparate factors converged to consolidate the CCP leadership’s rejection of broad “political reform”: the disintegration of communist rule in Europe and the Soviet Union and, no less critical, the tremendous costs associated with past CPP factionalism. Hu Yaobang’s death – on April 15, one week after suffering a heart attack during a Politburo meeting – sparked the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations. Once Hu’s death

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217 See, Alexis de Tocqueville. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. New York: Anchor Books, 1955, pp. 176-177.

218 See, Samuel P. Huntington. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

219 For a discussion, see, Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, “Performance Legitimacy, State Autonomy and China’s Economic Miracle”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24, No. 91, 2005, pp. 64-82, available at: <https://core.ac.uk/reader/87131480>.

220 See, for instance, Frederick C. Teiwes, “The Problematic Quest for Stability: Reflections on Succession, Institutionalization, Governability, and Legitimacy in Post-Deng China” In Hung-mao Tien and Yun-han Chu (eds.). *China under Jiang Zemin*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000 pp. 71-95; Zheng Yongnian, “Interest Representation and the Transformation of the Chinese Communist Party”, *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, 2002, pp. 57-85; Zheng Yongnian. *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, and Transformation*. New York: Routledge, 2010; Richard McGregor. *The Party: The Secret World of China’s Communist Rulers*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010 and Bruce J. Dickson. *The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Survival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

221 For a general discussion, see, Kai Strittmatter. *We Have Been Harmonized: Life in China’s Surveillance State*. Exeter: Old Street Publishing, 2019 and Xiao Qiang, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom: President Xi’s Surveillance State”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 30, No. 1, January 2019, pp. 53-67.

became public, Beijing students scheduled a march of homage for April 17, when some 4,000 made their way to Tiananmen Square. The following day, a group of perhaps one thousand students refused to leave the locale until members of the National People's Congress received their petition calling for a reevaluation of Hu Yaobang's role in recent events, the publication of the salaries of top party and state officials and their children, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and increased financial resources for students, instructors and educational initiatives. On April 22, the day of Hu's funeral service, authorities attempted but failed to bar the public from entering the square. Throughout the day the demonstrators swelled in number as attempts to disperse the crowds proved unfruitful. Thousands poured into the square and over a million people witnessed Hu's funeral ceremonies in the streets surrounding Tiananmen Square. Two days later, the students launched a boycott of classes.

Protests were not unprecedented in the post-Mao era; mass demonstrations had also occurred in 1976, 1978 and 1986. Yet, in 1989, Zhao Ziyang, General Secretary of the CCP, was viewed by the students as sympathetic to reform, a leader willing to dialogue with the protesters and transmit their demands to the party<sup>222</sup>. Nonetheless, by late April, signs of the leadership's exasperation with the protesters were clearly visible. Expressing the views of Premier Li Peng (and perhaps Deng Xiaoping) and the CCP hard-liners, a vehement People's Daily editorial branded the movement a "planned conspiracy", insinuating that foreign interests were sustaining the democracy movement<sup>223</sup>. As Beijing awaited the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in mid-May for a reconciliation summit ending the decades-old Sino-Soviet enmity, the warning did not demobilize the students and Tiananmen Square was transformed into a tent-city of thousands. Hunger strikes were initiated and the official Gorbachev welcoming ceremonies were canceled. As days became weeks, students began to call for the resignations of Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping.

Premier Li Peng finally acquiesced to meet with the hunger-strike leaders, but, as a result of temperamental and generational differences, the chasm between the parts remained unbridgeable<sup>224</sup>. On May 17 and 18, one million filled into Tiananmen Square and the surrounding streets. Against this backdrop, shortly before dawn on May 19, Zhao Ziyang visited the hunger strikers, attempting to convince them to end the protests. Meeting with failure, Zhao left the square in tears. Accompanying Zhao, Li Peng also briefly talked with the strikers but, predictably, made no pleas and no promises.

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222 Jonathan Spence suggests that "Zhao, for his part, may have seen the students' demonstrations as a potential political force that could strengthen his own party base and enable him to shunt aside Li Peng and perhaps even Deng Xiaoping himself. (In 1978 Deng Xiaoping had successfully used the Democracy Wall protests to cement his position against Hua Guofeng). See, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 740. See, also, Alfred L. Chan, "Power, Policy and Elite Politics under Zhao Ziyang", *The China Quarterly*, Vo. 203, No. 3, September 2010, pp. 708-718.

223 See, "It is Necessary to Take a Clear-cut Stand Against Disturbances", *People's Daily*, April 26, 1989, available at: <http://tsquare.tv/chronology/April26ed.html>.

224 For the transcript of the May 18 meeting, see, "Li Peng Holds Dialog With Students", available at: <http://tsquare.tv/chronology/May18mtg.html>.

The following day, on May 20, Premier Li Peng and PRC president Yang Shangkun placed the country under martial law. In the televised speech announcing the decision, Li Peng claimed the intent of the protestors was “precisely to organizationally subvert the CPC leadership, overthrow the people’s government elected by the People’s Congress in accordance with the law, and totally negate the people’s democratic dictatorship. They stir up trouble everywhere, establish secret ties, instigate the creation of all kinds of illegal organizations, and force the party, the people, and the government to recognize them”<sup>225</sup>. Then, in the small hours of June 4, troops isolated Tiananmen and ordered the evacuation of the square. As students complied and abandoned the site, the soldiers began to destroy the tents and the “liberty statue” that had become internationally recognizable. Soon after, the killing began.

The protest movement calling for openness and democratic change occupying Tiananmen Square in the Spring of 1989 was not restricted to the capital city; similar gatherings were organized in over one hundred cities throughout the country. Nor was regime contestation restricted to students exhorting radical change. Various social actors, including components of the urban working class and sectors of the military, including uniformed servicemen, took to the streets to openly manifest their discontentment. Neither were the protests motivated exclusively by political demands. Since the cost of living in the cities had outpaced salaries, the protests signaled dissatisfaction with the party’s economic management. The CCP Politburo decided to resort to the violent suppression of the democracy movement precisely because the protests were no longer confined to a handful of student agitators congregating in Tiananmen Square. Even more worrisome, the protests provoked deep cleavages within the highest echelons of the CCP leadership as it struggled to find the proper response<sup>226</sup>.

Echoing past episodes in party history, including the pervasive, destructive factionalism of the Cultural Revolution, CCP unity was visibly fraying as societal contestation intensified. Having arrived at such a perilous crossroads, Deng and his Politburo allies

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225 See, “Li Peng Delivers Important Speech on Behalf of Party Central Committee and State Council”, accessed at: <http://tsquare.tv/chronology/MartialLaw.html> In the same speech, prior to reaching this conclusion, Li Peng argued that the “party and government have pointed out time and time again that the vast numbers of young students are kindhearted, that subjectively they do not want turmoil, and that they have fervent patriotic spirit, wishing to push forward reform, develop democracy, and overcome corruption... However, willfully using various forms of demonstrations, boycotts of class, and even hunger strikes to make petitions have damaged social stability and will not be beneficial to solving the problems. Moreover, the situation has developed completely independent of the subjective wishes of the young students. More and more it is going in a direction that runs counter to their intentions. At present, it has become more and more clear that the very, very few people who attempt to create turmoil want to achieve, under the conditions of turmoil, precisely their political goals which they could not achieve through normal democratic and legal channels; to negate the CPC leadership and to negate the socialist system. They openly promoted the slogan of negating the opposition to bourgeois liberalization. Their goal is to gain absolute freedom to unscrupulously oppose the four cardinal principles. They spread many rumors, attacking, slandering, and abusing principal leaders of the party and state. At present, the spearhead has been focused on Comrade Deng Xiaoping, who has made tremendous contributions to our cause of reform and opening to the outside world”.

226 See, Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 175-252.

decided to pursue a survival strategy predicated on deepening repression. To preempt the type of generalized unrest that had overwhelmed Eastern European and Soviet authorities, the CCP was prepared to resort to levels of violence that European ruling parties had simply refused to contemplate. For all intents and purposes, Tiananmen was the Chinese Communist Party's drawing of a red line delimiting the frontiers of acceptable reform and dissent. Denunciations of corruption and calls for economic reform were acceptable as long as they did not veer into an open challenge of the underpinning's of the party's political authority. As for dissent, the Tiananmen massacre made it unequivocally clear that any movement seeking to break the CCP's monopoly of power would meet with brutal suppression. Indeed, thirty years later, the cost of dissidence continues to be extraordinarily steep, as illustrated by the case of Liu Xiaobo, a human rights activist and winner of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize<sup>227</sup>. In addition to such individual cases, Beijing's wide-scale, collective repression in Tibet and Xinjiang, facilitated by mass surveillance technologies and "reeducation camps", has intensified over the last few years and is now a "new normal".

Two weeks after the massacre, on June 19–21, an enlarged Politburo meeting was held to ratify Deng Xiaoping's decision to use the military at Tiananmen. Influential retired elders such as Bo Yibo and Peng Zhen were convoked to signal party unity and express their backing for Deng Xiaoping. Of course, such a public display of loyalty was also a means of compromising the leadership (and the retired elders) with the use of force. Two documents had laid the groundwork for the meeting: Deng's June 9 speech to the PLA soldiers that had squashed the Tiananmen demonstrations and, second, Li Peng's critical report of Zhao's behavior during the crisis<sup>228</sup>. The enlarged Politburo concluded that the demonstrations were a "disturbance" that metamorphosed into a "counterrevolutionary riot"<sup>229</sup>. Although the party elders suggested that the vast majority of the protestors were "misguided but not hostile to the regime", they also claimed that ideas of "bourgeois liberalization" and foreign powers "scheming" to overthrow party and regime had incited the students.

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227 Imprisoned for his role in the Tiananmen protests, Liu, in 2009, was sentenced to eleven years in prison for subversion. After soliciting and being denied authorization to travel abroad for medical treatment for terminal cancer, Liu died on July 13, 2017. See, Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh, "Brave New World Meets Nineteen Eighty-four in a New Golden Age: On the Passing of Liu Xiaobo, Advent of Big Data, and Resurgence of China as World Power", *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July/August 2018, pp. 593-764, available at: <http://rpb115.nsysu.edu.tw/var/file/131/1131/img/2374/113040557.pdf>.

228 See, Deng Xiaoping, "June 9 Speech to Martial Law Units", available at: <http://www.tsquare.tv/chronology/Deng.html>. In addition, Li Peng, "Full Text of Top-Secret Fourth Plenary Session Document: Li Peng's Life-Taking Report Lays Blame on Zhao Ziyang", *Chinese Law & Government*, 2005, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2005, pp. 69-84. For insightful discussion, see, Andrew J. Nathan, "The New Tiananmen Papers", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 4, July/August 2019, pp. 80-91 and Ian Johnson, "China's 'Black Week-end'", *The New York Review of Books*, June 27, 2019, pp. 34-37, available at: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/06/27/tiananmen-chinas-black-week-end>.

229 Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 431-437.

The blame for the “counterrevolutionary riot” was assigned to Deng’s former “left and right hands”. Some elders claimed that the lack of ideological vigilance responsible for the turn of events had actually began with Hu Yaobang. Zhao Ziyang had revealed himself incapable of reverting the deviation and his advocacy of a conciliatory approach and refusal to accept the decision to use force allowed events to spillover beyond acceptable boundaries of protest. Despite the vehemence of the criticism, Zhao, in effect, had never advocated multiparty political competition or liberal democracy. Rather, he had merely argued for greater regime decompression. To lend legitimacy to the CCP, he argued for greater press freedom, dialogue with the student protestors and a general loosening of the repressive state. A reformer he may have been, a revolutionary calling for the destruction of the system he was not. Zhao remained loyal to the party and, unlike Boris Yeltsin, did not climb onto a tank in solidarity with the demonstrators. His greatest act of defiance was smuggling out of China, while under house arrest until his death in 2005, a manuscript of his memoirs<sup>230</sup>.

A few days after the Politburo met, the party gathered its full Central Committee, together with other party notables, for the Fourth Plenum of the Thirteenth Central Committee<sup>231</sup>. Zhao’s successor as General Secretary, Jiang Zemin, pledged to unify the party and to seek advice from “the old generation of revolutionaries”. Revealingly, he claimed that Deng had never sought to undermine the CCP’s ideological discipline: “From 1979 to 1989, Comrade Xiaoping has repeatedly insisted on the need to expand the education and the struggle to firmly support the Four Cardinal Principles and oppose bourgeois liberalization. But these important views of Comrade Xiaoping were not thoroughly implemented”<sup>232</sup>. As Deng’s collaborators were being sacrificed to party hardliners, the paramount leader was spared. Following from Jiang’s evaluation, the party was henceforth to devote greater attention to upholding ideological orthodoxy<sup>233</sup>. In other words, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Spring, the CCP was to initiate a rollback of the limited ideological opening of the preceding years.

The need to resort to repression and the indispensability of maintaining ideological orthodoxy were lessons the party leaders drew from the Tiananmen crisis. But these were not the only lessons apprehended by the leadership. Most senior cadres subscribed to the view that the Chinese Communist Party was under permanent siege from foreign enemies colluding with domestic groups vulnerable to ideas imported from the bourgeois West. Indeed, from this point forth, the CCP increasingly looked to Chinese

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230 Cf., Zhao Ziyang *Prisoner of the State. The Secret Journal of Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang*. London: Simon and Schuster, 2009.

231 Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 437-447. Also, David L. Shambaugh, “The Fourth and Fifth Plenary Sessions of the 13th CCP Central Committee”, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 120, No 4, December 1989, pp. 852-862.

232 Andrew J. Nathan, “The New Tiananmen Papers”, pp. 87-88.

233 See, Bruce Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink: Jiang Zemin and China’s New Elite*. Berkeley University of California Press, 1998, 145-148.

tradition and nationalism to buttress its ideological hold on the society. Faced with such an onslaught from internal and external enemies, internal party divisions could not but constitute a clear and present danger to the CCP's monopoly of power and, as a corollary, to the survival of the PRC itself. Unsurprisingly then, most cadres concluded that, under these conditions, economic reform had to be subordinated to political demands, particularly the reinforcement of ideological discipline and social control. After 1989, the conservatives remained on the offensive for three years, until Deng made his 1992 "southern tour" to re-launch reform and replaced "politics in command" with "economics in command". Touring the Special Economic Zones, Deng, backed by the military, warned Jiang Zemin that "whoever is against reform must leave office"<sup>234</sup>. Advanced in age, Deng Xiaoping retained enough authority to oblige Jiang Zemin to resume economic liberalization. As for political liberalization, it remained a closed matter from that point forth.

Once the acceptable frontiers of dissent were fully delineated by the CCP, and having demonstrated the terrible consequences of overstepping those same frontiers, the party sought to minimize the sources of discontentment. Regime survival and persistence required the CCP to absorb change within clearly demarcated frontiers. The type of reformism pursued by Gorbachev, in short, came to symbolize all that was to be avoided. Perhaps for this reason, with the passage of time, CCP opinion relative to the Soviet leader actually hardened. For example, in September 2004, Hu Jintao denounced Gorbachev as "the chief culprit of Eastern Europe's transformation and a traitor of socialism", adding that "(B)ecause of the pluralism and openness he championed, Gorbachev caused confusion among the Soviet Communist Party and the people of the Soviet Union. The Party and the Union fell apart under the impact of 'Westernization' and 'bourgeois liberalism' that he implemented"<sup>235</sup>. Arguable from a historical perspective, Hu's reading is nevertheless indicative of the broad political lessons apprehended by the CCP leadership in the Spring of 1989.

From the prism of the Chinese Communist Party, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, following the CPSU's illegalization in the immediate aftermath of the aborted August 1991 hardline putsch, demonstrated conclusively that socialist construction, as defined by the CPSU, had failed. Frequently denounced by the Soviet "big brothers", the CCP's path to socialism emerged as the sole survivor of the historical dispute between the two Marxist-Leninist parties. The CPSU's demise also put a definitive end to Moscow's tutelage over the international communist movement. As a consequence, the solidarity extended to the USSR by the "fraternal parties" was, in most cases, transferred to the Chinese Communist Party. The failure of Lenin's party to build socialism in the

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234 Hugh Peyman. *China's Change: The Greatest Show On Earth*. London: World Scientific Publishing, 2018, p. 168 and Bruce Gilley, *Tiger on the Brinck*, pp. 83-87.

235 See, Jean-Pierre Cabestan. *China Tomorrow: Democracy or Dictatorship?*: London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2019, p. 28.

homeland of the October Revolution, and the concomitant dismemberment of the Soviet state, constituted a sort of *post facto* validation of decades of CCP denunciations of Soviet capitulationism and “revisionism”. This was not an inconsequential outcome because, during decades, Chinese elites had insisted that Soviet revisionism was leading to the degradation and ultimate collapse of socialism. But China’s gains extended far beyond mere ideological vindication. The disintegration of the Soviet Union dissipated Chinese existential security concerns relative to its northern and western militarized borders. True, at the precise moment that the PRC was looking beyond its immediate borders the centrifugal forces threatening the territorial integrity of the Russian state and Moscow’s nuclear arsenal continued to pose security challenges. Yet, as trade and energy became increasingly determinant for sustaining the country’s economic growth, security concerns shifted to China’s vast and economically strategic coastal zones. Secure inland borders allowed Beijing to redeploy forces and shift its security focus to the country’s littoral.

## PART IV

### A New Great Helmsman

“He who fights with monsters might take care  
lest he thereby become a monster”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Marking the first five years of Xi Jinping’s tenure as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, the October 2017 CCP Nineteenth Congress dispelled any remaining doubts as to Xi Jinping’s dominance over party and state. Delegates to the Congress voted unanimously to enshrine “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想) in the CCP’s charter. Months later, on 11 March 2018, the opening session of the Thirteenth National People’s Congress sanctioned amendments to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, including the incorporation of “Xi Jinping Thought”. Since “Mao Zedong Thought” was made the party’s guiding ideology in 1945, only Deng and Xi have seen their ideas consecrated in this manner, although Deng, in 1997, was posthumously honored with the inclusion of the less significant “theory” (rather than “thought”). While China’s leaders introduced doctrines into official CCP ideology, Xi Jinping Thought differs to the extent that it develops the concept of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, officially considered to be part of CCP ideological legacy consisting of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents, and Hu Jintao’s Scientific Development Perspective<sup>236</sup>.

The concept “socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been a mainstay of CPP discourse since being introduced by Deng Xiaoping during the 1982 Twelfth Party Congress, when the paramount leader asserted that the country’s modernization required the adapting of foreign ideas and practices to Chinese realities. Playing a pivotal role in the legitimization of the regime, “socialism with Chinese characteristics” reconciles the broad goals of communist rule and market mechanisms. To all intents and purposes, “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” posits that the fundamental politico-ideological continuity with the renovation of socialism pursued by Deng and his successors in the post-post Mao era is preserved in the era of Xi. Since the revisions to party and state constitutions were approved, a massive ideological offensive aiming to disseminate Xi’s theoretical contributions has

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236 On Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents, see, Joseph Fewsmith, “Studying the Three Represents”, *China Leadership Monitor*, Hoover Institution, No. 8, Fall, 2003, pp. 1-11, available at: [https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/clm8\\_jf.pdf](https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/clm8_jf.pdf).

been unfolding particularly through apps and new technologies<sup>237</sup>. No other post-Mao leader has demonstrated as much preoccupation with ideological matters.

Post-Mao Chinese Communist Party collective leadership sought to avoid many of the pitfalls that undermined Mikhail Gorbachev's stewardship of the CPSU. Li Peng's decade-long premiership, as well as the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao leadership cycles, instilled stability and solid technocratic management after the tumultuous 1989 Tiananmen protests. Risk of instability, particularly acute following Deng Xiaoping's death in 1997, was mitigated at the cost of ideological orthodoxy and intensified repression. As the 1989 Tiananmen events demonstrated, the continued dominance of the Chinese Communist Party was a non-negotiable matter since the party is tasked with devolving to China its former greatness. By the time Xi assumed the party's reins, the question, of course, was to what extent the CCP remained a communist party in any meaningful sense. Whereas the CCP's leading role was unquestionable, its ideological legacy had suffered significant mutations during the preceding decades. Marx's theoretical *corpus* was not particularly relevant as a guide to Chinese reality because Marxism excluded the possibility of building socialism in "backward" countries such as China. To a large extent, after Zhao Ziyang's November 1987 report to the Thirteenth Congress, Marx became a historical reference fundamentally devoid of concrete applicability in modern China. True, the broad values of Marxism could still be detected in the CCP's denouncement of the extreme income inequality associated with capitalist development and in the central role attributed to the state sector in the building of socialism. Nonetheless, the Great Leap Forward revealed that the Stalin-inspired model resting on central planning and agricultural collectivization was inadequate. However, Leninist notions of party organization were an entirely different matter. Principles of "democratic centralism" were consistently upheld by Deng Xiaoping, and not even Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang sought to abandon them or overturn the party's monopoly of power. As for the collective leadership of the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao years, effectively discarded by Xi Jinping, it had revealed clear signs of erosion long before the breakout of the 2012 "Bo affair"<sup>238</sup>.

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237 See, for example, Zheping Huang, "China's most popular app is a propaganda tool teaching Xi Jinping Thought", South China Morning Post, February 14, 2019, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/tech/apps-social/article/2186037/chinas-most-popular-app-propaganda-tool-teaching-xi-jinping-thought> and Sarah Cook, "The Chinese Communist Party's Latest Propaganda Target: Young Minds", Perspectives, Freedom House, April 30, 2019, accessed at: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/chinese-communist-partys-latest-propaganda-target-young-minds>.

238 On the end of collective leadership, Xi's concentration of power and the institutional changes resulting from the end of collegial rule, see, inter alia, Sangkuk Lee, "An Institutional Analysis of Xi Jinping's Centralization of Power", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. No. 26, No. 105, 2017, pp. 325-336 and Björn Alexander Düben, "Xi Jinping and the End of Chinese Exceptionalism", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 67, No. 2, 2020, pp. 111-128.

## I Have a Dream

In the waning months of Hu Jintao's mandate, the country was shaken by the spectacular and very public political demise of Bo Xilai. Member of the Politburo, former minister of Commerce and party secretary of Chongqing, Bo would later be formally charged with criminal wrongdoing and implicated in his wife's alleged murder of British businessman Neil Heywood<sup>239</sup>. What made the accusations so remarkable was the fact that Bo Xilai, like Xi Jinping himself, was a "princeling", a privileged child of the old-guard regime elite. His father, Bo Yibo, joined the CPP in April 1925 and served in Mao's Politburo. Among the 61 renegades purged during the Cultural Revolution, the elder Bo was rehabilitated by Deng, returned to the Politburo and then finally emerged as one of the "Eight Immortals", veterans of Mao's revolution allied with Deng. Partially because of his red aristocratic lineage, the younger Bo's political downfall "was so significant that it has been widely described as a political earthquake of a magnitude rivaling the downfall of Mao's designated heir Lin Biao in 1971 or the crackdown in 1989"<sup>240</sup>.

On 28 September 2012 state media disclosed that Bo Xilai had been expelled from the CCP and would face criminal accusations of corruption, abuse of power, bribe-taking, and improper relations with women. On 8 November 2012, weeks after effectively closing the Bo incident, the CCP opened its Eighteenth National Congress. Bo Xilai's public disgrace would not have been an abnormal occurrence during the Cultural Revolution, but the public nature of his downfall in post-Maoist China hinted at the viciousness of the struggle over Hu Jintao's succession. Bo's cardinal sin was political: challenging the CCP's broad, underlying consensus relative to the country's socialist developmental model. Also, by taking the leadership struggle outside of the iron walls of the party, rather than follow the rules of succession as defined by the CCP, Bo's populism clashed frontally with the consensus governing leadership selection. In effect, he disrupted the correct balance between elites and mass opinion, a precedent that, if it were to succeed, would make the party vulnerable to unacceptable pressures stemming from societal opinion and public mobilization.

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239 On the "Bo affair", see, Yuezhi Zhao, "The Struggle for Socialism in China: The Bo Xilai Saga and Beyond", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 64, No. 5, October 2012, pp. 1-17 and Alice L. Miller, "The Bo Xilai Affair in Central Leadership Politics", *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 38, Summer 2012, August 6, 2012, available at: <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM38AM.pdf>. Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, claimed to have suffered a "mental breakdown" after Heywood blackmailed and threatened her son. She reportedly confessed to the murder, perhaps the reason why her trial lasted a mere seven hours. The episode remains murky, but the timing of the events was certainly fortuitous for Bo's political rivals. See, Edward Wong and Andrew Jacobs, "Blackmail Cited as Motive in a Killing That Shook China", *The New York Times*, August 10, 2012, consulted in: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/11/world/asia/blackmail-emerges-as-gu-kailai-motive-for-heywood-killing-in-china.html?pagewanted=1&hp>.

240 Cf., Yuezhi Zhao, "The Struggle for Socialism in China: The Bo Xilai Saga and Beyond", p. 1. See, also, Joseph Fewsmith, "Bo Xilai and Reform: What Will Be the Impact of His Removal?", *China Leadership Monitor*, Hoover Institution, No. 38, Summer, 2012, pp. 1-11, available at: <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM38JF.pdf>.

A populist politician expressing neo-Maoist ideological sympathies, Bo had spearheaded an extremely successful anti-corruption campaign in his home province<sup>241</sup>. Designated as the “Chongqing Model”, Bo’s approach to government encompassed three interrelated components: “singing red songs” (*changhong*), “smashing criminal gangs and corruption” (*dabei*) and “distributive social policies” (*minsheng*)<sup>242</sup>. The “Chongqing Model” was usually contrasted with the “Guangdong Model”, Deng’s market approach to development. Consolidated in the wake of the paramount leader’s death, the “Guangdong Model” became associated with corruption, vast social inequalities, crass materialism and individualistic values. In contrast, the “Chongqing Model” emphasized community-based development, egalitarianism and the upholding of socialist values<sup>243</sup>. In Chongqing, Bo reinforced the role of the state in the economy and transformed state enterprises into profitable firms, while his provincial government actively combated corruption and infused ideological vigor through *changhong*. Bo Xilai’s “Chongqing Model” thus configured a challenge from the CPP neo-Maoist left to a leadership group advocating the persistence of the “Guangdong Model”<sup>244</sup>.

At any rate, Bo’s troubles were not the sole example of the communist elite’s moral degradation. In late October, two weeks prior to the opening of the Eighteenth National CCP Congress, the international press revealed the extent to which Premier Wen Jiabao’s family had enriched itself during the previous years<sup>245</sup>. The timing of the revelation was not a mere coincidence. Although slated to step down from the premiership, Wen would still remain eligible for other leadership posts from which he could continue to advocate for reform. After all, Wen Jiabao, at this point in time, was the party’s most respected and senior spokesman for reform. The publication of allegations of official wrongdoing was meant to embarrass the reformist wing of the party and, in this fashion, balance the political damage caused by the “Bo affair” to the neo-Marxist wing of the CCP. Additionally, the downfall of Wen also removed a potential critic of Xi Jinping’s leadership.

The “princeling” son of communist veteran Xi Zhongxun, a former Politburo member and vice-premier of the State Council, Xi Jinping was not an obvious choice for the

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241 On the neo-Maoists, see, Kerry Brown and Simone Van Nieuwenhuizen. *China and the New Maoists*. London: Zed Books, 2016 and Jude D. Blanchette. *China’s New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

242 See, Lin Chun, “China’s leaders are cracking down on Bo Xilai and his Chongqing model” *The Guardian*, April 22, 2012, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/22/china-leaders-cracking-down-chongqing-xilai>.

243 For an argument positing that, even in the wake of Bo’s downfall, the “Chongqing Model” continued to resonate with the more underprivileged sectors of Chinese society, see, Lance P. Gore, “The Fall of Bo Xilai and the Seduction of the Chongqing Model”, *East Asian Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 2, April/June 2012, pp. 53-61.

244 See, Joseph Y. S. Cheng, “The “Chongqing Model”: What It Means to China Today”, *Journal of Comparative Asian Development*, Vol. 12, No. 3, December 2013, pp. 411-442.

245 See, David Barboza, “Billions in Hidden Riches for Family of Chinese Leader”, *The New York Times*, October 25, 2012, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/business/global/family-of-wen-jiabao-holds-a-hidden-fortune-in-china.html>.

top CCP leadership post<sup>246</sup>. Jailed in 1968, the senior Xi was one of the many victims of the Cultural Revolution. Fifteen years of age at the time, Xi Jinping was sent to rural Shaanxi in 1969 for re-education. He joined the Chinese Communist Youth League in 1971 and, after various failed attempts, was finally accepted into the ranks of the CCP in 1974. During the 1997 Fifteenth Communist Party Congress he placed last in elections for Central Committee alternate members. After advancing through local party structures, he was appointed party secretary of the Shanghai Municipal Committee in 2007. That same year, at the Seventeenth CCP National Congress, he emerged as one of the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee. Thus consecrated as a national leader, Xi was given responsibility for Macao and Hong Kong, as well as overall supervision of the 2008 Summer Olympics, conceived as a showcase of Chinese power on the international stage. Promoted to Vice-president of the PRC, he substituted Hu Jintao as General Secretary of the CCP at the November 2012 Eighteenth National Congress.

Xi immediately unleashed an extensive anti-corruption campaign that resulted in the purging of approximately one million party members implicated in unlawful practices<sup>247</sup>. The country had witnessed other anti-corruption campaigns; indeed, these were practically a permanent feature of CCP rule<sup>248</sup>. A few years before, the acute dangers posed by corruption were publicly expressed by President Hu Jintao's Report to the 2012 Eighteenth Party Congress, affirming that battling "corruption and promoting political integrity, which is a major political issue of great concern to the people, is a clear-cut and long-term political commitment of the Party. If we fail to handle this issue well, it could prove fatal to the Party, and even cause the collapse of the Party and the fall of the state"<sup>249</sup>. Yet, the publicity accorded to Xi's campaign, and the zeal propelling it forward, signaled that the initiative was designed to achieve two main objectives<sup>250</sup>. First, and certainly not

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246 For biographical details, see, Kerry Brown, *CEO, China: The Rise of Xi Jinping*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2016 and Evan Osnos, "Born Red: How Xi Jinping, an unremarkable provincial administrator, became China's most authoritarian leader since Mao", *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2015, available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red>?

247 See, "One million Chinese officials punished for corruption", *BBC News*, October 24, 2016, consulted at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37748241>.

248 See, Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involvement of the Chinese Communist Party*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

249 For the full text, see, "Report of Hu Jintao to the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress", November 12, 2012, available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th\\_cpc\\_congress/2012-11/16/content\\_27137540\\_12.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/2012-11/16/content_27137540_12.htm)

250 See, Guilhem Fabre, "Xi Jinping's Challenge: What is Behind China's Anti-Corruption Campaign?", *Journal of Self-Government and Management Economics*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017, pp. 7-28; Andrew Wedeman, "Xi Jinping's Tiger Hunt: Anti-corruption campaign or factional Purge?", *Modern China Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2017, pp. 35-94; Kerry Brown, "The Anti-Corruption Struggle in Xi Jinping's China: An Alternative Political Narrative", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 11, 2018, pp. 1-10; Macabe Keliher and Hsinchao Wu, "How to Discipline 90 Million People", *The Atlantic*, April 7, 2015, consulted at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/xi-jinping-china-corruption-political-culture/389787/>; and, Alexandra Fiol-Mahon, "Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign: The Hidden Motives of a Modern-Day Mao", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, August 17, 2018, accessed at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/08/xi-jinpings-anti-corruption-campaign-the-hidden-motives-of-a-modern-day-mao/>.

the least relevant, the campaign served an obvious instrumental purpose: the removal of Xi's rivals from positions of power in the party and state. Xi's anti-corruption campaign to purge the Chinese Communist Party of "tigers and flies," corrupt top and low-ranking officials and businessmen, gave way to a purge of political rivals<sup>251</sup>. In this specific respect, Xi's assault on corrupt practices did not differ substantially from previous campaigns ostensibly justified by the fight against official graft. Second, it became a mechanism for revamping the party's image and authority, until then tremendously degraded by a host of scandals occurring during the last years of Hu Jintao's presidential mandate. Wen Jiabao' and Bo Xilau's fall from the heights of power provided Xi the opportunity to save the party's reputation and prestige by restoring its former "purity".

At the same time, a vast web of surveillance was cast over Chinese society and a cultural crackdown intensified as Xi restricted media by obliging editors and reporters to submit to orientations emitted by the Central Propaganda Department. Huang Kunming, the Politburo member responsible for the department, claimed that "the restructuring showed the need to strengthen the Party's overall leadership in these areas and was good for advancing the ideological governing system and the sector's prosperity"<sup>252</sup>. Similarly, in the country's universities and think tanks, ideological conformity was imposed, narrowing considerably the parameters of acceptable debate. Xi in effect adapted Bo's populist, Neo-Marxist approach to politics, placing "red songs" at the service of the political *status quo* and the interests underpinning "Guangdong Model". Thus, Xi's political cooptation of the main themes associated with Bo's populism: anti-corruption, ideological rejuvenation and a greater reliance on the state in guiding economic development was designed to enhance the core leader's legitimacy and that of the CCP top leadership.

Since Xi's ascension to the CCP leadership, the Three Confidences (三个自信) doctrine – in conjugation with the Four Comprehensives and the "China Dream" – has become a pivotal political concept in Chinese politics. Introduced by Hu Jintao during the November 2012 Eighteenth CCP National Congress, the Three Confidences exhorts the party and the people to be orientated by "confidence in direction", "confidence in theoretic foundation" and "confidence in system"<sup>253</sup>. A "fourth confidence", in Chinese culture, was added in December 2014 to a doctrine exhorting self-confidence in the party and state institutions in the face of Western criticism of China's authoritarian model. In

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251 See, Jon S. T. Quah, "Hunting The Corrupt 'Tigers' and 'Flies' in China: An Evaluation of Xi Jinping's Anti Corruption Campaign (November 2012 to March 2015)", Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies, Occasional Papers, Carey School of Law, University of Maryland, 2015, pp. 1-98, available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=pt-PT&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=xi+anti-corruption+one+million+members&btnG=&httpsredir=1&article=1224&context=mscas](https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=pt-PT&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=xi+anti-corruption+one+million+members&btnG=&httpsredir=1&article=1224&context=mscas).

252 See, "China Unveils Three State Administrations on Film, Press, Television," Xinhua, April 16, 2018, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/16/c\\_137115379.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/16/c_137115379.htm).

253 See, Hui Jin, "Research on the Development of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics from the Perspective of Four Self-Confidence", Open Journal of Political Science, 10, 2020, pp. 41-49.

sum, the reaffirmation of the “Four Confidences” amounts to a defiant defense of the *status quo* and the party’s historical legacy. The “confidences”, in turn, underpin the Four Comprehensives articulated by Xi in 2014. Virtually identical to the “four comprehensives” outlined in Deng Xiaoping Theory, they express the general political line of the regime: build a moderately prosperous society, govern the nation according to law, deepen reform and strictly govern the party.

Since 2017, much has been made of Xi’s “New Era”, the CCP’s attempt to combine disparate elements such as historic-civilizational nationalism, Confucian traditionalism, socialist core values, the party’s monopoly of power and its role as the guardian of the People’s Republic of China. All of these elements have been subsumed under the broad term “China Dream” (中国梦), summarized in Xi’s “38-character statement” in the following fashion: “to realize the China Dream we must keep to the Chinese way, to realize the China Dream we must advance the Chinese spirit, to realize the China Dream we must consolidate Chinese power”<sup>254</sup>. Although the successor to “strategic doctrine” formulations defined under previous leaderships – The Three Represents, Scientific Development and the Harmonious Society –, the “China Dream” builds on those legacies to provide a response to the exigencies of the contemporary era. On November 29, 2012, a mere two weeks following his elevation to party chairman, delivering a speech at the National Museum of China during a visit to the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit, Xi Jinping made his first direct reference to his “China Dream”, stating that “the renaissance of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history”<sup>255</sup>. A clue as to the speech’s relevance was provided by the setting since both the locale and the theme of the exhibit conveyed the symbolic importance of *fu xing*, which may be variously translated as “renaissance”, “recovery” or “rejuvenation”. In effect, rejuvenation – the commonly used term – encompasses two distinct but interlocking dimensions<sup>256</sup>. First, it proclaims China’s emergence from its “century of humiliation” and, as a corollary, its rise as an influential and powerful country on the world stage. Second, invoking national robustness and national pride, rejuvenation also denotes a moral dimension; that

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254 Quoted in, Antonio Talia, “China’s National Dream Needs Chinese Power: the New Era in Xi’s Thought”, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, April 6, 2018, p. 3, consulted at: [https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/commentary\\_talia\\_06.04.2018.pdf](https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/commentary_talia_06.04.2018.pdf)

255 See, Cary Huang, “Just what is Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese dream’ and ‘Chinese renaissance?’”, South China Morning Post, February 6, 2013, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1143954/just-what-xi-jinpings-chinese-dream-and-chinese-renaissance>.

256 Zheng Wang succinctly outlines the intuitive meaning of the concept in the Chinese context: “Although outsiders almost always speak of China’s “rise,” the Chinese like to refer to their impressive recent achievements and future planned development as “rejuvenation” (*fu xing*). The use of that word underscores an important point: the Chinese view their fortunes as a return to greatness and not a rise from nothing. In fact, rejuvenation is deeply rooted in Chinese history and the national experience, especially with regards to the so-called “century of national humiliation”... Although the meaning of the Chinese Dream is practical and intuitively understood at home, it has the unfortunate consequence of remaining opaque to non-Chinese”. See, Zheng Wang, “Not Rising, but Rejuvenating: The ‘Chinese Dream’”, The Diplomat, February 5, 2013, accessed at: <https://thediplomat.com/2013/02/chinese-dream-draft>.

is, the overcoming of decay through spiritual renewal. National rejuvenation is therefore not restricted to a celebration of economic growth, greater prosperity or even the country's newfound assertiveness outside its frontiers. Encompassing all of these dimensions, national rejuvenation denotes a new self-confidence springing from spiritual rebirth propelled by renewed nationalism. Indeed, nationalism has increasingly displaced economic performance as the primary source of regime legitimacy, a trend that was accentuated in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Rejuvenation, in turn, opens the way to greater opportunity and prosperity. As a matter of fact, during Xi's first official speech as president, he declared that every Chinese person "has the chance to succeed in life, to see their dream become reality, to progress and fulfill themselves at the same time as their homeland and their time"<sup>257</sup>. However, unlike the "American Dream", holding that the pursuit of individual self-interest leads to desirable collective outcomes, Xi's vision suggests collective undertakings defined and executed by the CCP produce beneficial individual outcomes. Moreover, not only was China becoming great again, the party was creating new, unparalleled opportunities for the Chinese people. Since 1949, the party was recovering China, liberating it from the historical injustices perpetuated by the West throughout the "century of humiliation". Just as Mao destroyed feudal China, and Deng placed it on the path to development, Xi was consummating the PRC's rise to international preponderance. Quite naturally, the task was not compatible with the utopian adventurism of the Cultural Revolution nor the bureaucratic routinization of the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras. Just as Joseph Stalin had done in the 1930s and 1940s, the Chinese Communists Party, heir to a millennial civilization, was calling upon the Chinese people to carry out a heroic undertaking of historical proportions.

In the decades following the launching of Deng's reforms, China witnessed staggering rates of economic growth. Until 2011, official growth rates averaged 10 per cent yearly. Although growth dipped in the wake of the 2008 international financial crisis, the country, in comparative terms, continued to experience enviable growth generated by massive spending infusions. Although Chinese economic data is not entirely reliable, even a cursory analysis evinces the impressive development of the past decades. In 1980, China's GDP was 7% of America's; it reached 61% by 2015<sup>258</sup>. Equally impressive, as Peter Ferdinand notes, "(B)y the end of June 2014 Chinese foreign exchange reserves had swelled to almost US\$4 trillion; at the end of 2001, before China joined the WTO, they had stood at US\$212 billion<sup>259</sup>. China's economy overtook Germany's in 2007 and, in 2009, it became the world's largest exporter. One year later, in 2010, the PRC displaced

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257 François Bougon, *Inside the Mind of Xi Jinping*, p. 24.

258 For comparative US-China economic data, see, "China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States", CRS: Congressional Research Service, updated June 25, 2019, available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>.

259 See, Peter Ferdinand, "Westward ho—the China dream and 'one belt, one road': Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping", *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 24, 2016, p. 941.

Japan as the world's second largest economy and in 2013 overtook the United States as the world's largest trading nation. Moreover, World Bank data indicates that, in 2014, China surpassed the US in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). While the figures are obviously impressive, substantial challenges remain. For instance, China's 2018 GDP per capita was 9,770 current USD, compared with 62,794USD for the United States and 23,407USD for Portugal<sup>260</sup>. Even if China's historical rates of growth were to be sustained, decades would need pass before China approximates American levels of GDP per capita.

Irrespective of the gains made by “socialism with Chinese characteristics” in the previous decades, by the time Xi Jinping became “core” leader the export-led growth model adopted in the wake of Deng's 1978 “opening” was in need of overhaul. As early as 2003, the CCP saw fit to modify Deng's orientation by embracing the “scientific concept of development” 科学发展观, a byword for changes meant to assure the sustainable development of the Chinese economy<sup>261</sup>. As a result, the CCP's October 2007 Seventeenth National Congress committed the party to the aim of accelerating “the transformation of the mode of economic development”<sup>262</sup>. Soon after, the 2008 financial crisis convinced the leadership that capitalism was in accelerated decline, and, as a corollary, “socialist renewal” was the only viable path open to China. In practical terms, this meant that the country's export-driven model of growth needed to “bring the state back in” and promote policies meant to attenuate social inequalities; in effect, the path advocated by the neo-Maoists. Yet, entrenched coastal export industries and “liberal” intellectuals resisted reorienting Chinese developmental along the lines prescribed by the Neo-Marxists. A few years later, Xi emerged as a synthesis between these left and right positions, extending the state's power in the economy and society through bold programs to foster an innovative economy and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At the same time, Xi sought to foment regime legitimacy through nationalism, “red songs”, the “fourth confidence” (culture) and, when all else failed, stability was maintained by way of mass surveillance and the naked repression employed, for instance, in Tibet and Xinjiang.

The challenges faced by the new party leadership were not unique to China. An upper middle-income country, the PRC invariably must upgrade its manufacturing capacity and services if higher levels of growth are to be achieved. The dimension of the problem is borne out by World Bank data pointing to the herculean tasks confronting countries making the transition from middle income to high-income economies. Of the 101

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260 See, World Bank Development Indicators data, accessed at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=NY.GDP.PCAP.CD&country=PRT,CHN,USA>.

261 See, Joseph Fewsmith, “Promoting the Scientific Development Concept”, China Leadership Monitor, Hoover Institution, No. 11, July 30, Summer, 2004, pp. 1-10, available at: [https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/clm11\\_jf.pdf](https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/clm11_jf.pdf).

262 See, “Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 18th Party Congress”, Qiushi, September 30, 2011, consulted at: [http://www.csc.it/upload/doc/full\\_text\\_of\\_hu\\_jintaos\\_report\\_at\\_17th\\_party\\_congress\\_\\_\\_qiushi\\_journal.pdf](http://www.csc.it/upload/doc/full_text_of_hu_jintaos_report_at_17th_party_congress___qiushi_journal.pdf). For a comparison, see, “Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 18th Party Congress”, People's Daily, November 19, 2012, available at: <http://en.people.cn/90785/8024777.html>.

middle-income countries analyzed in the 1960s, all but 13 had failed the transition to high income economies by 2008<sup>263</sup>. For a regime whose legitimacy was staked on delivering economic performance and improved living standards, historical precedent was therefore rather disheartening. In essence, particularly after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, the CCP had entered into a social contract with the Chinese people; in exchange for political acquiescence from the society, the party pledged to deliver individual and national prosperity. Deng's claim that it was "glorious to get rich" contained an unmentioned flipside: so long as the Chinese people left politics to the Chinese Communist Party.

The "grand bargain" between party and population was manageable as long as growth remained unabated. Given the complexities and uncertainty of a successful transitioning from middle to high income economy (in the regime's lexicon, "a moderately prosperous society"), regime legitimacy could not continue to rest primarily upon economic performance. But neither could regime legitimacy altogether dispense with economic performance. The solution was to alter the "legitimacy mix" so as to lessen the centrality of performance while shifting to politico-ideological sources of legitimacy in the post-Tiananmen period: a civilizational tradition, the national unity achieved by the PRC, the centrality of the PLA, the overcoming of the "century of humiliation", the anti-Japanese and anti-Western narratives. As the vanguard party gave way to a "party of the whole people", these sources of legitimacy were reinforced, with nationalism providing the glue unifying these disperse, intertwined elements of CCP legitimacy.

Preserving economic performance and achieving a high-income economy required another transition: an export-led industrial economy invariably had to give way to an economy driven by innovation and international growth secured by highly competitive companies. Concern over China becoming mired in the middle income trap led to the adding of the Made in China 2025 (中国制造2025) (MIC2025) strategy to Beijing's policy toolbox<sup>264</sup>. Loosely inspired by Germany's 2013 "Industry 4.0", as well as Japan's broad approach to innovation and development, MIC2025 was unveiled in May 2015 by prime-minister Li Keqiang<sup>265</sup>. Touted as a decade-long comprehensive strategy squarely

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263 See, The World Bank and Development Research Center of the State Council, the People's Republic of China, *China 2030: Building a Modern, harmonious, and Creative Society*. Washington DC, 2013, p. 12.

264 See, Jost Wübbeke, Mirjam Meissner, Max J. Zenglein Jaqueline Ives and Björn Conrad, "Made in China 2025: The making of a high-tech superpower and consequences for industrial countries", Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), No. 2 December 2016, accessed at: [https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/MPOC\\_No.2\\_MadeinChina2025.pdf](https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/MPOC_No.2_MadeinChina2025.pdf). Also, "Strategic Plan of Made in China 2025 and Its Implementations" (with Ma H.), *Analysing the Impacts of Industry 4.0 in Modern Business Environments*. 2018. pp. 1-23, IGI Global, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326392969\\_Strategic\\_plan\\_of\\_Made\\_in\\_China\\_2025\\_and\\_its\\_implementation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326392969_Strategic_plan_of_Made_in_China_2025_and_its_implementation); Scott Kennedy, "Made in China 2025", *Critical Questions*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1 June 2015, consulted at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/made-china-2025>; and, Mirjam Meissner and Jost Wübbeke, 'China's High-Tech Strategy Raises the Heat on Industrial Countries' *The Diplomat*, 16 December 2016, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/chinas-high-tech-strategy-raises-the-heat-on-industrial-countries/>.

265 See, "Made in China 2025" plan unveiled to boost manufacturing", *GB Times*, May 20, 2015, accessed at: <https://gbtimes.com/made-china-2025-plan-unveiled-boost-manufacturing>.

aimed at incrementing the country's industrial capacity, the proposal concentrates primarily on ten strategic sectors<sup>266</sup>. The strategy aims to attain Chinese dominance in aviation, robotics, driverless cars, advanced medical products and biopharma and a host of other high-tech sectors believed to be the foundation of the new global economy<sup>267</sup>. To achieve leadership in these areas, MIC 2025 foresees massive investment in state of the art research as well as capital investments in innovate Chinese companies capable of competing in the domestic and global markets. The program is funded primarily by the state, the National Integrated Investment Fund being the best-known vehicle, but, in 2015, "297 new government guided funds were created with more than RMB1.5 trillion in capital<sup>268</sup> for the purpose of financing Made in China 2025. The view from Washington is less benign. Vice-President Mike Pence, in an October 2018 speech delivered at the Hudson Institute, remarked that "through the 'Made in China 2025' plan, the Communist Party has set its sights on controlling 90 percent of the world's most advanced industries, including robotics, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence. To win the commanding heights of the 21st century economy, Beijing has directed its bureaucrats and businesses to obtain American intellectual property – the foundation of our economic leadership – by any means necessary"<sup>269</sup>.

The broad strategy for growing competitive, world-class companies essentially replicates the approach pursued in the last few decades by Huawei and similar champions<sup>270</sup>.

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266 Announced in July 2010, the High-Tech Strategy 2020 for Germany emphasizes the research and innovation. Innovation is oriented to five priority areas: climate/energy, health/nutrition, mobility, security and communications. Berlin's aim is to increase digitalization and the interconnection of products over a ten to fifteen-year span, thus obtaining advantages in digital manufacturing. Information technology and the internet of things are of critical import because, by connecting German companies to global production chains, these companies would become more competitive. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research subsequently updated the 2020 strategy.

267 See, The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "Made in China 2025 plan issued", May 19, 2015, accessed at: "[http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latest\\_releases/2015/05/19/content\\_281475110703534.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latest_releases/2015/05/19/content_281475110703534.htm) Ten sectors as priorities to develop and upgrade China's industry: advanced information technology, automated machine tools and robotics, aerospace and aeronautical equipment, maritime equipment and high-tech shipping, modern rail transport equipment, new-energy vehicles and equipment, power equipment, agricultural equipment, new materials, advanced medical products and biopharma. The importance of the latter has become apparent to all during the Covid crisis.

268 See, Nicholas R. Lardy. *The State Strikes Back: The End of Economic Reform in China?*. Washington: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2019, p. 2.

269 See, The White House, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China", The Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, October 4, 2018, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

270 For more information on China's main technological companies, see, Rebecca A. Fannin. *Tech Giants of China*. Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2019. On Huawei's international strategy, see, Brian Low, "Huawei Technologies Corporation: from local dominance to global challenge?", *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 2, 2007, pp. 138-144 and Sunny li Sun, "Internationalization Strategy of MNEs from Emerging Economies: The Case of Huawei", *Multinational Business Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2009, pp. 133-159, 2009, available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1528265](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1528265).

For all intents and purposes, China's protected massive internal market provides companies with an opportunity to grow until they are sufficiently consolidated to "go out" and compete for external market share. At the same time, a highly advantageous environment for creating these type of companies is provided by government direct and indirect subsidies, targeted financing, forced technology transfers, export incentives and immunity from the theft of intellectual property<sup>271</sup>. Moreover, if the country is to transition to a developed nation, it must move up on the value chain, competing with countries such as Germany, South Korea and Japan. By developing the sectors identified by MIC2025, China aims to reduce its dependence on manufactured imports and foreign export markets, thus extending greater control over the entirety of its value chains.

MIC 2025 was also a response to immediate increased competition from countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia, whose cost structures became more competitive relative to China's. Competition was also increasing from the developed countries as a result of efficiency gains driven by technological innovation. In short, China's vast pool of cheap labor was increasingly seen as less competitive and unable to sustain export-led growth. Incapable of reducing substantially labor costs or devaluing significantly the *renminbi*, competitive advantages were to be obtained through innovation and the establishment of standards. Attaining the "moderately prosperous society" outlined by Hu Jintao, and restated in Xi's "Chinese Dream", was achievable by moving up the value chain. This being the case, even if MIC 2025 falls short of its stated aims, China's drive for innovation will nonetheless provoke huge consequences in most industrialized economies.

The CCP recognizes that the PRC's emergence as a leading world power requires the country's economy to rapidly become an innovation leader<sup>272</sup>. Two leading technological sectors – Artificial Intelligence (AI) and fifth generation wireless (5G) – have become central tenants of the PRC's quest for innovation and growth. A recent research note produced by the World Bank's international Finance Corporation concludes that "the United States and China lead in AI investment, with China dominating global AI funding. Chinese AI companies raised a total of \$31.7 billion in the first half of 2018, almost 75 percent of the global total of \$43.5 billion. China looks poised to lead the AI space in several sectors including healthcare and autonomous driving. China's progress with AI is largely the result of strong and direct government support

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271 See, Nicholas R. Lardy, *The State Strikes Back*, pp. 99-117. These practices are exhaustively documented in the March 2018 United States Trade Representative's report, resulting from its Section 301 investigation into China's unfair trade practices. See, Office of the United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President, "Findings of the Investigation into China's Acts, Policies, and Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, and Innovation Under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974", March 22, 2018, available at: <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/Section%20301%20FINAL.PDF>.

272 For a discussion, see, Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution*, pp. 121-151.

for the technology, leadership from Chinese tech industry giants, and a robust venture capital community<sup>273</sup>. AI and 5G are actually interrelated and, just as crucially, are the building stones of the new world economy. Upgrading to 5G systems makes AI more critical for the type of real-time activities made possible by 5G connectivity<sup>274</sup>. China's substantial advantage in AI is also a consequence of the country being home to almost 20 per cent of the world's population<sup>275</sup>. This is extremely relevant because it means that China has access to a tremendous amount of data that will be used to make AI more accurate and, no less important, more valuable. Kai-Fu Lee has observed that "reliance on data for improvement creates a self-perpetuating cycle: better products lead to more users, those users lead to more data, and that data leads to even better products, and thus more users and data"<sup>276</sup>. For this reason, China has also been making deals with various government to access foreign data so as to make Chinese data banks more varied and thus more reliable<sup>277</sup>. This competition for data is another reason that China's telecommunications related companies are scrambling for markets and why the Trump Administration has led an international campaign against Huawei's growing dominance of the 5G market.

Telecommunications technology has also become one the prime vehicles for gaining greater acceptance of Chinese technical standards that ultimately benefit Chinese companies developing goods and services in conformity with those same standards. China's main telecommunication equipment makers, Huawei, ZTE and China Mobile, have all invested tremendous resources in the development of 5G technology. These companies are active in many international telecommunication industry bodies such as the International Telecommunications Union, where Beijing seeks to control standards. Defining and controlling standards is essential for competitiveness because it translates into leverage in commercial negotiations<sup>278</sup>. Companies that lead in the establishment of

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273 See, Xiaomin Mou, "Artificial Intelligence: Investment Trends and Selected Industry Uses", International Finance Corporation, EM Compass, Note 71, September 2019, p. 2, available at: <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/7898d957-69b5-4727-9226-277e8ae28711/EMCompass-Note-71-AI-Investment-Trends.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mR5Jvd6>.

274 See, for example, Adam Segal, "When China Rules the Web: Technology in Service of the State", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 97, No. 5, September/October 2018, pp. 10-18.

275 See, Sarah Zhang, "China's Artificial-Intelligence Boom", The Atlantic, February 16, 2017, available at: [http://paramita.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Chinas-Artificial-Intelligence-Boom\\_The-Atlantic.pdf](http://paramita.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Chinas-Artificial-Intelligence-Boom_The-Atlantic.pdf).

276 See, Kai-Fu Lee. *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley and the New World Order*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018 and Sophie-Charlotte Fischer, "Artificial Intelligence: China's High-Tech Ambitions", CSS Analyses in Security Policy, No. 220, February 2018, accessed at: <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/bitstream/handle/20.500.11850/321542/CSSAnalyse220-EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

277 See, for example, Amy Hawkins, "Beijing's Big Brother Tech Needs African Faces, Foreign Policy, July 24, 2018, accessed at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/24/beijings-big-brother-tech-needs-african-faces/>.

278 See, Samm Sacks and Manyi Li, "How Chinese Cybersecurity Standards Impact Doing Business In China," CSIS Briefs, August 2018, pp. 1-15, available at: [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180802\\_Chinese\\_Cybersecurity.pdf?EqyEvuhZiedaLDFDQ.7pG4W1IGb8bUGF](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180802_Chinese_Cybersecurity.pdf?EqyEvuhZiedaLDFDQ.7pG4W1IGb8bUGF).

standards are able to outdistance their rivals and remain competitive as others are forced to follow their lead. Early leaders are, predictably, able to retain market advantages (when not dominance) for some time. No wonder then that Beijing sees the telecommunications industry as a central component of its Made in China 2025 strategy. Neither is it a coincidence that the Chinese government seeks to use the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to build telecommunication networks all over the world, conceiving them as a technological beachhead for further penetration of those countries. The scramble to lead the innovation race and therefore reap the benefits of the new economy is a replay of the transformation that occurred in the immediate post-1945 period, when US hegemony was partially a consequence of having gained significant advantage through the internationalization of its technical standards<sup>279</sup>.

Yet, AI is still in its infancy, applied primarily to business and internet related activity. The third and fourth AI waves – perception and autonomous AI – promise to be even more disruptive and have the most potential for transforming military affairs through the introduction of new weapons systems<sup>280</sup>. Some of these weapons probably already exist but remain unknown to the general public. There is however sufficient open source information to suggest that autonomous weapons system (AWS) development is progressing rapidly<sup>281</sup>. Such a weaponization of AI generates security challenges that will surely become even more complex once new breakthroughs in quantum computing are achieved. Warfare will be revolutionized and algorithmic war conducted by autonomous weapons systems will be a permanent feature of international conflict. The point here is not to develop this theme, but merely to suggest that China’s end-game cannot be reduced to mere commercial advantage. Although economic competitiveness is certainly important for Beijing, no less important is assuring military advantage through the weaponization of these new technologies.

No wonder then that, during the December 2019 NATO summit commemorating the alliance’s seventieth anniversary, Donald Trump repeated his concerns over the security of European countries intending to contract Huawei to modernize their 5G

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279 For a discussion, Daniel Immerwahr. *How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States*. London: Bodley Head, 2019, pp. 298-316.

280 For a discussion on Europe, see, Meia Nouwens and Helena Legarda, “Emerging technology dominance: what China’s pursuit of advanced dual-use technologies means for the future of Europe’s economy and defense innovation”, The International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) December 2018, available at: [https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/181218\\_Emerging\\_technology\\_dominance\\_MERICS\\_IISS.pdf](https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/181218_Emerging_technology_dominance_MERICS_IISS.pdf).

281 See, *inter alia*, Brad Smith and Carol Ann Browne. *Tools and Weapons: The Promise and Peril of the Digital Age*. New York: Penguin Press, 2019; Paul Scharre. *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018 and Pavel Sharikov, “Artificial intelligence, cyberattacks, and nuclear weapons—A dangerous combination”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 74, No. 6, 2018, pp. 368-373.

infrastructure<sup>282</sup>. At the same time, in Portugal, Mike Pompeo claimed that the source of his preoccupation was not a “particular company”, but the Chinese regime and its communist party<sup>283</sup>. China’s embassy in Lisbon emitted a particularly harsh public rebuke to Pompeo, suggesting his “smearing” of Huawei reflected a “deep-rooted Cold War mentality and ideological bias of the United States”, adding that the real intention was “merely to suppress the legitimate operation of the Chinese company under the disguise of the security excuses”<sup>284</sup>. That is to say, the Secretary of State’s words merely masked a commercial dispute and an evident attempt to hamper a legitimate business deal. In point of fact, it is obvious that the discussion is anything but a mere business dispute; in reality, it is a dispute over geopolitical international leadership in the XXI century.

## The Road to Rejuvenation

It seems counterintuitive that Xi Jinping would select the 2017 Davos Economic Forum as the venue to make a major statement on globalization and free trade. Yet, at that gathering, in a speech titled “Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth”, the CCP strongman claimed that “(W)hether you like it or not, the global economy is the big ocean that you cannot escape from. Any attempt to cut off the flow of capital, technologies, products, industries and people between economies, and channel the waters in the ocean back into isolated lakes and creeks is simply not possible. Indeed, it runs counter to the historical trend”<sup>285</sup>. Xi then added that countries “big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are all equal members of the international communi-

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282 See, George Parker, Helen Warrell and Nic Fildes, “Boris Johnson toughens stance on Huawei after Trump lobbying”, *Financial Times*, December 4, 2019, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b4bbd218-16a2-11ea-8d73-6303645ac406> and Sebastian Payne and Katrina Manson, “Donald Trump ‘apoplectic’ in call with Boris Johnson over Huawei”, *Financial Times*, February 6, 2020, accessed at: <https://www.ft.com/content/a70f9506-48f1-11ea-aec2-9ddbdc86190d>. After some delay, NATO has introduced 5G into its policy agenda. The Final Statement of the London December North Atlantic Council meeting affirmed that “(W)e are addressing the breadth and scale of new technologies to maintain our technological edge, while preserving our values and norms. We will continue to increase the resilience of our societies, as well as of our critical infrastructure and our energy security. NATO and Allies, within their respective authority, are committed to ensuring the security of our communications, including 5G, recognizing the need to rely on secure and resilient systems... We recognize that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance”. See, London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019, available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm).

283 See, “Pompeo alerta Portugal contra Huawei. “Mentalidade da Guerra Fria”, diz embaixada da China”, *Diário de Notícias*, December 6, 2019, available at: <https://www.dn.pt/dinheiro/pompeo-alerta-portugal-contra-huawei-mentalidade-da-guerra-fria-diz-embaixada-da-china-11586440.html>.

284 See, “Chinese embassy in Portugal refutes Pompeo’s anti-China allegations”, *Xinhua*, May 12, 2020, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/06/c\\_138611653.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/06/c_138611653.htm).

285 See, The State Council Information Office, The People’s Republic of China. “Full Text: Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at the World Economic Forum”, *Davos, Switzerland*, January 17, 2017, available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/node\\_7247529/content\\_40569136.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/node_7247529/content_40569136.htm).

ty. As such, they are entitled to participate in decision-making, enjoy rights and fulfill obligations on an equal basis. Emerging markets and developing countries deserve greater representation and voice... We should adhere to multilateralism to uphold the authority and efficacy of multilateral institutions. We should honor promises and abide by rules. One should not select or bend rules as he sees fit”<sup>286</sup>. For all intents and purposes, the “core” leader was making the argument that globalization was unstoppable and, therefore, any decoupling strategy undertaken by the US was bound to fail. Rather, he maintained that the multilateral, rules-based trading system was not to be abandoned. That Xi should make such a defense of the existing trade order is not surprising since China’s systematic violations of trade rules had not been sanctioned in any meaningful way.

One year later, in the midst of the “trade war” with the Trump administration, the Chinese strongman was repeating the same message. In early April 2018 a speech to the Boao Forum for Asia, Xi ushered in a “new phase of opening up,” making extensive commitments to further liberalize China’s economy by “significantly broadening” market access, easing restrictions on foreign firms and lowering import tariffs<sup>287</sup>. At the same time that Xi was engaged in promoting these “reforms”, the Office of the United States Trade Representative reported that the PRC, since joining the WTO, had systematically violated its commitments to move in the direction of “open, market-oriented policies” in line with its accession commitments. In a January 2019 report to Congress, the Trade Representative concluded that “China became a WTO Member but did not internalize the open-market norms of the WTO community. China retains its non-market economic structure and its state-led, mercantilist approach to trade, to the detriment of its trading partners. At the same time, China has used the benefits of WTO membership – including its guarantee of open, non-discriminatory access to the markets of other WTO Members – to become the WTO’s largest trader, while resisting calls for further liberalization of its trade regime by claiming to be a “developing” country”<sup>288</sup>. In one brief paragraph, the Trade Representative’s report captures the fundamental reality driving China’s trade policy and many of its foreign policy priorities.

The Trump Administration has consistently expressed its dissatisfaction with the WTO and, in mid July 2019, on the eve of yet another round of “trade war” talks in Shanghai, Donald Trump described it as “broken”<sup>289</sup>. Later, in January 2020, during a

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286 Ibid.

287 See, Sarah Zheng, “Xi Jinping’s defence of globalisation and open markets: key takeaways from Chinese leader’s speech to Boao Forum”, South China Morning Post, April 10, 2018, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2141032/xi-jinpings-defence-globalisation-and-open-markets-key-takeaways>.

288 See, Office of the United States Trade Representative, “2018 Report to Congress On China’s WTO Compliance”, February 2019, p. 5, available at: <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2018-USTR-Report-to-Congress-on-China%27s-WTO-Compliance.pdf>.

289 See, Jacob M. Schlesinger and Alex Leary, “Trump Denounces Both China and WTO”, The Wall Street Journal, July 26, 2019, available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-presses-wto-to-change-china-s-developing-country-status-11564166423>.

White House press conference, Trump stated that the WTO “has been very unfair to the United States for many, many years. And without it, China wouldn’t be China, and China wouldn’t be where they are right now”<sup>290</sup>. The American president was pointing out that, largely as a consequence of WTO membership, China, since 2000, had quadrupled its GDP and increased exports by a factor of five<sup>291</sup>. Moreover, Western technology and know-how was not infrequently illegally appropriated in violation of intellectual property rules. If Western offshoring created millions of manufacturing jobs in China, one of the consequences of China’s WTO membership was the rise of over-consumption in the United States and, as a corollary, the diminishment of national savings. Replying to Trump, WTO Director-General Ricardo Azevedo conceded that the organization “has to be updated. It has to be changed. It has to be reformed”<sup>292</sup>. Twenty years later, how remote was Bill Clinton’s 2000 judgment of the WTO: “There is no substitute for the confidence and credibility the WTO lends to the process of expanding trade based on rules. There’s no substitute for the temporary relief WTO offers national economy, especially against unfair trade and abrupt surges in imports. And there is no substitute for WTO’s authority in resolving disputes which commands the respect of all member nations”<sup>293</sup>.

Although “openness” and “markets” are central to Xi’s discourse on the “community of common destiny for mankind”, the PRC’s understanding of open markets and free trade does not coincide with American and European views. Western policy makers urge the opening of the Chinese market and the adoption of WTO norms because they tend to see China as a country that, under Deng Xiaoping, made a conversion to markets and liberal conceptions of free trade. Beijing, on the other hand, sees opening and free trade as China’s integration into the global economy and the adaptation of that system to China’s necessities. In short, Western advanced technology was adapted by China to fuel its growth model and, in the new phase, Beijing is convinced that existing global rules and multilateral institutions must be adapted to China’s vital interests. That is why China is so intent on “reforming” multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank<sup>294</sup>. That is why it promotes the Group of 20, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Washington mistakenly insists that China’s “opening” is fundamentally a question of market access.

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290 See, “WTO has been very unfair to US for many years: Trump”, *Business Standard*, January 23, 2000, available at: [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/wto-has-been-very-unfair-to-us-for-many-years-trump-120012300078\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/wto-has-been-very-unfair-to-us-for-many-years-trump-120012300078_1.html).

291 For a discussion of the benefits derived by China from WTO membership, see, Stewart Paterson. *China, Trade and Power: Why the West’s Economic Engagement Has Failed*. London: London Publishing Partnership, 2018.

292 See, Silvia Amaro, “A reform-or-die moment: Why world powers want to change the WTO”, *CNBC*, February 7, 2020, consulted at: <https://www.cnbcm.com/2020/02/07/world-powers-us-eu-china-are-grappling-to-update-the-wto.html>.

293 See, The White House, “Remarks by the President at the World Economic Forum”, Davos, Switzerland, January 29, 2000, available at [https://1997-2001.state.gov/travels/2000/000129clinton\\_wef.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/travels/2000/000129clinton_wef.html).

294 See, Gregory Chin, “Two-Way Socialization: China, the World Bank, and Hegemonic Weakening”, *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Fall/Winter 2012, pp. 211-230.

In fact, the PRC is pursuing a revolution by stealth, gradually changing the international multilateral system in accordance with Chinese interests so as to leave these organizations fundamentally unrecognizable in every way but in name.

The dominance by stealth strategy encompasses a politico-ideological dimension. To the extent that it may be argued that “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is making China a modern economy, the CCP is able to claim that its developmental model is superior to democratic capitalism. The logic of Xi’s “community of common destiny for mankind” is visible in the Belt and Road Initiative which “connects the Chinese dream with the aspirations of the whole world for peace and development”<sup>295</sup>. Launched in 2013, Xi’s hugely ambitious project is, in short, Beijing’s main instrument for realizing the “core” leader’s vision of the “community of common destiny”. BRI aims to build connectivity through physical and digital infrastructure between China and countries throughout the globe<sup>296</sup>. However, such connectivity comes with a caveat: the world is expected to adapt to Beijing’s rules, standards and priorities. The strategic import of the project was highlighted during the October 2017 Nineteenth CCP Congress, when the party amended its constitution to encompass the pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative” and the building of “a community of common destiny”<sup>297</sup>. In this fashion, both BRI and the global vision enveloping it became strategic objectives to be pursued even in the post-Xi era.

Xi Jinping first called for the building of a Silk Road Economic Belt and a XXI Century Maritime Silk Road in the latter months of 2013<sup>298</sup>. Xi’s vision – alternatively

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295 See, “Spotlight: Chinese Dream connects aspirations of the whole world for peace, development”, Xinhua, November 29, 2017, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/29/c\\_136788472.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/29/c_136788472.htm).

296 On BRI, see, *inter alia*, Peter Frankopan. *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018; Bruno Maçães. *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order*. London: Hurst & Company, 2018; Tom Miller. *China’s Asian Dream: Empire Building along the New Silk Road*. London: Zed Books, 2019; Jonathan Holslag. *The Silk Road Trap: How China’s Trade Ambitions Challenge Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019 and Daniel Drache, A. T. Kingsmith and Duan Qi. *One Road, Many Dreams: China’s Bold Plan to Remake the Global Economy*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

297 See, “19th Party Congress: Belt and Road in CCP charter shows China’s desire to take global leadership role”, *The Straits Times*, October 24, 2017, available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/19th-party-congress-belt-and-road-in-ccp-charter-shows-chinas-desire-to-take-global>.

298 The Silk Road Economic Belt concept was presented in September 2013, in a speech delivered at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, In October 2013, Xi proposed a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to promote maritime cooperation during his speech to the Indonesian parliament. Xi also proposed establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to finance infrastructure construction, promote regional interconnectivity and economic integration. For the full text of the speeches outlining the proposal made in Kazakhstan, see, Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, “President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries”, September 7, 2013, available at: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpfwzysiesjtfhshzzfh\\_665686/t1076334.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesjtfhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml).

For the proposal made in Indonesia, see, “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament”, Jakarta, Indonesia, October 2, 2013, available at: [https://reconasia-production.s3.amazonaws.com/media/filer\\_public/88/fe/88fe8107-15d7-4b4c-8a59-0feb13c213e1/speech\\_by\\_chinese\\_president\\_xi\\_jinping\\_to\\_indonesian\\_parliament.pdf](https://reconasia-production.s3.amazonaws.com/media/filer_public/88/fe/88fe8107-15d7-4b4c-8a59-0feb13c213e1/speech_by_chinese_president_xi_jinping_to_indonesian_parliament.pdf).

A third speech, delivered at the official 2017 opening of the Belt and Road Forum is also relevant. President of the People’s Republic of China, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, 14 May 2017, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c\\_136282982.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm).

designated as One Belt, One Road (OBOR) or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – constitutes an ambitious program of infrastructure building to connect China’s less-developed border regions with neighboring countries. The original Silk Road trade network was developed by the Han Dynasty as commerce flowed to the west, into the vast lands of Central Asia, passing into today’s India and Pakistan and extending into continental Europe. Chinese BRI maps are imprecise, changing as BRI expands to new geographies or as corridors are added and, on occasion, subtracted. On land, the Silk Road Economic Belt aims to connect the country’s underdeveloped western frontier to Central Asia and, ultimately, Europe. The Maritime Silk Road envisions a network of ports and railways connecting southern China to Southeast Asia and, ultimately, Africa. During his 2017 Davos speech, making a provisional balance of the initiative, Xi asserted that in the three preceding years “over 100 countries and international organizations have given warm responses and support to the initiative. More than 40 countries and international organizations have signed cooperation agreements with China, and our circle of friends along the “Belt and Road” is growing bigger. Chinese companies have made over \$50 billion of investment and launched a number of major projects in the countries along the routes, spurring the economic development of these countries and creating many local jobs. The “Belt and Road” initiative originated in China, but it has delivered benefits well beyond its borders”<sup>299</sup>. In other words, BRI had become the privileged instrument for the dissemination of China’s international influence. Tremendous state resources have been allotted to BRI and virtually all levels of PRC government are actively engaged in the initiative, as are major companies as well as state and commercial banks.

Usually described by Western media as a massive infrastructure project determined by economic logic, Beijing views BRI as an instrument for achieving geopolitical advantage by binding countries more closely to Beijing through connectivity. On one level, BRI was an immediate response to the Obama Administration’s “pivot” to Asia and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. However, discussion regarding China’s strategic options, especially in Southeast China, predates the “pivot”. For instance, in late 2013, at the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference, attended by all members of the Politburo Standing Committee, Xi asserted that China’s neighbors had “extremely significant strategic value” and called for a strengthening of relations with its neighbors. Xi also affirmed that “stability in China’s neighborhood is the key objective of peripheral diplomacy. We must encourage and participate in the process of regional economic integration, speed up the process of building up infrastructure and connectivity. We must build the Silk Road Economic Belt and XXI Century Maritime Silk Road, creating a new regional economic order”<sup>300</sup>.

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299 For the full text of Xi’s Davos speech, see, “Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth”, Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping at the Opening Session Of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2017, Davos, 17 January 2017, CGTN America, January 17, 2017, available at: <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

300 See, Peter Cai, “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, Lowy Institute for International Policy, March 2017, p. 5, consulted at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative>.

In sum, China's financial and economic resources are viewed as a tool for maintaining regional stability and asserting Beijing's leadership in the immediate neighborhood. This new, activist foreign policy has buttressed the notion that BRI is primarily driven by broad geostrategic aspirations.

The intersecting geostrategic and economic dimensions of BRI are clearly evidenced by the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), linking Xinjiang's Kashgar with the Pakistani port city of Gwadar, situated on the Makran Coast on the edge of the Arabian Sea<sup>301</sup>. Gwadar is conceived as transshipment point, since the inland corridor allows China to bypass the Strait of Malacca choke point and the contested waters of the South China Sea. Touted as the world's deepest port, Gwadar could also, at some point, host aircraft carriers and submarines as the People's Liberation Army Navy extends its presence to the Indian Ocean<sup>302</sup>. Recently, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi characterized CPEC as a “transformational project and its completion is top priority of the current government”<sup>303</sup>. Initially budgeted at \$46 billion, the project now runs to \$62 billion. The first phase of CPEC, emphasizing infrastructure, primarily energy and roads (and, more disturbingly, a monitoring and surveillance system for the country's cities) has given way to a second phase reportedly focusing on industrialization, agriculture and socioeconomic development, with a particular emphasis on special economic zones<sup>304</sup>.

Gwadar is seen as economically vital for landlocked Xinjiang since transport costs to this autonomous region would be reduced by the existence of an inland corridor originating in Pakistan. Beijing believes that poverty and underdevelopment are the root cause of the province's political upheaval and, thus, connectivity between the Xinjiang and Central Asia will neutralize the separatist movement; specifically, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)<sup>305</sup>. Attempting to mitigate regional asymmetries between western and coastal provinces, Jiang Zemin, in 1999, launched the Western Development

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301 On CPEC and relations between the two countries, see, for example, Andrew Small. *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015 and Siegfried O. Wolf. *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, Context and Assessment*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2020.

302 For a more cautious perspective on Gwadar, see, Robert D. Kaplan. *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*. New York: Random House, 2010, pp. 67-94.

303 See, “Completion of CPEC top priority of govt: Qureshi”, *Daily Times*, April 25, 2020, available at: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/601613/completion-of-cpec-top-priority-of-govt-queshi-daily-times/>

304 See, Michael Kugelman, “Pakistan's High-Stakes CPEC Reboot”, *Foreign Policy*, December 19, 2019, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/19/pakistan-china-cpec-belt-road-initiative/>.

305 On the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), see, inter alia, Chien-peng Chung, “China's ‘War on Terror’: September 11 and Uighur Separatism”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4, July/August 2002, pp. 8-12 and John Z. Wang, “Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement: A Case Study of a New Terrorist Organization in China”, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Vol. 47, No. 5, October 2003, pp. 568-584; Rohan Gunaratna and Kenneth George Pereira, “An Al-Qaeda Associate Group Operating in China?”, *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 2006, pp. 55–61 and Michael Clarke, “China's ‘War on Terror’ in Xinjiang: Human Security and the Causes of Violent Uighur Separatism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 2, April 2008, pp. 271-301.

campaign, popularly known as “Go West!”<sup>306</sup>. Jiang’s plan focused on massive infrastructure investment (highway, railways, telecommunications) to foster growth in Xinjiang. Yet, beyond sparking new physical infrastructures, the central government’s sizeable investments produced few substantial results. For this reason, Beijing is attempting to use BRI to integrate the western regions, as well as other poor regions of China bordering on Southeast Asia, into the national economy. Chinese provincial governments have welcomed BRI, not least of all because they see it as a means of funding local infrastructure projects.

Of late, CPEC has run into ample political obstacles in Pakistan paralleling those encountered by China in other BRI partner nations. While still in the opposition, Imran Khan, elected prime minister in 2018, frequently criticized the project negotiated by the Pakistani Muslim League (Nawaz) government, intimating that corruption and excessive costs were endemic. The overreliance on Chinese labor rather than local workers and the debt risks faced by Pakistan also warranted his attention. The “debt trap” issue concerns most observers because countries signing up to BRI are heavily indebted states and thus willing to accept conditions that are, quite simply, often predatory. While Beijing’s denies practicing “debt trap diplomacy”, its seizure of the Sri Lankan Hambantota port suggests that Belt and Road-linked debt will become an instrument for maintaining partners submissive to Beijing’s broad interests<sup>307</sup>.

As China became more enmeshed in the country’s affairs, Pakistani public opinion become more vocal in rebuking Beijing’s treatment of fellow Muslim Uighurs and of PRC pressures to cancel an investigation into the trafficking of over 600 Pakistani brides to China<sup>308</sup>. It was therefore not entirely surprising that Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party called for a review of the CPEC agreements and reduced budgetary allocations slated for the project. Since Islamabad is wary of India’s approximation to the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies, there is little possibility of Pakistan withdrawing from the web of dependencies generated by the country’s partnership with the PRC. On the other hand, China is painfully aware that CPEC is a major obstacle for India’s participation in BRI. For better or worse, Pakistan finds itself in Beijing’s geostrategic orbit, an example of how Xi’s rhetoric of “equal relations” resting on partnerships can reduce significantly a country’s margin of strategic maneuver.

BRI’s strategic value depends on the extent to which domestic and foreign projects come together to structure production chains with China as the central hub of innovation,

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306 See, Wu-Long Lin and Thomas P. Chen, “China’s widening economic disparities and its ‘Go West Program’”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 13, No. 41, 2004, pp. 663-686.

307 See, Kinling Lo, Sri Lanka wants its ‘debt trap’ Hambantota port back. But will China listen?; *South China Morning Post*, December 7, 2019, consulted at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3040982/sri-lanka-wants-its-debt-trap-hambantota-port-back-will-china>. See, also, Christian Saint-Étienne. *Trump et Xi Jinping: les apprentis sorciers*. Paris: Editions de L’Observatoire, 2018, pp. 74-75.

308 See, Ben Farmer, “Pakistan halts investigation into sale of 629 brides to China ‘because of financial ties to Beijing’”, *The Telegraph*, December 4, 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/12/04/pakistan-halts-investigation-sale-629-brides-china-financial>.

advanced manufacturing and as setter of technical standards. Beijing expects BRI to play an important role in opening export markets for higher-end manufactured goods not readily accepted in demanding European and the US markets. Of course, as the PRC exports its goods, it also exports Chinese standards, indispensable if the country is to become leading player in research and development. The authorities further expect that new production chains will invariably force Chinese manufacturers to move higher up in value chains. China's telecommunications and high-speed rail technology demonstrate how BRI may be leveraged to upgrade Chinese industry. The Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Railway project exemplifies how Beijing intends to use BRI to promote high-tech sectors, technical and engineering standards<sup>309</sup>. After outmaneuvering Japan for the tightly contested contract, Indonesia signed with China in October 2015 because Beijing agreed to finance the deal in exchange for the use of “Chinese standards, Chinese technology and Chinese equipment”<sup>310</sup>. Not unlike other such projects, the accord fueled controversy and suspicion relative to China's predatory business practices. At any rate, it bears noting that the construction of the Jakarta–Bandung Rail line will likely be a loss-making project. Rather than seeing the project as a bust devoid of economic rationality, a better way of understanding such loss-making ventures is as a type of down payment, as investments, in exchange for a subsequent adoption of Chinese technology, know-how and standards. Seen from such a perspective, China invariably stands to profit economically and politically from these BRI projects.

It is against this background that Donald Trump's decision to retaliate against Chinese trade practices, the so-called “trade war”, must be viewed. Indeed, the term “trade war” is a misnomer for tariff increases within a context of intensifying geopolitical Sino-American rivalry. Trade has been fully politicized and is now one of the many planes in which this global geopolitical struggle is being carried out. As the “trade war” raged, in May 2019 Xi Jinping chose to visit Jiangxi province, the locale from whence the Red Army began its mythical Long March. Invoking the spirit of struggle and endurance, Xi, reacting to Washington's placing of Huawei on its trade blacklist, exhorted his countrymen to mobilize for “a new Long March, and we must start all over again”<sup>311</sup>. Concurrent with the visit to Jiangxi, Xi visited a rare earth mining and processing facility<sup>312</sup>. In a not so subtle affirmation of China's leverage, Xi's visit was meant to signal that China could ban the export of essential rare earths. Although denied by Beijing, Japan was in

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309 See, Peter Cai, “Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative”, p. 13.

310 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

311 See, Zhou Xin, “Xi Jinping calls for ‘new Long March’ in dramatic sign that China is preparing for protracted trade war”, *South China Morning Post*, May 21, 2019, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3011186/xi-jinping-calls-new-long-march-dramatic-sign-china-preparing>.

312 See, James T. Areddy, “Xi Jinping Flexes China's Trade Muscle With Visit to Rare-Earths Hub”, *The Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2019, consulted at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/xi-jinping-flexes-china-s-trade-muscle-with-visit-to-rare-earths-hub-11558442724> and Yang Kunyi, “Xi's visit boosts China's critical rare-earth sector”, *Global Times*, May 20, 2019, accessed at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1150779.shtml>.

fact the target of an undeclared rare earth export ban following the 2010 Senkaku boat collision incident<sup>313</sup>. Reporting on Xi's tour, the Xinhua News Agency claimed that "bullying by the US side" was the cause of the failed trade talks, adding that "China has fully prepared for a protracted trade war with the United States, as it seems highly possible that the trade frictions between China and the United States are far from over. All of the Chinese people are ready to embark on a new "Long March" journey with greater courage and resilience and will never yield to foreign bullying and assault"<sup>314</sup>. The PRC "whole-of-the-nation" approach to its strategic rivalry with the United States and its allies was no longer deniable.

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313 See, Yuko Inoue, "China lifts rare earth export ban to Japan: trader", Reuters, September 29, 2010, consulted at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-china-export-idUSTRE68S0BT20100929>.

314 See, "Commentary: China fights U.S. trade bullying with 'Long March' spirit", Xinhua, May 24, 2019, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/24/c\\_138086295.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/24/c_138086295.htm).

## PART V

### America's China Illusion

“It isn't that there's no right and wrong here. There's no right”

V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*

#### Competitors, Rivals... Enemies

In recent years, as the post-Cold War American bipartisan consensus on China began to fray, accusations of “losing China” have been cast at the administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. It is remarked that, just as Truman “lost” China to Mao in the late 1940s, the presidential globalist trio lost the opportunity to stave off China's rise. The debate, framed in these terms, is sterile. Unlike the 1940s, American policy in the post-Mao era was extremely constrained once Deng Xiaoping decided to proceed with “openness and reform”. While it is true that US choices could have delayed the PRC's rise, and the vast integration of production and value chains could have been avoided, the country's economic reemergence was not preventable. But American and European politicians, working under the assumption that engagement would surely modify the communist regime, actually embraced the process that greatly accelerated the PRC's rise to great power status. In so doing, by not delaying China's rise, US politicians and business interests narrowed the timeframe for developing an adequate policy response more favorable to Western nations. To comprehend this strategic misjudgment, it is useful to consider the manner in which US policy toward China has consistently overestimated Washington's capacity to shape Chinese events, for this is “America's China illusion”.

Concurrent with the dawning of the new republic declared in 1776, American traders and missionaries took to the seas to procure commerce and the salvation of souls in Cathay<sup>315</sup>. Engagement with China was fundamentally an individual undertaking since the new state, heeding George Washington's admonition regarding the avoidance of foreign entanglements, concentrated on securing its unstable borders and recently-acquired independence. However, avoidance of foreign entanglements was not merely wise policy advice, it was dictated by the new nation's extremely limited capacity to project national military power. American involvement in the Middle Kingdom was, however, to expand in the wake of the Qing's cataclysmic Opium Wars. With the cessation of hostilities, the United States and assorted European powers extracted inequitable trading privileges and extraterritorial concessions from the imperial authorities. The Treaty of Wangxia, the first bilateral accord between the United States

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315 See, John Pomfret. *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom*, pp. 1-28.

and imperial China, signed on 18 May 1844, was “basically a summary, with significant refinements, of the two treaties that the Chinese had signed with the British”<sup>316</sup>.

Guiding American policy in China for half a century, the “Open Door” principle was outlined by John Hay, William McKinley’s Secretary of State, on 6 September 1899<sup>317</sup>. In the first of a number of diplomatic notes, Hay proposed an “open market” for all merchants trading in China, irrespective of nationality. Moreover, he called upon Great Britain, France, Japan, Germany and Russia to refrain from establishing colonies in China and from pursuing policies benefiting only their citizens. However, the Open Door seemed to be compromised as the Boxer Rebellion, backed by Empress Dowager Cixi, targeted foreign nationals, particularly missionaries, as well as Chinese Christians<sup>318</sup>. Responding to the outbreak of the Boxers uprising, on 3 July 1900, Hay circulated another note to the powers, calling for respect for the “territorial and administrative integrity” of China; that is, the powers were not to use the rebellion as a pretext for “carving up” China into colonial possessions. Ironically, the Open Door policy exposed the limits inherent to America’s foreign policy; specifically, the lack of adequate military resources to enforce US vital interests in China. The call for “open access” and “free trade” denoted that American merchants would be free to pursue profits, but Japan and the European powers were to be straddled with the costs of forcibly “opening” China’s doors. In short, much like the PRC has relied on the US Navy to guarantee unobstructed oceanic shipping lanes and “choke points”, the Open Door policy was a “free-rider” strategy relying on blood and treasure expended by other states.

The post-World War I years witnessed the intensification of America’s presence in Asia. A self-confident and expansive Pacific power present in the Philippines, Guam and Hawaii, the United States, during the 1920s and 1930s, actively promoted trade and investment ties with China and the Far East. Concomitantly, missionaries of various denominations, particularly active in China since the Second Great Awakening, duplicated efforts to bring Christianity to the region. In this context, Washington sought to defend its interests in the Far East by delineating a regional policy resting on three pillars. First, intending to assure equal access to commercial opportunities in China, Washington reiterated the Open Door principle. The reaffirmation of the Open Door principle in the post-1918 environment was meant to be an unequivocal refutation of Japan’s policy of exclusive spheres of interest, later consubstantiated by Tokyo’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Second, Washington maintained that China’s territorial integrity was sacrosanct and, by extension,

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316 See, Warren E. Cohen. *America’s Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (6th ed.). New York Columbia University Press, 2019, p. 13. The full text of the Treaty of Wangxia may be accessed at: <https://china.usc.edu/treaty-wangxia-treaty-wang-hsia-may-18-1844>.

317 John Hay was appointed by President William McKinley on September 30, 1898. Following McKinley’s assassination, on 1 September 1901, he served under President Theodore Roosevelt until his death, on 1 July 1905.

318 On this matter, see, *inter alia*, David J. Silbey. *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China*. New York Hill and Wang, 2012, and Jung Chang. *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China*. London Jonathan Cape, 2013, pp. 256-279.

putative imperialist designs to carve out colonies from Chinese territory were denounced on the grounds that colonial arrangements restricted free trade. Third, the US committed itself to cooperating with other powers in the pursuit of “legitimate interests”, understood as free trade and unencumbered missionary activity in the country.

Tokyo, undeterred by Open Door principles, attacked Shanghai in 1932, the city harboring the largest international settlements. Although the aggression threatened the integrity of foreign concessions outlined in various treaties, Secretary of State Henry Stimson, lacking more robust policy alternatives, responded by announcing that Japan’s violation of the Nine Power Treaty exempted the United States from previously agreed naval limitation agreements. Stimson, in this fashion, opened the door to a naval arms race in the Pacific that would augment Japanese insecurity and, ultimately, lead Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy to Pearl Harbor. In the meantime, the Lytton Report, submitted to the League of Nations in October 1932, was ratified<sup>319</sup>. Designating Japan as the aggressor state, the Report characterized Manchukuo as a puppet state and appealed for the return of an autonomous Manchuria to Chinese sovereignty. The Japanese delegation responded by permanently walking out of the League Council. China and Japan eventually signed a truce, but continued Japanese control over Manchuria exposed China’s undisguisable powerlessness in a threatening environment.

Given the exigencies resulting from the 1930s global Great Depression, and in light of its limited interests in Manchukuo, the US naturally excluded the use of force against Japan. Even limited economic sanctions commanded negligible support from an American public wary of distant entanglements. Under such constraints, the United States took an unprecedented diplomatic step: it resorted to the League of Nations to enforce the terms of the Kellogg-Briand Pact<sup>320</sup>. As a result of the predictable failure of the League to resolve the issue, in January 1932, the Secretary of State outlined the “Stimson Doctrine”, whereby Washington refused to recognize any treaty or agreement celebrated between Japan and China that violated established American rights or agreements. For all of the diplomatic bluster, the United States, in many respects, had been excluded from the region’s geopolitics.

American policy shifted in response to Japan’s 1937 military invasion of China. Much had changed since the early 1930s, including Washington’s newly-forged privileged ties

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319 See, Arthur K. Kuhn, “The Lytton Report on the Manchurian Crisis”, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 27, No. 1, January 1933, pp. 96-100.

320 The United States, Germany and France signed the document on 27 August 1928. Article I stated that “(T)he High Contracting Parties solemnly declare in the names of their respective peoples that they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies and renounce it as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another”. Article II stated: “(T)he High Contracting Parties agree that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or of whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means”. In case of violation of the Pact, states “should be denied of the benefits furnished” by the terms of the accord. Since there was no mechanism for enforcement, the Pact was not particularly useful as a means of deterrence. The full text may be accessed at: [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kbpact.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kbpact.asp).

with Chiang Kai-shek's Guomintang as it fought a civil war to prevent Mao's assumption of power. US support was also extended to the Chinese communists during the war against the Japanese occupation. The first initiative establishing contact with the CCP in Yan'an was undertaken in July 1944 by the The United States Army Observation Group (Dixie Mission), led by diplomat John S. Service and Colonel David D. Barrett. Virtually the sole source of information for American decision-makers, Service's reports from Yan'an proposed US collaboration with Mao's CCP, described as a movement more akin to European socialism than to Russian Bolshevism<sup>321</sup>.

When the Japanese surrendered following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Mao's Red Army did not control any major city: a limitation compensated by superior military organization, elevated morale and having been spared devastating encounters with the Japanese. In contrast, the Guomintang had been mauled by years of Japanese attacks. Straddled by corruption and mismanagement, popular support for the GMD narrowed considerably. At this specific junction, Mao and Chiang met in Chongqing to discuss the formation of a post-war government committed to "democracy", a unified military and the "equality" for all political parties<sup>322</sup>. The result was the Double Tenth Agreement of 10 October 1945, whereby the CCP recognized the legitimacy of the GMD government, while Chiang recognized the CCP as a legitimate opposition force. Weeks later, Truman charged General George Marshall with the task of persuading Chiang and Mao to form a joint government under the auspices of the Dixie Mission. Marshall met Mao at Yan'an to broker a truce between the two contending parties, but decades of suspicion and mistrust thwarted efforts to form a coalition government<sup>323</sup>. The Double Tenth Agreement was a dead letter as the parties, by 1946, resumed fighting. Harry Truman, not entirely convinced that relations with Nationalist China were of strategic import but hemmed in by domestic political considerations, prolonged financial and military aid to the Nationalists and, on 11 March 1947, the last elements of Dixie Mission were airlifted out of Yan'an.

Immediately prior to the CCP's 1949 seizure of power, reeling from allegations of having "lost" China to the communists, the Truman administration, on August 1949, released a "China White Paper"<sup>324</sup>. Minimizing Washington's role in China's affairs, the document claimed that policy had been dictated by the principle that only Chinese forces could determine the outcome of the civil war. The White Paper revealed the extent to which China policy had been transformed into a domestic political issue as the investigations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities reached their zenith. Indeed,

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321 See, Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists*, pp. 228-235.

322 For Mao's version of these negotiations, see, Mao Tse-tung, "On the Chungking Negotiations", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 4, pp. 53-63. On the talks, see, Sergey Radchenko, "Lost Chance for Peace: The 1945 CCP-Kuomintang Peace Talks Revisited", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring 2017, pp. 84-114.

323 On George Marshall's China mission, see, Danies Kurtz-Phelan. *The China Mission: George C. Marshall's Unfinished War, 1945-1947*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2018.

324 ON Harry Truman's response to the "loss" of China, see, Kevin Peraino. *A Force So Swift: Mao, Truman and the Birth of Modern China, 1949*. New York: Crown, 2017.

the standing committee's excesses would prompt Truman to denounce it as "the most un-American thing in America"<sup>325</sup>. The White Paper also exposed the administration's vulnerability to the "China lobby"; that is, Chiang Kai-shek's congressional backers guaranteed that the United States, having failed to impede the communist takeover of the mainland, was bound to assume special responsibilities toward the Guomindang government installed in Taipei.

In response to Mao's establishment of the PRC, Washington and a number of its allies imposed a trade embargo on the new regime as Mao revealed his "lean to one side" preference for an alliance with the Soviet Union. Sino-American relations were virtually non-existent during the first two decades of the Cold War. However, the Korean War, whose outbreak coincided with escalating Cold War tensions in Europe, marked a sea-change in the regional balance of power and the respective roles of the United States, China and the Soviet Union. Ostensibly undertaken to reunite North and South Korea under communist rule, the 25 June 1950 aggression brought the United States into the conflict as the principal power enforcing the police action authorized by the United Nations Security Council<sup>326</sup>. In the wake of initial North Korean military successes, General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the joint allied forces in Korea, made an amphibious landing behind enemy lines at Inchon in mid September 1950. As the allied troops pushed Kim Il Sung's forces deep into North Korean territory, Chinese "volunteers" entered the conflict and pushed UN forces far into the south. In response, MacArthur suggested crossing into Chinese territory and raised the possibility of resorting to atomic weapons to halt the Chinese "People's Volunteer Army". MacArthur's imprudence and veiled challenge to President Truman's authority ultimately led to his dismissal. The war would end in a stalemate, formalized by the July 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement and the consolidation of the border at the 38th parallel Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

The geopolitical landscape was wholly altered by the Korean war. The Soviet Union benefitted from the war's outcome since pressures on Stalin in Eastern Europe were eased as the US, forced to assume a permanent role in Asia, transferred resources from Central Europe. As for China, the losses incurred during the war accentuated its dependence relative to Moscow. Sanctioned by Mao and Stalin, Kim Il Sung's decision to invade the southern half of the peninsula made accommodation between the PRC and the US virtually impossible. As a consequence, the US Navy's Seventh Fleet prevented the PRC from assaulting the Guomindang's last island bastion and sealed Washington's commitment to the continued survival of Chiang Kai-shek Taiwanese government<sup>327</sup>.

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325 See, Gay Talese, "Truman Day Here: Talk, Walk, Talk", *The New York Times*, April 30, 1959, p. 17. Accessed at: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1959/04/30/89188649.html>.

326 On the Korean War, see, John Merrill. *Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989 and Bruce Cummings. *The Korean War: A History*. New York: Random House. 2010.

327 See, Gao Wenqian. Zhou Enlai, p. 5. On the Brezhnev Doctrine, see, R. Judson Mitchell, "A New Brezhnev Doctrine: The Restructuring of International Relations", *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 3, April 1978, pp. 366-390, and Matthew J. Ouimet. *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

A decisive episode in the onset of the Cold War in Asia, the Korean War effectively poisoned Sino-American relations from the 1950s to the 1970s. The establishment of a diplomatic dialog between the two countries would have to await the election of a staunchly anti-communist, Republican president. After his 1968 victory, President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, embarked on a radically new policy approach<sup>328</sup>. Largely due to geopolitical reasons, the United States and the People's Republic of China began considering a limited rapprochement as leaders in both countries concluded that a re-approximation presented a historical opportunity to alter the international correlation of forces. With Washington and Beijing locked in great power rivalry with Moscow, and given the existential threat posed by Soviet nuclear weapons to both the United States and China, Nixon's end-game was to encircle the Soviet Union and, in this fashion, oblige Moscow to negotiate *détente* in less favorable circumstances. Indeed, recollecting a round of arms control talks with the Soviets, Nixon notes that "a major reason for Brezhnev's interest in a nonuse treaty might be his suspicion that we were about to conclude a military agreement with Peking. The Soviets felt that a renunciation of the use of nuclear weapons would greatly undercut our usefulness to the Chinese in the event of a Sino-Soviet war"<sup>329</sup>. Henry Kissinger, the president Nixon's National Security Advisor, more bluntly, states that "we did not seek to join China in a provocative confrontation with the Soviet Union. But we agreed on the necessity to curb Moscow's geopolitical ambitions"<sup>330</sup>.

Immediate, practical concerns pushed Mao and Nixon to action. For Mao, a decade of intense Sino-Soviet tension provided an obvious incentive to explore a thaw in relations with the United States. Security concerns stemming from border clashes and fears over a general Sino-Soviet war made the US an obvious ally to balance the Soviets. Chairman Mao was also motivated by domestic political realities. Although the CCP's pro-Soviet faction had been defeated during the Cultural Revolution, Mao's paranoia prevented him from allaying fears of a Soviet invasion of China after Moscow's 1968 suppression of the Prague Spring gave rise to the Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty<sup>331</sup>. For Nixon, the "opening" to China was a logical outcome of his 1968 presidential campaign pledge to end the protracted war in Vietnam<sup>332</sup>. Normalizing relations with China would contribute to isolating Ho Chi Minh's government, a *sine qua non* condition for the "vietnamization" of the war and the subsequent withdrawal of American troops. As for *détente* with the Soviets, strategic realignment with the PRC would increase American leverage relative to the Kremlin.

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328 See, Chris Tudda. *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012.

329 See, Richard Nixon. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York. Grosset & Dunlap, 1978, pp. 880-881.

330 See, Henry Kissinger. *White House Years*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979, p. 764.

331 See, Gao Wenqian. *Zhou Enlai*, p. 6.

332 Richard Nixon had raised the possibility of straightening US-PRC relations before winning the White House. See, Richard M. Nixon, "Asia After Viet Nam", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1, October 1967, pp. 111-125.

Signaling interest in improved relations, Nixon eased travel and trade restrictions in place since the Korean War. Through Pakistani President Yahya Khan, Washington established a secret channel to the PRC leadership, used by Beijing to manifest interest in high-level discussions with the United States. An unorthodox but unequivocal diplomatic signal was emitted when Mao confided to Edgar Snow, visiting China at the Chairman's invitation, his willingness to talk with Nixon<sup>333</sup>. In 1971, President Nixon corresponded to the overture by eliminating all restrictions on travel to the People's Republic. The next round of this ongoing diplomatic shadow-play occurred in April 1971, when American and Chinese table tennis players met and, unexpectedly, publicly fraternized during an international competition held in Japan. The US team was then invited to play a match in mainland China and, in April 1972, the Chinese ping-pong squad reciprocated by visiting the United States.

As these incipient signs of a diplomatic thaw played out in public, Henry Kissinger made two secret trips to Beijing in 1971 to plan Nixon's visit, the first of which began on July 9. Kissinger's well-known sense of history led him to conclude that "(T)he visit of an American emissary to Peking was bound to spark a geopolitical revolution, the effect on Hanoi alone would be traumatic"<sup>334</sup>. Coinciding with Kissinger's second trip, in 25 October 1971, the United Nations voted China's status in that body. Washington maintained that the UN should seat both Beijing and Taipei, but with the General Assembly's passage of Resolution 2758 recognizing the PRC as "the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations", the seat was attributed to the PRC and Taiwan abandoned the organization. Still, despite this reversal, the US refrained from vetoing Beijing's assumption of the Security Council seat.

Developments at the United Nations cleared the way for Richard Nixon's February 1972 visit to China for talks with Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai<sup>335</sup>. Resulting from these meetings, the Shanghai Communiqué expressed the desire of both parts to normalize the bilateral relationship<sup>336</sup>. Notwithstanding the intention to open a new chapter in the bilateral relation, a number of critical issues continued to separate the parts. The most significant was the status of Taiwan because, in effect, the Chinese refused to normalize ties unless Washington severed formal diplomatic relations with Taipei. To ease Beijing's anxieties, the American side was conspicuously silent relative to Beijing's claim that the PRC government "is the sole legal government of China" and "Taiwan is a province of China". Richard Nixon reaffirmed that his government did not support Formosa's independence, accepting that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain that there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China"

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333 See, Gao Wenqian. Zhou Enlai, p. 11 and Richard Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 547.

334 See, Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 691.

335 See, Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World*. New York: Random House, 2007.

336 The Full text of the "Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China ("Shanghai Communiqué", February 28, 1972)", is available at: [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/shanghai\\_communique.pdf](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/shanghai_communique.pdf).

and called for a “peaceful solution” to the issue. The question as to who would govern “one China” was circumvented. Washington’s policy did not differ significantly from that of the Guomindang government in Taipei; Chiang Kai-shek had always been adamant in affirming that his Nationalist government was the true, legitimate government of China, whole and indivisible. As an additional good-will gesture, the US announced its intention to remove its troops still stationed in Formosa, but refrained from stipulating a concrete time frame for withdrawal.

The framework was thus set for Jimmy Carter’s 1979 “normalization” of bilateral ties. Throughout the next decade, bilateral diplomatic relations were hindered primarily by the “Taiwan issue”. The PRC sought to avoid any change to the “one China” policy and pressed for a downgrading of America’s commitment to Taiwan. For its part, the US refused to abandon the Formosa government, a move that would invariably place Taipei at Beijing’s mercy. However, broadly speaking, relations continued to improve following Deng’s rise to power as US policy-makers became convinced that the PRC was gradually thawing and setting out on a path to capitalism and, perhaps, even liberal democracy.

Faced with the herculean challenge of managing the security crisis wrought by the demise of European communism, President George H. W. Bush, a former chief of the liaison office in Beijing and unofficial US ambassador to China, sought to avert volatility in the bilateral relationship<sup>337</sup>. A few days after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, President Bush stated that “I don’t think we ought to judge the whole People’s Liberation Army by that terrible incident”<sup>338</sup>. Since the PLA was under the direction of Deng Xiaoping and the senior civilian leadership, the president’s remarks focusing on the military were disingenuous. Despite the president’s intentions, domestic outrage provoked by the Tiananmen massacre made punitive sanctions inevitable. Bush nonetheless rejected broad sanctions, announcing instead the cancellation of bilateral military talks, the suspension of military contacts and limitations on technology transfers. Considering the White House’s overall response to be tepid, congressional leaders called for the immediate imposition of tariffs, a ban on technology transfers and the cessation of military cooperation<sup>339</sup>.

The House of Representatives, in July 1989, amending a foreign aid authorization bill, retorted by approving a ban on arms sales and other measures. There was, however,

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337 See, George Bush and Brent Scowcroft. *A World Transformed*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998, pp. 86-111. George Bush’s political conservatism and aversion to change regarding China is clearly demonstrated in a direct quote reproduced by one of the President’s biographers, Jon Meacham: “The strength of democracy and freedom is fantastic, it’s wonderful”, Bush dictated, “and yet change has to be orderly in many situations. The big point is, we cannot foment revolution or it might make things worse”. See, Jon Meacham. *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*. New York: Random House, 2015, p. 374.

338 See, Jeff Jacoby, “Kissing and Coddling China’s Dictators”, *Capitalism Magazine*, June 6, 2001, available at: <https://www.capitalismmagazine.com/2001/07/kissing-and-coddling-chinas-dictators/>.

339 For an examination of the debate surrounding sanctions in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre, see, David Skidmore and William Gates, “After Tiananmen: The Struggle over US Policy toward China in the Bush Administration”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Summer 1997, pp. 514-539.

a caveat. By invoking “national security interests”, the president could nullify the application of sanctions. Moreover, in early 1990, the Senate substituted the “national security interests” formulation with a generic “national interests”, thereby further accentuating presidential discretion regarding the concrete application of the sanctions<sup>340</sup>. Displeased with the Bush Administration, Senator George Mitchell and Representative Nancy Pelosi drafted a 1991 bill linking human rights to the president’s annual extension of Chinese non-discriminatory Most Favored Nation (MFN) status allowing Chinese exports to avoid the high penalizations foreseen by the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act<sup>341</sup>. The bill mustered sufficient support to pass both houses of Congress, but was vetoed by President Bush. Year after year, until 2001, interminable lobbying by the foreign policy establishment and corporations eyeing the Chinese market ensured that similar legislative initiatives died quietly in the halls of Congress.

## The Globalizer-in-Chief

Unsurprisingly, George Bush’s response to the Tiananmen massacre thrust China policy into the 1992 presidential race as Democrat Bill Clinton reproached Bush for “coddling dictators from Baghdad to Beijing”<sup>342</sup>. Accusing the sitting president of timidity in confronting the “butchers of Beijing”, Clinton pledged that, if elected, future renewals of China’s MFN status would be predicated on Beijing’s acceptance of human rights related conditions. Yet, soon after, Clinton effectively capitulated to corporate interests alleging that the competitiveness of their companies in the Chinese market would be undermined, and American jobs inexorably compromised, if such linkage was not jettisoned. Although Nancy Pelosi attempted to keep the issue alive, the House of Representatives validated Clinton’s position in August 1994. Subsequent American administrations would, at least publicly, continue to emphasize human rights in their dealings with China, but, in the absence of a linkage between trade and human rights, the rhetoric was utterly devoid of substance.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union had removed the shared assumptions underlying the domestic bipartisan consensus on foreign policy, Clinton set out to define a new strategic course. Understanding the United States as the “indispensable nation”, the

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340 Soon after, Bush authorized the sale of four Boeing airplanes. Other sanctions, including USTDA, although not OPIC, were abandoned by Bill Clinton. Pursuing the Global War on Terror, George W. Bush allowed the sale of sensors and police equipment. In short, the rhetoric of punitive sanctions was generally not coincidental with the reality of their application.

341 China was first granted non-discriminatory MFN status in 1980, subject to annual review by US authorities. See, Csilla Lakatos, “Back to the 1930s: Do US tariffs signal a shift to Smoot-Hawley-type Protectionism?”, Brookings Future Development, July 26, 2018, accessed at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/07/26/back-to-the-1930s-do-us-tariffs-signal-a-shift-to-smoot-hawley-type-protectionism/>.

342 See, James Kirchick, “Dems marching backward on foreign policy”, Politico, November 26, 2007, available at <https://www.politico.com/story/2007/11/dems-marching-backward-on-foreign-policy-007039>.

Administration laboured to forge a new bipartisan consensus resting on the promotion of markets and democracy. American economic and military preponderance, and international leadership, would be employed to accomplish the country's primary mission, which, according to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, was to enlarge the "community of free nations" so that the US would become "more secure, prosperous and influential"<sup>343</sup>. China and Russia, defined by the president as "our former adversaries", were to be absorbed into the "international system as open, prosperous, stable nations" and, proposing continued engagement, Clinton added that "what is the best thing to do to maximize the chance that China will take the right course, and that, because of that, the world will be freer, more peaceful, more prosperous in the 21st century? I do not believe we can bring change to China if we isolate China from the forces of change"<sup>344</sup>.

Still, the Clinton Doctrine was of critical import because it structured the post-Cold War bipartisan consensus in foreign policy. Particularly evident during the unipolar 1990s, foreign policy orthodoxy posited that US engagement with China would produce internal change ultimately leading to acceptable (that is, relatively benign) Chinese international behavior<sup>345</sup>. The fundamental premise of the "China consensus" posited that engagement, viewed as effectively integrating China into a globalized economy, would generate economic growth that, in turn, would produce a middle class whose interests would lead it to demand greater political participation. Societal pressures applied to the state would ignite institutional change as the regime, to survive, would have no alternative but to accommodate the demands and interests of the novel middle class. The growth of societal pluralism in an increasingly complex Chinese society would spark reform and democratization. Seen in this light, American self-interest in China, understood as investment and market access, was a force for promoting democracy and markets, globalization's pillars.

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343 Anthony Lake, Bill Clinton's first National Security Council (NSC) director, outlined the main pillars of the Clinton Doctrine in a speech given on September 21, 1991, at the Johns Hopkins University. See, Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement", September 21, 1993, available at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>. Also, on the Clinton Doctrine, see, The White House, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, February 1996, available at: <https://www.hsdll.org/?view&did=444939>. For a discussion, see, Douglas Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine", *Foreign Policy*, No. 106, Spring 1997, pp. 110-127, and J. Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine? President Clinton's Foreign Policy Reconsidered", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 13, No. 22, 2002, pp. 43-56.

344 See, The White House, "Remarks by the President on Foreign Policy", Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Francisco, CA, February 26, 1999, accessed at: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/clintfips.htm>.

345 Expressing this view, Bill Clinton, in 1997, claimed that: "Isolation of China is unworkable, counterproductive, and potentially dangerous. Military, political, and economic measures to do such a thing would find little support among our allies around the world and, more importantly, even among Chinese themselves working for greater liberty. Isolation would encourage the Chinese to become hostile and to adopt policies of conflict with our own interests and values. It will eliminate, not facilitate, cooperation on weapons proliferation. It would hinder, not help, our efforts to foster stability in Asia. It would exacerbate, not ameliorate, the plight of dissidents. It would close off, not open up, one of the world's most important markets. It would make China less, not more, likely to play by the rules of international conduct and to be a part of an emerging international consensus". See, The White House, "Remarks by the President in Address on China and the National Interest", *Voice of America*, Washington, DC, October 24, 1977, consulted at: [https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eap/971024\\_clinton\\_china.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eap/971024_clinton_china.html).

The emerging Clinton Doctrine posited that globalization, understood primarily in terms of market liberalization and the extension of free trade, would generate socio-economic change favourable to democratization. As the spread of globalization fostered democracy, security would be enhanced by the “interdemocratic peace”<sup>346</sup>. Resting on the assumption that democracies do not wage war against each other, peace between democracies was seen as a means of achieving international security. Mutually reinforcing, democratization and globalization – desirable from a normative perspective –, were also a means of boosting US national security. In sum, no noticeable contradiction existed between democracy promotion and the fulfilment of America’s fundamental national interest. Still, Lake recognized that promoting democracy would necessarily be tempered by power constraints and recognized that “non-democratic” regimes would at times be supported to advance US national interests. The theoretical edifice underpinning the Clinton Doctrine was fragile, viewing globalization as a benign phenomenon, a cause of greater tolerance and, therefore, a generator of pluralist politics. Such an optimistic conclusion rested on the fairly superficial belief that “the more people know, the more opinions they are going to have; the more democracy spreads”<sup>347</sup>. Equally questionable was the conceit that China’s absorption into the globalized order could change China but would not provoke changes in the United States. Clinton and Lake saw change as unilinear and appeared not to entertain the notion that America too could be profoundly changed by globalization.

Operating under these faulty theoretical assumptions, the Clinton Administration set the pattern for Sino-American relations until Trump entered the Oval Office. The defining moment of the relationship, the beginning of so-called “Chimerica”, occurred in 2000, when Congress granted “permanent normal trade relations” (PNTR) to the People’s Republic<sup>348</sup>. PNTR represented a tremendous upgrade for the People’s Republic

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346 There is an unending literature exploring the positive correlation – for it is a correlation – between democracy and peace. For some of the pioneering works, see, *inter alia*, Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs. Part 1”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer 1983, pp. 205-235; Michael Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics”, *American Political Science Review*, 80, 1986; Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, ‘Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 September 1993, pp. 624-638; Raymond Cohen, “Pacific Unions: A Reappraisal of the Theory That Democracies Do Not Go to War with Each Other”, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 20 No. 3, July 1994, pp. 207-223; Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997; J. R. Oneal and J. L. Ray, “New Tests of the Democratic Peace: Controlling for Economic Interdependence, 1950-85”, *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 4, December 1997, pp. 751-775; John M. Owen. *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997; and, Stephen van Evera. *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999. See, also, Vasco Rato, “Mas são mesmo mais pacíficas?”, *Política Internacional*, No.18, Fall/Winter 1998, pp. 93-114.

347 According to Clinton, “The more people know, the more opinions they’re going to have; the more democracy spreads – and keep in mind, more than half the world now lives under governments of their own choosing – the more people are going to believe that they should be the masters of their own fate”. See, The White House, “Remarks by the President at the World Economic Forum”, Davos, Switzerland, January 29, 2000, available at [https://1997-2001.state.gov/travels/2000/000129clinton\\_wef.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/travels/2000/000129clinton_wef.html).

348 See, Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick, “Chimerica and the Global Asset Market Boom” *International Finance*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Winter 2007, pp. 215-239.

since the 1974 Trade Act excluded China and a host of other communist nations from MFN status unless they met certain preconditions demanded of non-market economies. However, with the improvement of bilateral relations, the PRC, in 1980, had been attributed MFN status, subject to annual renewal by Congress after pondering concerns from labor unions, human-rights activists and pro-Taiwan anti-communists. The granting of “permanent normal trade relations” thus constituted a sea-change since China was assured of permanent “favorable access” to the US market and virtually guaranteed entrance to the WTO. More importantly, by eliminating the uncertainty inherent to an annual review, PNTR allowed US companies and Chinese suppliers to establish new, interlocking supply chains. As a result of increased investor confidence, bilateral trade and investment exploded and the two economies became increasingly interwoven.

In May 2000, as Congress passed PNTR, Clinton summed up the expected consequences: “We will be exporting, however, more than our products. By this agreement, we will also export more of one of our most cherished values, economic freedom. Bringing China into the WTO and normalizing trade will strengthen those who fight for the environment, for labor standards, for human rights, for the rule of law. For China, this agreement will clearly increase the benefits of cooperation, and the costs of confrontation”<sup>349</sup>. Bill Clinton was unequivocally wrong on all counts. Still, this consensus view of the People’s Republic would not be questioned for another two decades. With China’s ascension to the WTO, in 2000, the stage was set for China’s continued growth and vertiginous rise to great power status.

During the 2000 campaign for the White House, George W. Bush rebuffed Bill Clinton’s view of China as a “strategic partner”, claiming that the US and the PRC were “strategic competitors”, and, to prove the point, immediately vowed to do “whatever it took” to defend Taiwan<sup>350</sup>. Indeed, largely forgotten in the aftermath of the al-Qaeda’s 9/11 atrocity is the fact that Bush’s first foreign policy crisis involved China. Three months into his term, the president was confronted with the April 2001 “Hainan Island Incident”<sup>351</sup>. A US Navy EP-3E aircraft collided in mid-air with a Chinese J-8 interceptor over the South China Sea, killing the PLA pilot. When the American plane made a forced landing on Hainan, the twenty-three crew members were promptly arrested. A protracted diplomatic battle ensued and was concluded only when Ambassador Joseph Prueher delivered

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349 See, The White House, “Remarks by the President on the Passage of Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China”, The Rose Garden, May 24, 2000, available at: [https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eap/000524\\_clinton\\_china.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eap/000524_clinton_china.html).

350 Richard Baum, “From ‘Strategic Partners’ to ‘Strategic Competitors’: George W. Bush and the Politics of U.S. China Policy”, *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 2001, pp. 191-220.351.

351 On this incident and its consequences, see, Shirley A. Kan *et al.*, “China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications”, CRS Report for Congress, Updated October 10, 2001, accessed at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30946.pdf>, and Minnie Chan, #How a mid-air collision near Hainan 18 years ago spurred China’s military modernization”, *South China Morning Post*, April 2, 2019, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3004383/how-mid-air-collision-near-hainan-18-years-ago-spurred-chinas>.

a “letter of two sorries” to Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan. The missive affirmed that Washington was “very sorry” for the pilot’s death and “very sorry” the American Navy plane lacked “clearance” to land<sup>352</sup>. Satisfied that the White House had extended an apology, Beijing released the crew. Although the US later claimed that it had not apologized, but merely expressed “regret and sorrow”, the Chinese had scored a significant propaganda victory<sup>353</sup>. Shortly after, In June, the president revealed that Beijing’s hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games would not be opposed by Washington.

Eliciting a sea-change in American foreign policy, the cataclysm unleashed by al-Qa-eda on 11 September 2001 profoundly altered Sino-American relations. Immediately following the attacks, President Jiang Zemin expressed his country’s “deep sympathy” and reiterated that the “Chinese Government has consistently condemned and opposed all manner of terrorist violence”<sup>354</sup>. Beyond the verbal solidarity, China endorsed various UN Security Council resolutions authorizing the ousting of the Taliban government and called on Iraq to desist from its obstruction of ongoing weapons inspections. Predictably, criticism of Chinese behavior, particularly human rights violations, subsided. President Bush, in his January 2002 State of the Union address, went so far as to say that “(I)n this moment of opportunity, a common danger is erasing old rivalries. America is working with Russia and China and India, in ways we have never before, to achieve peace and prosperity”<sup>355</sup>. Shortly after, in 2003, Washington abandoned its traditional sponsorship of a yearly UN Human Rights Commission resolution censuring Beijing’s dismal human rights record.

America’s post-9/11 strategic focus on the Global War on Terrorism, and the resulting military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, therefore afforded China greater room to maneuver. Substantial American military buildups in various Central Asian countries to support the war effort in Afghanistan renewed fears in Beijing of strategic encirclement. Yet, in the brave new world of Sino-American “anti-terrorist cooperation”, Washington granted the Chinese a virtual free hand in Xianjing as the regime cracked down on the “terrorist” Uyghur independence movement<sup>356</sup>. Reliant on broad diplomatic support as he pursued the “war on terror”, Bush was willing to accommodate China in exchange for Beijing’s moderation on the international stage. Emphasizing UN legitimation, Bush’s diplomatic strategy placed him at the mercy of Russia and China. Having committed

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352 For the content of the letter, see, “The letter that led to release of U.S. crew”, CNN.com, April 11, 2001, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/east/04/11/prueher.letter.text/>.

353 Curiously, the Hainan Island Incident is barely mentioned in George W. Bush’s memoirs, receiving less than a page of attention. See, George W. Bush. *Decision Points*. New York: Crown, 2010, p. 426. On the same matter, see, Condoleezza Rice. *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*. New York: Crown, 2011, pp. 45-48.

354 See, “Jiang Expresses Sympathy to Bush, Condemns Terrorists”, September 11, 2001, available at: <http://bg.chinesembassy.org/eng/dtxw/t131603.htm>.

355 See, The White House, “President Delivers State of the Union Address”, available at: <https://georgew-bush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

356 On Beijing’s “war on terror” in Xinjiang immediately after 9/11, see, Chien-peng Chung, “China’s ‘War on Terror’: September 11 and Uighur Separatism”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4, July/August 2002, pp. 8-12.

itself to the UN process, the Bush Administration effectively came to rely on China and Russia to refrain from casting Security Council vetoes as it waged its “war on terrorism”. Both needed only to bide their time before undermining Bush at the Security Council during the preparation for war against Saddam Hussein.

America’s “Global War on Terrorism”, centered in the greater Middle East, distracted Washington from the vertiginous changes occurring in Asia, and thus allowed Beijing to reinforce positions in the South China and East China Seas. To a large extent, Barack Obama’s “pivot” to Asia sought to “rebalance” the regional correlation of power in Washington’s favor<sup>357</sup>. Outlined by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in an October 2011 Foreign Policy article titled “America’s Pacific century”, the “pivot” sought to reorient Washington’s strategic priorities away from the Atlantic, the center of the country’s pre-occupations after 1945, to the Pacific<sup>358</sup>. Such a step was imperative because China’s rise had, for all intents and purposes, made Asia the “key driver of world politics”<sup>359</sup>. For the US to retain its leadership role, it was necessary to invest in the Pacific in a fashion similar to the way the transatlantic relationship had been fostered after World War II. The insinuation was that the resources expended on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan reflected mistaken policy priorities and, therefore, the US had to refocus on the Asia-Pacific region. Understood as a reorientation of resources and priorities, the pivot was fundamentally designed to meet the challenge to American global leadership posed by China’s rise. That is to say, the “pivot” signaled that Washington refused to simply stand aside as Beijing “established itself as regional leader”<sup>360</sup>.

The turn to Asia was a means of redressing new priorities arising from China’s rise as well as the region’s dynamism and new-found relevance in global politics<sup>361</sup>. From a trade perspective, American national interest simply could not dispense engagement with a region expected to be the world’s most robust economic zone. But the pivot was

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357 See, Kurt M. Campbell. *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*. New York: Twelve, 2016. Assistant Secretary of State for Asia in Barack Obama’s first term, Campbell was, in effect, the principal architect of the president’s “pivot” to Asia.

358 See, Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>.

359 *Ibid*.

360 See, Jude Woodward. *The US vs China: Asia’s New Cold War?* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.

361 Shortly afterward, in January 2012, the Department of Defence (DoD) reproduced Clinton’s language. A DoD Report stated that “U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region. Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of the region. We will emphasize our existing alliances, which provide a vital foundation for Asia-Pacific security. We will also expand our networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific to ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests”. See, Department of Defense, “Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense”, Washington, DC, January 2012, available at: [https://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](https://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf).

not motivated exclusively by investment, growth and economics. China's rise provoked a number of regional power shifts that could eventually threaten American preponderance in the Pacific and, more immediately, the Asian regional order maintained by US power. Speaking at the ASEAN 23 July 2010 foreign ministers meeting, Hillary Clinton voiced those concerns by declaring that the United States had "a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea"<sup>362</sup>. Geopolitical priorities were shifting in a number of Asian states as a result of China's rise and problems stemming from creeping alterations in the balance of power were already manifest. Indeed, North Korea's nuclearization and myriad disputes breaking out in the South China Sea evinced the complexity of the challenges on the horizon.

Strengthening Asian partnerships was an integral part of the pivot strategy. To that end, relations with Washington's traditional regional allies, such as Japan, South Korea and Australia were to be reinforced through a web of enhanced cooperation. Hillary Clinton argued that greater American participation in the region should be pursued through existing multilateral institutions such as ASEAN and APEC, but increased trade and investment also demanded new mechanisms and initiatives such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), complimented by free trade agreements with traditional allies. Centered on Japan, TPP offered access to the US market to a free trade bloc encompassing twelve countries. An alternative to deepening trade relations with China, the TPP however was not a mere free trade zone. Rules were to be established regarding "anti-competitive practices", as was a supranational entity capable of enforcing those same rules. While not definitively excluded, Chinese membership would only be possible if, at some point, the country abandoned its state-controlled companies and conformed to TPP rules and standards. Obama was clear on this matter, stating that "TPP allows America – and not countries like China – to write the rules of the road in the 21st century, which is especially important in a region as dynamic as the Asia-Pacific"<sup>363</sup>. In short, much more than a free trade project, TPP ultimately sought to force change in the Chinese economy and, by extension, the country's political system. Until then, TPP would deprive China of markets and thus retard its expansion. In this sense, Obama shared Bill Clinton's conviction that political change in China would be driven by trade.

Beijing did not fail to respond to TPP; it accelerated the ASEAN Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and, in 2013, Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative. Comprising the ten ASEAN nations and China, Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand, RCEP was launched in November 2012 to stimulate freer

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362 See, US Department of State, "Remarks at Press Availability", Hanoi, Vietnam, July 23, 2010, available at: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/07/145095.htm>.

363 For Obama's remarks, see, The White House, "Statement by the President on the Signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership", February 3, 2016, available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/03/statement-president-signing-trans-pacific-partnership>.

trade between the countries adhering to the framework<sup>364</sup>. While not a free trade area, the partnership, from Beijing's perspective, was meant to foment uniform trade rules and technical standards. Since the PRC economy was such a colossus, these rules would, predictably, conform largely to Chinese standards. By proposing a trade area whose rules and standards were fundamentally different from those Washington promoted, RCEP was a frontal response to TPP. Moreover, it consubstantiated a Chinese attempt to exert greater dominance over the ASEAN states. If the fundamental aim of the United States was to exclude China from the TPP, China's fundamental aim was to exclude the United States from Asia, a motive that would also partially motivate Beijing's BRI.

Although TPP was, in effect, an unacknowledged geopolitical tool designed to contain China, Obama's "pivot" did not ignore traditional regional security issues<sup>365</sup>. The United States aimed to modernize bilateral arrangements and defense treaty guarantees extended to Australia, Japan and South Korea. At the same time, new alliances and partnerships were to be developed with the region's emerging states. Nor was the delivery of regional security collective goods to be neglected. To that end, a robust military presence was to be maintained, particularly through the projection of naval power. Responsibility for maintaining freedom of navigation and open sea lanes continued to rest with American naval forces, especially pressing in light of Beijing's challenge to these principles in the South China and East China Seas. In effect, the pivot meant that military, primarily naval, resources were to be shifted to the Pacific and bases were to be expanded and modernized<sup>366</sup>. At the same time, Japan and other regional allies were encouraged to assume greater responsibilities for their security. Washington began to nudge its allies to enhance their military capabilities so as to assure greater readiness and, not less relevant, to ease the burden imposed on the American treasury. All of these innovations were to be balanced with enhanced military-to-military dialogue with China so as to allay fears of American containment strategy of China.

## Trump's Rollback

On June 15, 2015, to the blaring sounds of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World", the New York billionaire Donald Trump descended the main escalator of Manhattan's

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364 See, for instance, Min Ye, "China and Competing Cooperation in Asia-Pacific: TPP, RCEP, and the New Silk Road", *Asian Security*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2015, pp. 206-224, and Shintaro Hamanaka, "TPP versus RCEP: Control of Membership and Agenda Setting" *Journal of East Asian Economic Integration* Vol. 18, No. 2, June 2014, pp. 163-186.

365 For a discussion of the geopolitical significance of the trade deal, see, Michael J. Green and Matthew P. Goodman, "After TPP: The Geopolitics of Asia and the Pacific", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4, October 2015, pp. 19-34, and Jane Perlez, "U.S. Allies See Trans-Pacific Partnership as a Check on China", *The New York Times*, October 6, 2015, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/07/world/asia/trans-pacific-partnership-china-australia.html>.

366 For a critical analysis, see, Bruce Klingner, "The Missing Asia Pivot in Obama's Defense Strategy", *The Heritage Foundation WebMemo*, January 6, 2012, consulted at: [http://thf\\_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/wm3443.pdf](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/wm3443.pdf).

Trump Tower to announce his bid for the Republican party's presidential nomination<sup>367</sup>. Since Trump had been frequently touted as a presidential candidate, the announcement was not entirely unexpected, although most pundits believed the announcement to be an orchestrated publicity stunt promoted by a consummate media personality. After all, Trump had been a fixture on the American entertainment scene for decades, becoming a major celebrity as host of the "The Apprentice" throughout fourteen television seasons. Generally neglected at the time was Trump's long-held beliefs, and public declarations, pointing to the country's industrial decline and the grievance stemming from his conviction that "the world is laughing at America's politicians"<sup>368</sup>.

During the hour-long announcement of the candidacy, Trump made explicit his intention to revert the country's "decline" by pledging to "Make America Great Again". A number of themes that were to subsequently define his presidential bid were introduced: undocumented immigration, the inequities of free trade, deindustrialization and accompanying job losses, terrorism, media bias and the rejection of politically correct cultural elitism. For all intents and purposes, an alternative view of national and international priorities, foreshadowed in the 1990s by Pat Buchanan's campaigns, was coalescing in Trump's bid for the Republican nomination.

The speech immediately drew a storm of criticism because of controversial remarks centered on Mexican immigration: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with [them]. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people"<sup>369</sup>. Receiving far less attention were Trump's claims that Mexico and China were siphoning well-paying manufacturing jobs from American blue-collar workers<sup>370</sup>. Curiously, Trump refused to blame China for this state of affairs, instead suggesting that Beijing was merely pursuing its legitimate self-interest. Rather, he suggested that the fault for the devastation of American industry resided squarely with the Obama Administration's willingness to acquiescence to unfair Chinese practices stemming from an unequal, unfair trade relationship dating to the 1990s. Seventy years after the abolishment of the "unfair treaties" imposed on China during the "century of humiliation", the United States now too clamored against unfair trade treaties.

As the campaign season progressed, what initially appeared to be a Quixotic adventure metamorphosed into an insurgency against the *status quo*, domestic and foreign.

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367 See, Michael Kruse, "The Escalator Ride That Changed America", Politico, June 14, 2019, consulted at: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/06/14/donald-trump-campaign-announcement-tower-escalator-oral-history-227148>.

368 See, Charlie Laderman and Brendan Simms. Donald Trump: The Making of a World View. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017, p. 3.

369 See, Washington Post Staff, "Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid", Washington Post, June 16, 2015, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/>.

370 See, Justin R. Pierce and Peter K. Schott, "The Surprisingly Swift Decline of US Manufacturing Employment" American Economic Review, Vol. 106, No. 7, 2016, pp. 1632-1662.

Throughout the long, unpredictable Republican primary season, Trump remained unyielding in his attacks on Chinese trade practices and forcibly denounced the colossal challenge posed by Beijing's predatory behavior to fundamental American interests. Throughout the campaign season, Donald Trump repeatedly labeled China as the "champion of currency manipulation", going as far as to promise that, if elected, on his first day at the Oval Office he would formally designate the country as a currency manipulator<sup>371</sup>. He also claimed that discriminatory barriers and practices, ranging from forced technology transfers to the flagrant theft of intellectual property to the lack of reforms in the state-owned sector, hampered the entry of American companies in the Chinese market. From this vast litany of grievances, Trump concluded that the best form of maintaining a balanced bilateral relation was to demand reciprocity for American companies and a level playing field in trade.

This is not to say that his presidential rival, Hillary Clinton, was not also critical of China. In fact, the Democrat was seething in her condemnation of the country's dismal record on human rights and gender inequality. Yet, in contrast to Trump, Clinton's views on trade and economic relations with the People's Republic were considerably less assertive, no doubt because she continued to believe that engagement with Beijing was still the best available policy option. Unlike Trump, Obama's former Secretary of State was not prepared to fully abandon the foreign policy establishment's approach to China defined by Bill Clinton in the 1990s. But reality was imposing itself on a presidential campaign struggling to articulate a coherent message. Accordingly, candidate Hillary Clinton, in early October 2015, publicly declared her opposition to TPP, suggesting the deal was not in the national interest<sup>372</sup>.

In a number of fundamental respects, Trump's assertive approach to China was the logical continuation of Obama's 2010 "pivot to Asia". While the Obama Administration engaged in containment without assuming it was pursuing such a strategy, Trump was quite transparent in his approach to the PRC. Within days of being elected, Trump accepted a congratulatory telephone call from Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's president, symbolically treating her as a head of state rather than the head of a "Chinese province"<sup>373</sup>.

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371 After being sworn-in, Trump continued to designate China as a currency manipulator. See, for instance, Steve Holland e David Lawder, "Exclusive: Trump calls Chinese 'grand champions' of currency manipulation", Reuters, February 24, 2017, consulted at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-china-currency-exclusive-idUSKBN1622PJ>. Two months after taking office, in an interview granted to the *The Wall Street Journal*, Trump had apparently, and for the time being, changed his mind and refused to use the currency manipulator designation. See, Gerard Baker, Carol E. Lee e Michael C. Bender, "Trump Says Dollar 'Getting Too Strong,' Won't Label China a Currency Manipulator" *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-says-dollar-getting-too-strong-wont-label-china-currency-manipulator-1492024312>.

372 For the Democrat Party politics driving the decision, see, Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes. *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*. New York: Crown, 2017, pp. 86-87. Also, Anne Gearan and David Nakamura, "Hillary Clinton comes out against Obama's Pacific trade deal", *The Washington Post*, October 7, 2015, consulted at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/10/07/hillary-clinton-comes-out-against-obamas-pacific-trade-deal/>.

373 See, Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, "Trump Speaks with Taiwan's Leader, an Affront to China", *The New York Times*, December 2, 2016, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/us/politics/trump-speaks-with-taiwans-leader-a-possible-affront-to-china.html>.

It was the first time since the 1979 severing of relations between the US and Republic of China that an American president (in this case, a president-elect) spoke directly with his Taiwanese counterpart. Although the reasons leading Trump to act in such a heterodox fashion remain murky, it was nevertheless a signal that Beijing could ill afford to ignore since, during the campaign season, Trump had questioned the “one China policy”. In an interview granted to Fox News, Trump stated that he failed to understand the necessity of maintaining a “one China” policy unless it was possible to negotiate other issues, including commercial ones, with the Beijing government<sup>374</sup>. However, even if Trump was attempting to maximize his negotiating leverage, questioning publicly the “one China policy” still amounted to a significant break with foreign policy precedent.

Following the historic meeting between Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong, in February 1972, Washington adopted the “one China” policy; that is to say, it recognized China was territorially indivisible and the country’s legitimate government was in Beijing. As it consummated this turn in policy, Washington, with Beijing’s consent, maintained a privileged relation with Taipei. For three decades, the US preserved its “strategic ambiguity” relative to the response that would be forthcoming in the case the PRC attempted to reunify the country by force<sup>375</sup>. Unwilling to “test” American resolve regarding the status of Formosa, and thereby avoiding the risk of provoking war, the Chinese accepted the existing *status quo*. In effect, this informal but equally crystalline understanding between the two governments sustained the peace in the Taiwan Strait, where the periodic presence of the US Navy guaranteed stability. It was precisely this *status quo* that Trump, deliberately or not, upturned by answering Tsai Ing-wen’s telephone call.

China was also wary of other overt signs of a hardening of policy. Various PRC critics, including Peter Navarro and Steve Bannon, were appointed to relevant administration posts<sup>376</sup>. Moreover, the departments of State and Defense were also attributed

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374 See, Mark Lander, “Trump Suggests Using Bedrock China Policy as Bargaining Chip”, The New York Times, December 11, 2016, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/11/us/politics/trump-taiwan-one-china.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article>. Soon after, following a telephone conversation with president Xi Jinping, President Trump announced that, after all, he would abide by the “one China” policy. See, Mark Landler e Michael Forsythe, “Trump Tells Xi Jinping U.S. Will Honor ‘One China’ Policy”, The New York Times, February 9, 2017, consulted at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/world/asia/donald-trump-china-xi-jinping-letter.html>.

375 For a discussion, Jonathan Manthorpe. *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2009, pp. 211-225.

376 Prior to taking a White House job, Navarro, was an outspoken, and controversial, critic of China’s trade policies. *Death by China* is his most well-known book. He was nominated director of the White House National Trade Council in December 2016. A few months later, in April 2017, Navarro became head of the National Trade Council, when it folded into the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy. In September 2017, the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy was subsumed under the National Economic Council. See, Peter Navarro and Greg Autry. *Death by China: Confronting the Dragon – A Global Call for Action*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2011. On Bannon, see, Joshua Green. *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017 and Keith Koffler. *Bannon: Always the Rebel*. Washington: Regnery, 2017.

to men whose views on China did not indicate a future decompression of policy. For instance, the designated Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, during his Senate confirmation hearings, suggested that Beijing's island-building in the South China Sea was "akin to Russia's taking Crimea", adding that "(W)e're going to have to send China a clear signal that, first, the island-building stops and, second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed"<sup>377</sup>. Apparently referring the possibility of a naval blockade of the South China Sea to impede Beijing's effective control of the Spratly Islands, he characterized PRC policy as "extremely worrisome" and, if Beijing's control of the waters were to be consummated, a potential threat to the "entire global economy". In no uncertain terms, pointing the finger at the Obama Administration, Tillerson concluded that the "failure of a response has allowed them just to keep pushing the envelope on this"<sup>378</sup>.

Tillerson did however dissent from Donald Trump on one critical issue. During the Senate hearings, the nominee expressed his support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Preferring bilateral relations with the Pacific nations, Trump characterized the TPP an unfair trade accord prejudicial to US interests. Perhaps the harshest outburst occurred during a speech at a 6 June 2016 campaign rally in Ohio. On that occasion, Trump asserted that: "The Trans-Pacific Partnership is another disaster done and pushed by special interests who want to rape our country, just a continuing rape of our country. That's what it is, too. It's a harsh word: It's a rape of our country"<sup>379</sup>. Declaring it "a great thing for the American worker", Trump unceremoniously abandoned TPP on his third day in the Oval Office<sup>380</sup>. Yet, the TPP odyssey did not end with the announced withdrawal because Trump's decision did not sink the treaty. Following the White House's announcement, the remaining nations negotiated new provisions less objectionable to the American side. In early April 2018, the White House White House Deputy Press Secretary Lindsay Walters admitted that "(T)he President has consistently said he would be open to a substantially better deal, including in his speech in Davos earlier this year. To that end, he has asked Ambassador Lighthizer and Director Kudlow to take another look at whether or not a better deal could be negotiated"<sup>381</sup>. On 30 December 2018, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership came into force, but the administration's position would remain ambiguous.

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377 See, David Brunnstrom and Matt Spetalnick, "Tillerson says China should be barred from South China Sea islands", Reuters, January 11, 2017, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congress-tillerson-china-idUSKBN14V2KZ>.

378 Ibid.

379 See, Adam Taylor, "A timeline of Trump's complicated relationship with the TPP", The Washington Post, April 13, 2018, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/13/a-timeline-of-trumps-complicated-relationship-with-the-tpp/>.

380 See, David Smith, "Trump withdraws from Trans-Pacific Partnership amid flurry of order", The Guardian, January 23, 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/23/donald-trump-first-orders-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp>.

381 See, Alana Abramson, "White House Explains Trump's Reversal on TPP", Fortune April 12, 2018, available at: <https://fortune.com/2018/04/12/white-house-explains-trumps-reversal-on-tpp/>.

Although post-Cold War foreign policy orthodoxy posited that the US must remain engaged with China so as to modify PRC international behavior, Trump had effectively begun to fashion Washington's emerging bipartisan awareness of the formidable threat posed by China. Xi Jinping's reversal of internal reforms, leading to robust authoritarianism and an increasingly assertive foreign policy, helped to sway opinion in favor of a new policy orientation. Although a new bipartisan "China consensus" has yet to congeal, it is generally accepted that the approach of the preceding decades has failed. Two senior Obama officials responsible for Asia policy, Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, recognizing that the underlying premise of US China policy "have started to look increasingly tenuous", describe China as America's "most dynamic and formidable competitor in modern history"<sup>382</sup>.

The pre-Trump "China consensus" held for decades because it was not entirely evident that it was a massive failure. Experience with democratization and development in other regions of the globe appeared to vindicate modernization theory predictions about democratization. Until Xi Jinping's ascension to the leadership of the CCP, signs of reform and an incipient opening of the regime seemed to be a real possibility. Granted, the signs were not unequivocal, and the reforms in place were often piecemeal and obviously subject to reversal. Still, most observers chose to see a general trend pointing to positive change. Business leaders motivated by access to the vast Chinese domestic market were vocal supporters of the policy. Inexpensive Chinese imports, producing the so-called "Wal-Mart effect", were an incentive to develop trade with China since the deflationary effects of those goods amounted to a bonus for consumers straddled with stagnant wages<sup>383</sup>.

Many were also convinced by China's "peaceful rise" rhetoric maintaining that the country's growing economic power would not be converted into military assets to seek regional alterations in the balance of power. Beijing's persistent claims that the country was on a course of "peaceful rising" fitted neatly into the complacent Western narrative advanced by academics seduced by theories of American declinism. Trump dynamited the political establishment's "China consensus" and the benign expectations underpinning an engagement policy appearing to be "natural" in a globalized world. Expressing the view that engagement had not produced desired democratization, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo affirmed that "we did an awful lot that accommodated China's rise in the hope that communist China would become more free, more market-driven, and ultimate-

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382 See, Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 2, March/April 2018, pp. 70. For a different view, see, Fareed Zakaria, "The New China Scare: Why America Shouldn't Panic About Its Latest Challenger", Vol. 99, No. 1, January/February 2020, pp. 52-69. For an interesting discussion on this matter, see, James Curran, "How America's Foreign Policy Establishment Got China Wrong", *The National Interest*, December 17, 2018, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-america-s-foreign-policy-establishment-got-china-wrong-39012?page=0%2C1>.

383 See, Charles Fishman. *The Wal-Mart Effect: How the World's Most Powerful Company Really Works – And How It's Transforming the American Economy*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006.

ly, hopefully more democratic. And we did this for a long time”<sup>384</sup>. Xi Jinping’s hardening of foreign and domestic policies apparently demonstrated the extent to which America’s China policy had been misguided.

Concurrently, the risks of politicians adopting a more robust rhetoric or a more affirmative stand in Congress have diminished because American public opinion, even before the Covid crisis, largely ceased to view China as a benign power. An August 2019 Pew Poll revealed that negative perceptions of China stood at 60%, the highest unfavorable response since Pew began to pose the question<sup>385</sup>. The inquiry indicates a number of other interesting findings. When asked which country or group constituted the greatest threat to the United States, 24% indicated China, the same that replied Russia. Nuclear North Korea obtained 12% of the responses. Lastly, both Democrats and Republicans view China in a negative light, although “Republican opinion is somewhat more negative: 70% of Republicans and independents who lean Republican have an unfavorable opinion, compared to 59% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents”<sup>386</sup>. The Covid19 crisis will undoubtedly see American public opinion harden even more against China.

A second aspect of the “new China consensus” rested on the conviction that America’s unipolar moment has been superseded by great power rivalry, with China and Russia emerging as “peer competitors”<sup>387</sup>. The shift was unambiguously laid out in the December 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, the Trump Administration’s key national security document. Defining China as a “competitor” and a “revisionist power”, the document affirmed that “China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, an emptying to erode American security and prosperity”<sup>388</sup>. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair,

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384 See, “2019 Herman Kahn Award Remarks: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on the China Challenge”, delivered at the Hudson Institute, October 30, 2019, available at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Transcript\\_Secretary%20Mike%20Pompeo%20Hudson%20Award%20Remarks.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Transcript_Secretary%20Mike%20Pompeo%20Hudson%20Award%20Remarks.pdf).

385 The poll was conducted between May 13 to June 18, 2019, during a period of ongoing trade tensions between the US and China. See, Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “US Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions”, Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes and Trends, consulted at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/08/13/u-s-views-of-china-turn-sharply-negative-amid-trade-tensions>.

386 Ibid.

387 The Department of Defense currently defines a “global peer competitor” as a “nation or rival coalition with the motivation and capabilities to contest U.S. interests on a global scale”. A coalition of states, however, remains the most likely type of challenge beyond the single state. See, Thomas S. Szayna, Daniel Byman, Steven C. Bankes, Derek Eaton, Seth G. Jones, Robert Mullins, Ian O. Lesser, and William Rosenau. *The Emergence of Peer Competitors: A Framework for Analysis*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001, p. 8, footnote 1, available at: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1346.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1346.html). Also, José Manuel Félix Ribeiro. *EUA versus China: confronto ou coexistência*. Lisbon: Guerra e Paz, 2015, and Carlos Gaspar. *O Regresso da Anarquia: Os Estados Unidos, a Rússia, a China e a Ordem Internacional*. Lisbon: Alétheia Editores, 2020.

388 For a discussion, see, Feng Huiyun, “Is China a Revisionist Power?”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Summer 2009, pp. 313-334.

to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence”<sup>389</sup>. In effect, Trump’s national security strategy posits that the threat posed by China is particularly acute since it represents a comprehensive, full-spectrum challenge to American power.

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389 See, The White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America”, December 2017, p. 2, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. For a discussion, John M. Weaver, “The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2018, pp. 62-71.

## PART VI

### Thucydides Redux

“Standing in the grey world looking with sodden,  
molten eyes out into what irrevocably is”

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Leaving*

#### Xi, the Revisionist

During the CCP Nineteenth National Congress that consecrated his undisputed leadership of party and state, Xi Jinping boasted that China “has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong”<sup>390</sup>. With these brief words, China’s strongman succinctly outlined the fundamental objectives underlying decades of CCP rule and his vision of the future. Elizabeth Economy recently observed that China’s communist trajectory since the 1949 “liberation” may be subdivided into “three revolutions”<sup>391</sup>. During the “first revolution”, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the country was “liberated”, unified and “stood up” to close the door on the “century of humiliation”. During the “second revolution”, China grew rich as a result of the reforms undertaken by Deng Xiaoping and his two successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. The “third revolution”, building on the success of the previous two, consubstantiated the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (中华民族伟); that is, the country’s return to its “natural”, historical greatness under “core” leader Xi Jinping. This ongoing “third revolution” encompasses two distinct yet complementary component parts: a modern economy offering increased living stands to the population while sustaining great power affirmation in international affairs.

As early as the Chinese Communist Party’s October 2002 Sixteenth National Congress, Jiang Zemin outlined a two-decade long “period of strategic opportunity” for China<sup>392</sup>. As would become readily apparent, the most significant dimension of this “strategic opportunity” was the country’s ascension to World Trade Organization (WTO) membership on 11 December 2001. Seen as the main driver for assuring continued growth and development during the “second revolution”, WTO status meant virtually unfettered access to the coveted US and European markets. Moreover, since Western companies believed that PRC WTO membership diminished the risks of investing in the

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390 See, “Socialism with Chinese characteristics enters new era: Xi”, October 18, 2017, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/18/c\\_136688475.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/18/c_136688475.htm).

391 See, Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution*, pp. 1-12.

392 See, “Full Text of Jiang Zemin’s Report at 16th Party Congress on November 8, 2002”, available at: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/3698\\_665962/t18872.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18872.shtml). Also, Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 203.

country, Chinese access to foreign technology and capital was tremendously facilitated after membership was extended. Concomitantly, as a confidence-building measure, Beijing, in addition to its ostensible conversion to free trade, delineated a “good neighbor policy” emphasizing support for ASEAN and other regional initiatives and institutions. Beijing, in effect, sought to convince neighboring nations and the United States in particular, of China’s self-restraint and nonthreatening behavior as it pursued “peaceful rise”<sup>393</sup>. Said differently, PRC behavior was apparently modified as a consequence of becoming a “stakeholder” in the international order which, so it was said, the Beijing regime did not seek to overturn. This was exactly the type of message US policymakers eagerly awaited to confirm the fundamental soundness of policy choices made in Washington in the preceding years.

Ten years later, things looked very different from those heady days of the 1990s and 2000s. When Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012, the PRC had metamorphosed into a confident power flexing its economic and military might. One such expression of the country’s new-found assertiveness and determination to resume its central role in world politics transpired in May 2014, when Xi stated that “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia”<sup>394</sup>. Interpreted in some quarters as a “Chinese Monroe Doctrine” designed to exclude the United States from a future regional security architecture dominated by Beijing, the affirmation was, at a minimum, an unequivocal affirmation of Xi’s determination to play predominant role in the region<sup>395</sup>. The premise, of course, was that the “people of Asia” were of one mind on this matter. China tends to make little or no distinction between Asian interests and its own parochial ones; usually viewing them as one and the same. Japan, South Korea and other neighboring states (not to mention Taiwan) are less readily disposed to accepting a regional order excluding the United States and dominated by the PRC, an eventuality that would leave them open to Beijing’s cajoling. Irrespective of Beijing’s ultimate motivation, major clashes between the US and China, and their respective regional allies, loom in a not too distant horizon.

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393 For further discussion on “peaceful rise” (also known as peaceful development), see, State Council White Paper, “China’s Peaceful Development Road”, People’s Daily, October 22, 2005, available at: [http://en.people.cn/200512/22/eng20051222\\_230059.html](http://en.people.cn/200512/22/eng20051222_230059.html). Also, Henry. Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 499-513; Zheng Bijian, *China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5, September/October 2005, pp. 18-24; Barry Buzan, “China in International Society: Is ‘Peaceful Rise’ Possible?” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2010, Pages 5-36; and Raquel Vaz-Pinto, “Peaceful rise and the limits of Chinese exceptionalism”, *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 57, 2014, pp. 210-224, available at: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbpi/v57nspe/0034-7329-rbpi-57-spe-00210.pdf>.

394 See, David Lague and Benjamin Kang Lim, “Special Report: How China is replacing America as Asia’s military titan”, *Reuters*, April 23, 2019, consulted at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-army-xi-specialreport/special-report-how-china-is-replacing-america-as-asias-military-titan-idUSKCN1RZ12L>.

395 See, for example, Patrick Mendis, “Chinese behaviour in Asian seas driven by Monroe Doctrine of its own”, *South China Morning Post*, May 26, 2014, consulted at: <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1519437/chinese-behaviour-asian-seas-driven-monroe-doctrine-its-own>.

Since coming to power, Xi Jinping has made innumerable references to a “community of common destiny for mankind” (人类命运共同体), frequently translated as a “community of shared future for mankind”<sup>396</sup>. Encompassing themes common to Chinese foreign policy outlined in Zhou Enlai’s 1954 “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, the “community of common destiny for mankind” is best understood as an alternative paradigm of international relations and, as such, a blueprint for a post-liberal international order<sup>397</sup>. To put the matter simply, under Xi Jinping the PRC has emerged as a revisionist power endowed with the will and the power resources necessary to challenge the post-1945 international liberal order. Although such monumental strategic ambition tends to be underappreciated in the West, where engagement strategies continue to hold sway over various governments, such a radical design is a fundamental consequence of the CCP’s ongoing “third revolution”. As a matter of fact, the attempt to revise the *status quo* is most advanced in the PRC’s immediate neighborhood, in the South China and East China Seas.

For some time, conceptions of “common destiny” have assumed a prominent place in PRC foreign policy discourse. For instance, the expression “community of common destiny” was first utilized by Hu Jintao in 2007 to depict PRC-Taiwan relations and, thus, was restricted to the “common destiny” ostensibly shared by the Chinese nation on both sides of the Strait<sup>398</sup>. Conveying many of the themes Xi would later emphasize, Hu, in 2005, used the occasion of a United Nations address to call for a “harmonious world” based on “friendly relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”<sup>399</sup>. Xi’s vision therefore does not represent discontinuity with past PRC foreign policy. Rather, it reasserts the intention to break with the essential tenets of the liberal international order consistently denounced by Beijing over the decades, including “superpower hegemonism” and security alliances created and maintained

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396 On this issue, I follow closely the views outlined in Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and its Allies”, *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, November 2018, pp. 155-166, available at: <https://2llqix3cnhb21kcxpr2u9o1k-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TNSR-Vol-2-Issue-1-Tobin.pdf>. See, also, Nadège Rolland, “China’s Vision for a New World Order” *The National Bureau of Asian Research*. NBR Special Report #83, January 2020, available at: [https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr83\\_chinasvision\\_jan2020.pdf](https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr83_chinasvision_jan2020.pdf).

397 See, Ronald C. Keith. *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, pp. 209-215.

398 See, Jin Kai, “Can China Build a Community of Common Destiny?” *The Diplomat*, November 28, 2013, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/can-china-build-a-community-of-common-destiny/>.

399 Hu stated that: “I would like to reiterate here what China stands for. We will continue to hold high the banner of peace, development and cooperation, unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development, firmly pursue the independent foreign policy of peace and dedicate ourselves to developing friendly relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Always integrating our development with the common progress of mankind, we take full advantage of the opportunities brought by world peace and development to pursue our own development while going for better promotion of world peace and common development through our successful development”. See, “Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity”, Statement by H.E. Hu Jintao President of the People’s Republic of China At the United Nations Summit, New York, September 15, 2005, consulted at: <https://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf>.

by the United States in Asia after 1945. Xi does however innovate in one critical sense: he aims to “realign global governance across at least five major dimensions: politics, development (to include economics, society, and technology), security, culture, and the environment”<sup>400</sup>. In other words, unlike his predecessors, Xi goes beyond traditional Chinese criticism and admonition and articulates a global vision, a global alternative, to the present liberal order. Albeit crouched in relatively benign Orwellian doublespeak, the “community of common destiny for mankind” is, in reality, a global challenge to the United States and its allies, Asian and non-Asian alike<sup>401</sup>.

The new, revisionist approach to international relations was explicitly and comprehensively articulated in a 18 January 2017 speech delivered by Xi Jinping at the Geneva United Nations office<sup>402</sup>. Days after making an unexpected speech at Davos in defense of globalization and free trade, Xi told the delegates assembled at Geneva that “China’s proposition is: build a community of shared future for mankind and achieve shared and win-win development”<sup>403</sup>. Positing a “harmony of interests” between China and the world’s nations, the speech argues for the establishment of a “fair and equitable international order” based on “sovereign equality”<sup>404</sup>. The operative principle underlying sovereign state interaction is “consultation”, actively pursued because “as long as we maintain communication and treat each other with sincerity, the “Thucydides trap” can be avoided”. “Consultation”, in turn, structures “international partnerships” based on “dialogue, non-confrontation, and non-alliance”. Moreover, Xi affirmed that, in contrast with the comportment of past and present great powers, “China is the first country to make partnership-building a principle guiding state-to-state relations”. Beijing thus understands itself as standing at the center of a vast global network of partnerships encompassing various issue areas. Given that the rules governing this new system envisioned by the Chinese are to be fashioned in conformity with the principle of equality between sovereign states, the system purports to give developing countries an enhanced voice in international affairs. Following from this vision of “sovereign equality”, Xi disingenuously concludes that “China will never seek hegemony, expansion or sphere of influence”<sup>405</sup>.

By replacing current alliance structures with “win-win” partnerships, China seeks an effective end to “dominance by just one or several countries”, a euphemism for US

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400 See, Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance”, p. 165.

401 See, Lam Peng Er, “China, the United States, Alliances, and War: Avoiding the Thucydides Trap?” *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2016, pp. 36-46.

402 For the full text of the speech, see, “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” Speech By President Xi Jinping At the United Nations Office at Geneva, Geneva, 18 January 2017, available at: <http://iq.chineseembassy.org/eng/zygx/t1432869.htm>.

403 Ibid.

404 Inspired by Adman Smith’s “invisible hand”, E. H. Carr, analyzing a different historical context, coined the term “harmony of interests” to suggest that great powers invariably posit that their specific interest coincides with the broad interest of all states, of the international community. See, E. H. Carr. *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 42-60.

405 See, “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” Speech By President Xi Jinping At the United Nations Office at Geneva.

treaty alliances<sup>406</sup>. Critically, and in marked contrast to American alliances, partnerships permit cooperation regardless of ideological, cultural and or differences. For example, irrespective of ideological or cultural affinities, China maintains “comprehensive strategic partnerships” with Australia, Iran, the European Union and a host of other countries and organizations. Lacking treaty commitments typical of structured alliances, these partnerships are deemed flexible and may be upgraded or downgraded in accordance with China’s national interest and the behavior of its partners. This flexibility is, in fact, the source of tremendous leverage. For example, Portugal, in 2019, upgraded its “strategic partnership” to a “strategic dialogue”, at the exact moment that the European Union labelled a China a “systemic rival”<sup>407</sup>. Indeed, China’s preference for dealing bilaterally with European Union states allows it to sow division and prevent the definition and implementation of common, European-wide policy. Quite simply, Beijing’s preference for partnerships is a “divide and conquer” approach designed to provide the PRC with a maximum amount of leverage. As for Russia, the relationship between the two powers is characterized as a “comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination”, that is, a strategic alliance in all but name.

Crucially, Xi dismisses “any contribution of the United States and its allies to keeping the peace and enhancing global prosperity since World War II. Rather, he credits the United Nations and the global community writ large and proposes his “community of common destiny for mankind” as the framework for future success”<sup>408</sup>. As a consequence, the “core” leader advocates resolving crises by way of dialogue between the parts directly involved or through the United Nations, adding that the Security Council should mediate and play the pivotal role in keeping the peace. But, obviously, some crises were not susceptible to resolution through dialogue. That the Security Council habitually failed to keep the peace in the past, frequently due to PRC vetoes or veto threats, is inconsequential because the pivotal role attributed by Xi to the UN is a smokescreen. By emphasizing the Security Council’s legitimacy to resolve conflicts, Xi seeks to hinder American and Western capacity to preserve international order and to undermine US alliances, viewed by Beijing as a structural impediment to its rise. The “no strings attached” cooperation and the “major powers should treat small countries as equals” mantras are, in reality, rhetorical devices that do not correspond to Chinese *praxis*. Nor would equality between states be congruent with past Chinese grievances, all based on the claim that China’s size and power entitled it to a say in international relations equal to its power.

Characterized by Beijing as Cold War institutions inadequate for the exigencies of contemporary international relations, alliances pose a fundamental politico-ideological

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406 Ibid.

407 See, Luis Felipe, “Portuguese-Chinese relations rise on a political level with annual contacts”, Portugal iNews, April 29, 2019, available at: <https://portugalinews.eu/portuguese-chinese-relations-rise-on-a-political-level-with-annual-contacts/>. On the EU’s decision, see, EU Commission, “EU-China – A Strategic Outlook”, March 12, 2019, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

408 See, Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance”, p. 159.

challenge to the CCP<sup>409</sup>. As Liza Tobin points out, “Beijing’s opposition to U.S. security alliances is also due to the coercive potential that coalitions of democracies represent”<sup>410</sup>. Such values-based alliances are a significant problem for China because the communist regime is presently unable to build alliances resting on the political values upheld by the CCP. In contrast, balancing alliances led by the US in the Indo-Pacific region are, in part, facilitated by common values and similar democratic regimes. It may, however, have greater success by appealing to a “Chinese development model” emphasizing growth but mute in relation to political values. In other words, partnerships with China do not oblige adherence to Beijing’s values, but they do presuppose that China’s development model is worthy of emulating. But if the model’s success is the result of the CCP’s “wise leadership” and “consultative” methods, the demarcation between the model’s performance and the values sustaining it gradually erodes. Over the long term, Beijing’s “community of common destiny for mankind” implies a future in which US alliances are absent and democratic states are forced to deal with China individually. China’s virulent opposition to the Quad, essentially conceived as an alliance of a “community of democracies”, is readily explicable.

Unsurprisingly then, the Chinese leadership relies increasingly on soft power instruments for expanding the country’s international influence. Cultural affirmation has become an essential component of national rejuvenation as well as the “core” leader’s global governance vision. Nonetheless, it bears emphasizing that in Xi’s parlance culture is synonymous with “socialist culture” and “core socialist values”, the latter being a precondition for achieving a “great modern socialist country” by mid-century<sup>411</sup>. The CCP insists that its “culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “core socialist values” must be reinforced through popular adhesion, while maintaining that the “community of common destiny for mankind” accepts difference and respects diversity. Resorting to a standard formula, Xi, during his Geneva speech, affirmed that “there is no such thing as a superior or inferior civilization, and civilizations are different only in identity and location. Diversity of civilizations should not be a source of global conflict; rather, it should be an engine driving the advance of human civilizations. Every civilization, with its own appeal and root, is a human treasure. Diverse civilizations should draw on each other to achieve common progress. We should make exchanges among civilizations a source of inspiration for advancing human society and a bond that keeps the world in peace”<sup>412</sup>. Interestingly enough, the claim of cultural equality is undermined not only by CCP policies of cultural assimilation and internal colonization in Tibet and Xinjiang, but also by Xi’s claim that “(F)or several millennia, peace has been in the blood

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409 See, Sun Xiaokun, “A Chinese Perspective on US Alliances”, *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 6, November 2019, pp. 69-76.

410 See, Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance”, p. 159.

411 See, “Xi Urges Efforts in Building China into a Great Modern Socialist Country”, *Xinhua*, March 20, 2018, consulted at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/20/c\\_137052370.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/20/c_137052370.htm).

412 See, “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” Speech By President Xi Jinping At the United Nations Office at Geneva.

of us Chinese and part of our DNA”<sup>413</sup>. By suggesting that, unlike other countries, China is hard-wired for peace, and that peace is the essence of Chinese identity, Xi, in a fit of cultural essentialism, attributes opposite characteristics to nations that, apparently, have war programed into their DNA.

Repression of religious and ethnic minorities is rampant in the People’s Republic, as is the stifling of speech and other liberties not meeting with the approval of the Chinese Communist Party. Yet, Chinese leaders advocate “consultative” democracy not only in state-to-state relations but also within states, arguing that such a model is superior to Western democracy. Steven Tsang describes this “consultative Leninism” as “an obsessive focus upon staying in power; continuous governance reform designed to pre-empt public demands for democratization; sustained efforts to enhance the Party’s capacity to elicit, respond to and direct changing public opinion; pragmatism in economic and financial management; and the promotion of nationalism in place of Communism”<sup>414</sup>. Although the CCP holds the monopoly of power, the party “consults” so-called “non-affiliated groups” and other “representative entities” within the institutional framework provided by the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. China’s harmonious “democracy” is thus presented as superior and more efficient than the Western bourgeois model emphasizing conflict and interest articulation through electoral politics. The Chinese government seeks to undermine electoral politics so as to shift global influence away from Washington and its allies.

Beijing also seeks to shift international public opinion in its favor by coopting environmental and sustainability issues. Although the Chinese government’s environmental *praxis* does not coincide with its rhetoric, the PRC has gained solid support in Western opinion for its unhesitating support of the Paris Agreement and the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ever since the 2012 Eighteenth Party Congress, when Hu Jintao elevated “ecological progress” to a structural component of China’s development plans, steps have been taken to reduce pollution and environmental damage caused by the country’s breakneck industrialization<sup>415</sup>. The CCP’s Nineteenth National Congress consolidated this policy orientation by establishing a “beautiful China” as a 2035 goal of national rejuvenation<sup>416</sup>. Although policy initiatives do not necessarily translate into practical change, the environment will likely remain a CPP priority for two distinct reasons. First, China’s rapid modernization provoked untold environmental devastation that now needs to be undone. Second, China has made a strategic bet on “clean energy” and associated technologies, in the process setting international standards and leaving it positioned to become a green economy leader. For the PRC, environmentalism makes sound economic sense and is a means of advancing Chinese business interests throughout the globe.

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413 Ibid.

414 See, Steven Tsang, “Consultative Leninism: China’s new political framework”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 18, No. 62, November 2009, p. 865.

415 See, Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution*, pp. 152-185.

416 See, “CPC incorporates ‘Beautiful China’ into two-stage development plan”, *China Daily*, October 18, 2017, consulted at: [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/18/content\\_33404172.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/18/content_33404172.htm).

Xi's revisionist international agenda has obliged him to point out, on numerous occasions, that "China's development does not pose a threat to any country... No matter how far China develops, it will never seek hegemony"<sup>417</sup>. Yet, for all the emphasis publicly placed on "consultation", "win-win" relations and "sovereign equality", the Beijing government does not discard military power. In point of fact, despite Xi's assurances that the PRC is a benign rising state, the 2019 "China's National Defense in a New Era" document advocates a multipolar world order within a "reformed" system of global governance<sup>418</sup>. Said differently, China intends to create a more favorable new security architecture as the country expands into new regions of the globe. Discussing the security situation in the Asia-Pacific, the document claims that countries in the region are "increasingly aware that they are members of a community with shared destiny"<sup>419</sup>. A response to US national security strategy, the Defense Paper describes Sino-Russo defense cooperation as a "comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era", adding that the relation between the two states is essential for "maintaining global strategic stability"<sup>420</sup>. Just what this means is not entirely clear, but, more than likely, it suggests a balancing strategy against the United States.

Convinced that Beijing's quest for broad economic development had been achieved by his predecessors, Xi maintained that the country must employ its material wealth to achieve great power status, to make China great again. China's inexorable march to great power status was therefore bound to stimulate intense debate over the nature of that rise and, more critically, over the likelihood of great power war. A particularly influential debate stemmed from Graham Allison's work on the "Thucydides Trap", comprehensively outlined in his book *Destined for War*<sup>421</sup>. In that study, Allison sets out to test empirically

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417 Xi Jinping made these remarks during the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's market reforms. See, Samuel Osborne, "China does not seek global domination, president Xi Jinping says in landmark speech", *The Independent*, December 18, 2018, consulted at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-president-speech-beijing-economy-finance-global-domination-a8689231.html>.

418 See, "China's National Defense in the New Era", The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, July 2019, the text is available at: [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html).

419 *Ibid.*

420 *Ibid.*

421 See, Graham Allison. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. The sixteen cases are documented in the "Thucydides's Trap Case File" at Harvard University's Belfer Center, accessible at <https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/case-file>. Reviewing Allison's book, Lawrence Freedman writes: "If lessons are to be drawn from past power struggles, perhaps the most relevant would come from the Cold War is that the avoidance of a hot war in this case had something to do with nuclear weapons. The nuclear issue might also encourage caution between China and the United States. The other instances come from times when issues of war and power were viewed differently than they are today, and their implications are not compelling. To try to find lessons from 15th century Portugal and Spain, or 17th century England and the Dutch Republic is unlikely to be fruitful". Lawrence Freedman, "Review of Graham Allison, *Destined for War*", *Prism*, Vol. 7, No. 1, September 2017, pp. 175-178, accessed at: [https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism\\_7-1/15-BR\\_Freedman.pdf?ver=2017-09-14-133601-573](https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_7-1/15-BR_Freedman.pdf?ver=2017-09-14-133601-573).

Thucydides' observation, contained in *The Peloponnesian War*, that "(I)t was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this instilled in Sparta, that made war inevitable". The Thucydides Trap suggests that when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling one, war is a likely outcome<sup>422</sup>. According to Allison, twelve out of sixteen such displacements in the past five hundred years have resulted in war. In contradistinction, war was avoided in four of those sixteen cases, including in the three cases occurring in the XX century<sup>423</sup>. Present-day Sino-US rivalry is the latest case. Strictly speaking, the results suggest that war is not an inevitable outcome of great power competition and changes to the balance of power stemming from such rivalry. Indeed, Allison argues that in the past intrepid statecraft mollified escalating tensions and, therefore, counsels prioritizing vital interests and avoiding strategic dispersal<sup>424</sup>. More importantly, he recommends a deeper understanding of China's domestic politics and vital interests; in short, a more nuanced approach to Chinese strategic ambitions<sup>425</sup>.

The broad interest generated by a scholarly debate surrounding the "inevitability" of great power war is also illustrative of the extent to which Western opinion has shifted regarding the consequences of China's rise. To a large degree, the hardening of public opinion against the PRC, and the emerging anti-Beijing foreign policy consensus in Washington, anticipates the definitive abandonment of the engagement strategy defined in the early 1990s. Increasingly common is the conviction that efforts to coopt the PRC into the international order have proved fruitless. A corollary idea, positing that globalization would unleash societal dynamics invariably leading to the democratization of the communist regime, has already fallen by the wayside. Rather than seeking to absorb the PRC into the international liberal order, Western leaders and publics are gradually coming to the realization that the PRC constitutes a real menace to that same order. As a result, Western policy approaches of the last thirty years are no longer tenable.

Quite understandably, the Thucydides Trap generated wide discussion in China, a fact openly acknowledged by Xi Jinping's blatant reference to the debate during his 2015 US visit. President Xi claimed "there is no such thing as the so-called 'Thucydides trap' in the world. But should major countries time and again make strategic miscalculations, they might create such traps for themselves"<sup>426</sup>. To avoid the possibility of falling into such a self-inducing trap, Xi proposed that Sino-American "great power relations" should be based on mutual cooperation, respect and dialogue. However, advocating great power relations based on traditional, accepted diplomatic principles avoids the essential

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422 See, Graham Allison, *Destined for War*, pp. 27-40.

423 The four cases are, 1) Portugal and Spain in the late XV century, b) the United Kingdom and the United States at the dawn of the XX century, c) the US and the USSR in the late XX century, and the UK and France/Germany in the middle-to-late XX century.

424 See, Graham Allison, *Destined for War*, p. 235.

425 For a stimulating discussion, see, Christopher Coker. *The Improbable War: China, the United States and the Logic of Great Power Conflict*. London: C. Hurst and Company, 2015.

426 See, Pamir Gautam, "US, China and the Thucydides trap", *ChinaDaily.com*, August 15, 2018, available at: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201808/15/WS5b7397bca310add14f385e37.htm>.

question of whether Chinese aims are fundamentally compatible with US aims. As a matter of fact, Chinese reactions to the “Thucydides Trap” debate indicate uncertainty as to the significance that Western, particularly American, politicians ascribe to the rise of China. Less benignly, they also denote that Chinese elites are not dismissive of the possibility of war as the country sets out to claim a leadership role in world politics.

Evidently, to posit the likelihood of war is not the same as positing the inevitability of war. Yet, since the danger of major power military confrontation cannot be dismissed in light of increasingly robust American and Chinese strategic postures, it is safe to say that the behavior of these two states is predicated on security maximization. As a result, the “security dilemma” concept is indispensable for illuminating the problem at hand. Security dilemmas result because states seeking to bolster their security take actions that exacerbate the insecurity of others, thus leading to an ongoing spiral of insecurity<sup>427</sup>. Since national security is fundamentally determined by state capabilities, the security dilemma cannot be dispelled by intentions and professions of good faith. The security dilemma may be diminished but never entirely transcended by treaties, international law, international institutions or other such instruments of inter-state cooperation. To the extent that they moderate the security dilemma, these instruments are far from valueless. Still, given that states do not relinquish their inherent right to self-defence when all other options are exhausted, these cooperative instruments lessen but do not transcend the security dilemma. Thus state survival is ultimately dependent upon force, the reason why states prepare for war as an *ultima ratio*.

Greater Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and the East China Sea manifests clearly the political logic of the security dilemma. Events transpiring in these theatres are justified by Beijing as a reposition of “historical rights”, and therefore fully compatible with Xi’s rhetoric of harmony, cooperation and “win-win” relations. Yet, Beijing’s actions, particularly in Taiwan, the South China Sea and the Senkaku Islands, are interpreted quite differently in Washington and in a number of Asian capitals. In fact, China’s posture and claims in these areas fuel concerns that the country is engaged in territorial expansion and natural resource appropriation at the expense of its neighbors’ claims and interests. PRC actions are viewed as offensive rather than defensive in nature. Accordingly, America’s reaction, its decision to involve itself or not in these disputes, and the extent to which it involves itself, opens or closes opportunities for Chinese assertiveness. Unless Washington acts decisively to dissuade the People’s Republic from continuing to intimidate its neighbors, the PRC will have an incentive to escalate its claims. Beijing’s behavior and leverage with neighboring countries is, thus, largely bound

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427 Briefly, a security dilemma occurs when the defensive actions of a state, meant to enhance its security, are interpreted as potentially offensive by the second state. This occurs because states are guided by capacities rather than intentions. The second state then takes steps to enhance its security, thus provoking insecurity in the first. See, John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma”, *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, January 1950, pp. 157-180, and Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma”, *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, January 1978, pp. 167-214.

by American choices. That is to say, American regional involvement *per se* is a structural factor constraining China's rise. For this reason, the growing tension in the South China Sea and Asia in general is, according to the Chinese, the outcome of American balancing strategies designed to hamper the PRC's legitimate interests and security. It is also the reason the two countries are heading for confrontation.

## The Military and the Renegades

Dressed in impeccable military fatigues befitting a CCP "core" leader, Xi Jinping, on 25 October 2018, inspected Guangzhou's Southern Theater Command headquarters. The visit was of great symbolic import precisely because that particular command encompasses the South China Sea, where tensions stemming from China's new regional assertiveness are most clearly in evidence. Although it was not the president's first tour of military installations, the visit was meant to relay China's determination to back its South China Sea claims. To that end, Xi alerted PLA officers and servicemen as to "the importance of preparing for war and combat" and enhancing "war-winning capabilities"<sup>428</sup>. No less critical, the "core" leader instructed them to carry out "a thorough implementation of the Party's thought on building a strong military in the new era"<sup>429</sup>.

Xi has unequivocally imposed his personal authority on the People's Liberation Army and, concomitantly, has not shied away from exhibiting China's military power, whether through training exercises, the holding of massive parades or through visits to installations meant to highlight the PLA's modernization and readiness. In marked contrast to Xi Jinping, both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, rose to power without possessing power bases within the PLA. Once in power, Xi's predecessors attempted to solidify their political position by placating the military with a mix of patronage, budget increases and the involvement of the institution in lucrative economic activities, thus effectively creating a vast industrial-military complex. Patronage and increased military budgets also led to the generalization of corruption, including rank buying. During the decade of Hu's weak leadership, the military hierarchy encountered little pushback as it expanded its autonomy relative to the civilian leadership. As the military developed unique corporate interests, the CCP's capacity for civilian oversight, of "controlling the gun", began to diminish considerably.

To remedy this state of affairs, Xi embarked on wholesale military reform. He immediately overhauled the armed forces bureaucracy, purging more than 100 generals implicated in corruption or deemed to be disloyal<sup>430</sup>. The most senior officer sanctioned

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428 See, "Xi inspects PLA Southern Theater Command, stresses advancing commanding ability", Xinhua, October 26, 2018, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/201810/26/c\\_137561097.html](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/201810/26/c_137561097.html).

429 Ibid.

430 See, David Lague and Benjamin Kang Lim, "Special Report: How China is replacing America as Asia's military titan", Reuters, April 23, 2019, consulted at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-army-xi-specialreport/special-report-how-china-is-replacing-america-as-asias-military-titan-idUSKCN1RZ12L>.

with the ultimate rebuke – expulsion from the CCP, in July 2015 – was Guo Boxiong, a former general and vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission<sup>431</sup>. One year later, Guo was sentenced to life in jail and his assets were seized by the state<sup>432</sup>. Prior to Guo's disgrace, another former member of the Politburo and of the Central Military Commission, Xu Caihou, was placed under investigation for corruption. Opened in March 2014, the inquiry would not lead to prosecution because, one year later, on 15 March 2015, Xu died of cancer. The suspicions were related to corrupt practices in the appointment and promotion of senior officers, Xu's professional responsibility between September 1999 and November 2012<sup>433</sup>. In the aftermath of these and other highly visible cases, it was clear that senior officers unwilling to acquiesce to Xi Jinping's personal authority would be dealt with in a similar manner<sup>434</sup>.

Xi made known his intention to proceed with a profound reform of the military in early 2014, when he took personal control of the party group charged with military reform, the Leading Group for National Defense and Military Reform of the Central Military Commission<sup>435</sup>. Subsequently, the leadership announced comprehensive organizational changes to the PLA, including the reorganization a bureaucratic structure, the creation of a system of five joint theater commands (TCs) and the establishment of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) and Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF)<sup>436</sup>. Further PLA

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431 On the sidelines of the CCP's 2017 Nineteenth Congress, Liu Shiyu, head of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, accused Bo Xilai, Sun Zhengcai (former Chongqing party head, and slated for a place on the Politburo Standing Committee), Zhou Yongkang, Ling Jihua, Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong of having "plotted to usurp the party's leadership and seize state power". Quite befittingly, he then praised Xi Jinping for "saving the Communist Party". See, Wendy Wu and Choi Chi-yuk, "Coup plotters foiled: Xi Jinping fended off threat to 'save Communist Party'", South China Morning Post, October 19, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2116176/coup-plotters-foiled-xi-jinping-fended-threat-save>.

432 See, Ben Blanchard, "China jails former top military officer for life in graft case", Reuters, July 25, 2016, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-corruption-military-idUSKCN10511X>.

433 Bo Zhiyue, commenting this case, has written that "Deng Xiaoping only promoted a batch of 17 generals in 1988. As chairman of the CMC from November 1989 to September 2004, Jiang Zemin promoted a total of 79 generals. As chairman of the CMC from September 2004 to November 2012, Hu Jintao promoted a total of 45 generals. But Xu Caihou screened and recommended 83 full generals — four more than promoted by Jiang, 38 more than Hu, and almost five times as many generals as those promoted by Deng". See, Bo Zhiyue, "The Rise and Fall of Xu Caihou, China's Corrupt General", The Diplomat, March 18, 2015, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2015/03/the-rise-and-fall-of-xu-caihou-chinas-corrupt-general/>.

434 See, Minnie Chan, Communist Party 'controls the gun,' PLA top brass reminded, November 5, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1632136/communist-party-controls-gun-pla-top-brass-reminded> and Li Jing, "President Xi Jinping lays down the law to Chinese Army in first 'precept' speech since Mao Zedong", South China Morning Post, January 4, 2016, consulted at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1898000/president-xi-jinping-lays-down-law-chinese-army-first>.

435 See, Zachary Keck, "China Creates New Military Reform Leading Group", The Diplomat, March 21, 2014, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/china-creates-new-military-reform-leading-group/>.

436 For a discussion, see, Manoj Joshi, "Xi Jinping and PLA Reform", ORF Occasional Paper #88, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, February 2106, pp. 1-38, accessed at: [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OP\\_88.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OP_88.pdf) and Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications", China Strategic Perspectives, No. 10, Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., March 2017, pp. 1-87, consulted at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1030342.pdf>.

downsizing occurred in mid-2015, with the dismissal of 300,000 non-combat personnel. In the wake of these purges and bureaucratic alterations, Xi intensified his grasp over the top military leadership during the Nineteenth Party Congress. He reduced the Central Military Commission from eleven to seven members, the vast majority of whom were personally loyal to the “core” leader. In contrast to previous practice, the new CMC did not include the service chiefs, demonstrating the extent to which the specific corporate agendas and interests of the services had been subsumed to the “core” leader’s political considerations. Should the signs of full civilian, party supremacy over the military have been lost on anyone, the new CMC did include the secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission, the entity charged with investigating PLA corruption. The military hierarchy was firmly under the control of the Central Military Commission, itself under the absolute dominion of Xi Jinping and his close allies<sup>437</sup>.

Once his control over the PLA was consolidated, Xi intensified the PLA’s shift to naval power, particularly the building of a “blue water navy”. New regional commands were charged with the development of modern air, land and naval capabilities meant to augment military readiness and fighting capabilities. While Xi’s predecessors had approved massive increases to the PLA’s budget that contributed to force modernization, Xi’s long-term vision of military transformation, articulated at the October 2017 Nineteenth Party Congress, foresaw that by 2035 (most likely 2049, the centenary of the PRC) the country would be endowed with “world-class forces”<sup>438</sup>. That is to say, forces superior to those possessed by China’s competitors. However, over the next few years, increases in military spending may become difficult to sustain as the debt-burdened, post-Covid Chinese economy continues to slow. In such a scenario, Xi, rather than dampen his ambitions, may opt for bold action to mobilize support for the regime; that is to say, the leadership may resort to military clashes in Taiwan or in the South China Sea. While the decision is unknowable, PRC military capabilities now make military action in the neighborhood a credible, albeit risk-filled, option.

Xi Jinping’s signature “China Dream”, encompassing a “strong military dream”, is clearly expressed in the 2019 “China’s National Defense in a New Era”<sup>439</sup>. Constituting an unequivocal warning to the Taipei government, seen as moving in the direction of independence as the “one country, two systems” model breaks down in Hong Kong, the document affirms that “Taiwan authorities, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), stubbornly stick to “Taiwan independence” and refuse to recognize the 1992

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437 For a discussion, see, Joel McFadden, Kim Fassler, and Justin Godby, “The New PLA Leadership: Xi Molds China’s Military to His Vision” In Phillip C. Saunders, Arthur S. Ding, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N.D. Yang, and Joel Wuthnow (eds.). *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2019, p. 557-582.

438 See, Lim Yan Liang, “19th Party Congress: China to have world-class military by 2050”, *The Straits Times*, October 18, 2017, consulted at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/19th-party-congress-china-to-have-world-class-military-by-2050>.

439 See, Jeremy Page, “For Xi, a ‘China Dream’ Of Military Power”, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2013, available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324128504578348774040546346>.

Consensus, which embodies the one-China principle. They have gone further down the path of separatism by stepping up efforts to sever the connection with the mainland in favor of gradual independence, pushing for *de jure* independence, intensifying hostility and confrontation, and borrowing the strength of foreign influence. The “Taiwan independence” separatist forces and their actions remain the gravest immediate threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the biggest barrier hindering the peaceful reunification of the country. External separatist forces for “Tibet independence” and the creation of “East Turkistan” launch frequent actions, posing threats to China’s national security and social stability<sup>440</sup>. Claiming that “the fight against separatists is becoming more acute,” the document goes on to conclude that “(T)o solve the Taiwan question and achieve complete reunification of the country is in the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation and essential to realizing national rejuvenation”<sup>441</sup>. In his 2 January 2019 New Year speech, marking the fortieth anniversary of the “1979 statement” abandoning the CCP policy of “liberation” of Taiwan, Xi called for the adherence to the 1992 Consensus, restated his firm rejection of Taiwanese independence and reaffirmed the “one country, two systems” formula<sup>442</sup>.

Although Beijing frames the Taiwan question in terms of separatism, thus equating Formosa with Tibet and Xinjiang, the fact is that the Taiwanese have grown tremendously skeptical as to the feasibility of the “one country, two systems” model<sup>443</sup>. Calls for independence are augmented as suspicions of the PRC’s motives multiply. Regarding Taiwan as a renegade province, Xi’s 2049 “national rejuvenation” project will remain incomplete unless Taiwan’s “reunification” with the mainland is achieved. The PRC maintains that the fundamental obstacle to reunification is not the will of the Taiwanese, but, rather, “foreign interference”; that is, United States support for Taiwan’s security. None of this suggests that the People’s Republic is helpless. Xi intensifies military pressure on Taiwan by building a massive arsenal of missiles capable of striking Formosa, while PLA naval and air forces apply unrelenting pressure on Taipei’s defenses. Military exercises seek to intimidate Taiwan while at the international level Beijing’s diplomatic and economic clout is relentlessly employed to delegitimize and isolate the island’s government. In numerous countries, Taiwanese embassies have closed as the PRC uses economic and financial aid to leverage its political demands. China also mustered support for freezes and delays in arms sales to Taiwan during the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations and, more importantly, lobbied to have sales of F-16 fighters and Aegis destroyers canceled.

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440 See, “China’s National Defense in the New Era”, n.p.

441 Ibid.

442 See, Richard C. Bush, “8 key things to notice from Xi Jinping’s New Year speech on Taiwan”, Brookings, January 7, 2019, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/07/8-key-things-to-notice-from-xi-jinpings-new-year-speech-on-taiwan>.

443 For more details, see, Kerry Brown and Kalley Wu Tzu Hui. *The Trouble with Taiwan: History, the United States and a Rising China*. London: Zed Books, 2019.

From Beijing's perspective, the use of force to attain "reunification" is justifiable in defense of PRC national sovereignty. The problem is that forced unification would dynamite the *status quo* formalized in the wake of the historic February 1972 meeting between Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong. On February 1972, Washington adopted a "one China policy", acknowledging that Chinese territory was indivisible, but waffled on whether Beijing was, as a corollary, China's sole legitimate government. The 1992 Consensus essentially froze the dispute and solidified the "one China" *status quo*. At the same time, Washington continued to foster a privileged relationship with Taiwan. In June 1998, during a nine-day visit to the PRC, Clinton declared that "(I) had a chance to reiterate our Taiwan policy, which is that we don't support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan-one China. And we don't believe that Taiwan should be a member in any organization for which statehood is a requirement"<sup>444</sup>. The "three no's" approach quite explicitly sought to preserve the *status quo*, but, left unstated, was the fact that neither Beijing nor Taipei were particularly satisfied with the *status quo*. Washington preserves a "strategic ambiguity" relative to the response it would give in case the PRC government proceeds to unify the country through the use of force<sup>445</sup>. Unprepared to risk war by "testing" US resolve over the status of Formosa, the Chinese communists have until now been left with little choice but to uphold the *status quo*. This shared understanding underpins the peace in the Straits of Taiwan, where the regular presence of the US Navy continues, for the time being, to deter Chinese adventurism.

It was precisely this *status quo* that president-elect Trump, whether deliberately or not, defied by receiving a telephone call from Tsai Ing-wen, Formosa's president, weeks after winning the November 2016 vote<sup>446</sup>. For the first time since 1979, when the US formally normalized relations with the PRC, an American head of state spoke directly (and quite publicly) with his Republic of China counterpart. Trump had questioned Washington's "one China" policy during the campaign in a Fox News interview, explaining that he failed to understand the need to maintain the "one China" policy unless it was possible to negotiate other issues, including commercial ones<sup>447</sup>. Rather than suggest a willingness to accept the island's independence, Trump's signal seemed to indicate

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444 See, Shirley A. Kan, "China/Taiwan: Evolution of the 'One China' Policy – Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei", CRS Report for Congress, Updated March 12, 2001, p. CRS-39, available at: [https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs9896/m1/1/high\\_res\\_d/RL30341\\_2006Sep07.pdf](https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs9896/m1/1/high_res_d/RL30341_2006Sep07.pdf).

445 See, Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China*, pp. 254-262.

446 See, Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, "Trump Speaks with Taiwan's Leader, an Affront to China", *The New York Times*, December 2, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/us/politics/trump-speaks-with-taiwans-leader-a-possible-affront-to-china.html>.

447 See, Mark Lander, "Trump Suggests Using Bedrock China Policy as Bargaining Chip", *The New York Times*, December 11, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/11/us/politics/trump-taiwan-one-china.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article>. Soon after, following a telephone call from President Xi Jinping, Trump apparently reverted to the "one China" policy. See, Mark Landler e Michael Forsythe, "Trump Tells Xi Jinping U.S. Will Honor 'One China' Policy", *The New York Times*, February 9, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/world/asia/donald-trump-china-xi-jinping-letter.html>.

he was actually using Taiwan as leverage for a better American trade arrangement with the PRC. Be that as it may, and although the American president did not upturn the *status quo*, China had been effectively warned that the existing arrangement in the Taiwan Straits was not immutable.

China's attempts to drive wedges between Taiwan and the rest of the world have provoked a boomerang effect in Taipei. As time passes, the people of Taiwan have become more determined to maintain their independence, economic system and democracy. As a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult for Beijing to claim that Taiwan's democracy lacks legitimacy, particularly when the mainland is determined to quash Hong Kong's special status, the model PRC elites claim would be extended to Formosa after reunification. Neither has economic engagement with the mainland brought the two sides closer; in fact, Xi's crackdown in Hong Kong has increased Taipei's perception of vulnerability and accentuated estrangement between the two sides. An important link in international supply chains, particularly by way of Foxconn and a host of technological giants, Taiwan's forced integration into the People's Republic cannot be achieved unless Beijing is prepared to undergo tremendous economic disruption and diplomatic isolation. None of these considerations have prevented the PRC from responding with belligerent rhetoric and military planning for forced integration. As a matter of fact, the 2019 Defense White Paper reiterates that "(W)e make no promise to renounce the use of force, and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures"<sup>448</sup>. Unable to achieve unification except through the use of force, Xi may succumb to the temptation of invading the island if the United States signals its willingness to refrain from entering the dispute in Taiwan's aid. Avoiding war in Taiwan therefore requires the US to maintain a vigorous strategic posture in the region, particularly in the South China and East China Seas, where Chinese assertiveness, unless robustly countered, may convince Beijing that a military assault on Formosa will go unchecked.

## A Sea of Infinite Troubles

Southeast Asia looms large in Chinese foreign policy since Mao Zedong established the People's Republic<sup>449</sup>. China's monumental Great Wall symbolizes recurring terrestrial invasions from the north and west, but by the middle of the XIX century, with the onset of the First Opium War, the principal threat facing the Qing was European and Japanese imperialist penetration on the coast. After 1949, the communist authorities dreaded encirclement and containment by the US and its allies – Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and several Southeast Asian countries. China's leadership

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448 See, "China's National Defense in the New Era", n. p.

449 For a discussion, see, Ian Storey. *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

was convinced that encirclement was designed to “keep China down” and, ultimately, provoke the downfall of the PRC regime. Decades later, the CCP’s “containment” narrative seemed validated by the collapse of the CPSU and the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. Since China’s vast coastline was the country’s lifeline to the globalized economy, the CCP was, by the early 2000’s, seeking to break the encirclement. Beijing thus openly proclaimed that China was “a maritime country” although, in reality, China’s historical legacy in the surrounding seas is, to say the least, ambiguous. Today, perceptions of encirclement are fostered by an arc of US military power stretching from Japan, to South Korea and Australia.

Keen to neutralize American-led encirclement, Beijing realized that Southeast Asia was the weak link in Washington’s cordon. Under Deng Xiaoping, China’s decades-long sponsorship of insurgencies was almost uniformly abandoned for the sake of trade and state-to-state relations<sup>450</sup>. At the same time, Deng was willing to resort to war, as he did in 1979, to “teach a lesson” to the unruly Vietnamese<sup>451</sup>. Endowed with abundant natural resources, the countries of Southeast Asia were easily accessible to Chinese business interests, particularly those engaged in resource extraction to supply the country’s expanding industrial base. Market access was also coveted in a region undergoing noteworthy economic growth driven by Japanese capital and the emergence of successful developmental models in South Korea, Indonesia and Taiwan. Access to these countries meant capital in the form of foreign direct investment and prosperous consumer markets for the export-led economy Deng was attempting to consolidate. In the post-Deng years, Southeast Asia has been a steadily growing focus of Chinese economic interest, culminating in Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road that sees Southeast Asia as a natural economic extension of the People’s Republic and as a bridge to the southern oceans and beyond.

Beijing’s behavior relative to its Asian neighbors indicates that the regional *status quo* underpinning American hegemony is no longer acceptable. Xi Jinping’s emphasis on “national rejuvenation” and the PRC’s assertive strategic posture, accompanied by a massive military buildup and the discarding of Deng Xiaoping’s “keeping a low profile” approach, are critical developments contributing to the emergence of balancing strategies on the part of neighboring states. While China’s neighbors have certainly seized the opportunity to deepen trade and investment ties with the PRC, they are quite unwilling to grant China free rein in the establishment of a sino-centric regional security order. The US presence in Asia therefore continues to be of significant import and key regional allies stress the urgency of bolstering links with Washington to counter Chinese might.

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450 For some background, see, Golam W. Choudhury, “Post-Mao Policy in Asia”, *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 26, No. 4, July/August 1977, pp. 18-29.

451 See, Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping’s Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Nowhere is China's attempt to attain great power status and America's defense of its hegemony more in evidence than in the waters of the South China Sea<sup>452</sup>. The significance currently attributed by Beijing to the South China Sea is clearly expressed in the country's 2019 Defense White Paper<sup>453</sup>. Titled "China's National Defense in the New Era", the document states that "China's homeland security still faces threats. Land territorial disputes are yet to be completely resolved. Disputes still exist over the territorial sovereignty of some islands and reefs, as well as maritime demarcation. Countries from outside the region conduct frequent close-in reconnaissance on China by air and sea, and illegally enter China's territorial waters and the waters and airspace near China's islands and reefs, undermining China's national security"<sup>454</sup>. Furthermore, the document plainly stresses that "(T)he South China Sea islands and Diaoyu Islands are inalienable parts of the Chinese territory. China is committed to resolving related disputes through negotiations with those states directly involved on the basis of respecting historical facts and international law. China continues to work with regional countries to jointly maintain peace and stability. It firmly upholds freedom of navigation and overflight by all countries in accordance with international law and safeguards the security of sea lines of communication (SLOC)"<sup>455</sup>. In this manner, the official governmental narrative posits that China's sovereignty claims in the area seek to address historical wrongs, injustices and humiliations. Echoing the grievances sustaining the "century of humiliation" narrative, Xi has acknowledged that the "nation's backwardness in military affairs has a profound influence on a nation's security. I often peruse the annals of modern Chinese history and feel heartbroken at the tragic scenes of us being beaten because of our ineptitude"<sup>456</sup>. In short, policy in the South China Sea is motivated by security concerns, resource extraction as well as the national affirmation inherent to "righting" past wrongs.

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452 There is a growing literature on the South China Sea. See, Sarah Raine and Chistian Le Mière. *Regional Disorder: The South China Sea Disputes*. New York: Routledge, 2013; Robert D. Kaplan. *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*. New York: Random House, 2014; Bill Hayton. *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*. New haven: Yale University Press, 2014; James Borton (ed.). *Islands and Rocks in the South China Sea: Post-Hague Ruling*. Xlibris Books, 2017; Humphrey Hawksley. *Asian Waters: The Struggle over the South China Sea and the Strategy of Chinese Expansion*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2018, and Anders Corr (ed.). *Great Powers, Grand Strategies: The New Game in the South China Sea*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018.

453 On the domestic Chinese debate over South China Sea strategy, see, Feng Zhang, "Chinese Thinking on the South China Sea and the Future of the Regional Order", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 132, No. 3, 2017, pp. 435-466.

454 See, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "China's National Defense in the New Era", July 2019. The full text is available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c\\_138253389.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm).

455 "China's National Defense in the New Era", *Ibid.*, n.p.

456 Cited in Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA" In Phillip C. Saunders, Arthur S. Ding, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N.D. Yang, and Joel Wuthnow (eds.). *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2019, p. 1.

Beijing's reading of the area's strategic centrality is, rather unsurprisingly, mirrored by the US government and the American defense establishment. For instance, Washington's 2017 National Security Strategy characterizes the People's Republic as a "competitor", adding that "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence"<sup>457</sup>. This strategic understanding of China is reaffirmed in the 2019 China Military Report, the Secretary of Defense's annual report to Congress, claiming that the Chinese "(O)ver the coming decades, they are focused on realizing a powerful and prosperous China that is equipped with a "world-class" military, securing China's status as a great power with the aim of emerging as the preeminent power in the Indo-Pacific region"<sup>458</sup>. As for the South China Sea, the 2018 National Defense Strategy concludes that "China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea"<sup>459</sup>. Events transpiring in the South China Sea, and what they represent for American and Chinese policy-makers, have thus transformed that corner of the globe into a dangerous arena of escalating great power rivalry where vital interests do not seem to be readily reconcilable.

An extremely complex clash over the possession of more than one hundred islands, atolls, reefs, rocks, banks and their adjacent waters, the South China Sea dispute involves six states – the PRC, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei. The disputes revolve around issues bearing on territorial sovereignty, but also around the resources found in the zone<sup>460</sup>. These waters abound with huge quantities of fish; one-third of all of the world's shipping passes through the region; oil and natural gas reserves are estimated to be vast and preliminary exploration indicates "the South China Sea region to be one of the most prolific hydrocarbon producing regions of the World, rivalling Persian Gulf region or any other comparable region"<sup>461</sup>. Securing the country's unhindered access to foreign commodities and markets is not the sole reason accounting for the PRC's South China Sea posture.

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457 See, White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, p. 2.

458 See, Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2019", China Military Power Report, p. 5.

459 See, Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America. Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge". January 2018, p. 1, available at: <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. Since the full National Defense Strategy is a classified document, DoD makes a summary available to the public.

460 See, Leszek Buszynski, The South China Sea: Oil, Maritime Claims, and U.S.–China Strategic Rivalry, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2012, pp. 139-156.

461 See, Mu Ramkumar, M. Santosh, Manoj J. Mathew, David Menier, R. Nagarajan, Benjamin Sautter "Hydrocarbon reserves of the South China Sea: Implications for regional energy security" *Energy Geoscience*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, July 2020, p. 1, available at: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S2666759220300044?token=0722BE7FE658554D521EF13F14BE4627AF0BB25E6FF247B1CEF79A2F1F03758608C68222BD67DCB95324819707180076>



boundary and reaffirm the “unity” of Formosa and the mainland. Beijing, however, refrained from attempting to exercise its alleged sovereignty within the “nine-dash line” and abstained from making claims on the adjacent waters<sup>468</sup>.

Even before Deng came to power, the South China Sea witnessed various small-scale clashes between the People’s Republic and its neighbors. In 1955, the PRC occupied Woody Island (eastern Paracels) after the Taiwan Nationalist government rather inexplicably abandoned it. When, in 1956, the French colonial administration withdrew from the western Paracels, the South Vietnamese authorities assumed responsibility for the archipelago’s administration. That same year, Taiwan reoccupied Itu Aba, the largest of the Spratly islands, to this day occupied by Taipei<sup>469</sup>. In January 1974, an incident subsequently known as the Battle of the Paracels began when a South Vietnamese maritime flotilla was ordered to Robert and Money Islands to remove a PLA occupation force. With the Nguyễn Văn Thiệu regime facing imminent collapse, China emerged victorious from this clash, took up positions on Pattle Island and assumed effective control over the entire Paracels archipelago. Although the Saigon regime withdrew under duress, the successor state, unified Vietnam, inherited the claim to Pattle Island. Reacting to these events, other regional states scrambled to occupy various islands and features in the South China Sea. Twenty years later, in 1995, the Philippines denounced the PLA’s occupation of Mischief Reef. Beijing retorted that the sole installation found on the reef, a structure on wooden stilts, was a refuge for Chinese fishermen in need of emergency shelter and had no military use. Today, that primitive shelter has given way to a multi-story concrete structure housing fifty PRC marines. The Philippines and China have also clashed over Scarborough Shoal whose waters are rich in fishing resources. Irrespective of the merits of these ultimately unfathomable historical claims, all states ground the legitimacy of their respective claims on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), effective since 1994<sup>470</sup>.

The area’s strategic relevance increased exponentially only in the aftermath of Deng Xiaoping’s “openness and reform”. As the PRC’s industrial infrastructures became concentrated along the Chinese coast, and its reliance on export-led growth accentuated, preserving access to secure international sea lanes emerged as a cardinal objective. Since containerized shipping made maritime transport the most cost effective means of moving goods, economic success in this region rested on maritime access to the global economy. China’s rapidly expanding economy also required energy, particularly Middle Eastern oil transiting through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea before reaching

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468 Ibid.

469 See, Steven Lee Myers, “Island or Rock? Taiwan Defends its Claim in the South China Sea”, *The New York Times*, May 10, 2019, accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/20/world/asia/china-taiwan-island-south-sea.html>.

470 For a discussion, see, Lowell Bautista, “Thinking Outside the Box: the South China Sea Issue and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Options, Limitations and Prospects)”, *Philippine Law Journal*, Vol. 81, No. 4, 2007, pp. 699-731, available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1779&context=lhapapers>.

Chinese entry ports. The “sea lanes of communication” (SLOC) through Southeast Asia thus became critical to China’s economy and security. Although unfettered PRC access to the sea became indispensable, it was the United States Navy, assisted by countries bordering on the Malacca Strait, that guaranteed access to the seas and maintained the security of the SLOC. To overcome this undesirable vulnerability – “the Malacca Dilemma” – China would therefore have to become a maritime power<sup>471</sup>.

Deng Xiaoping’s fondness for presenting policy objectives by way of traditional aphorisms is well-known. One of these, Deng’s “24-Character Strategy”, advised the country’s leaders to “observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership”<sup>472</sup>. The widely-recognized aphorism encapsulated the essential tenets orienting PRC external behavior in the thirty years subsequent to the 1989 Tiananmen massacre and explains why sovereign claims over the South China Sea were never definitively abandoned nor actively pursued. Until a favorable balance of power could be guaranteed, the assertion of claims in the South China Sea in such an inimical geopolitical environment required deception and prudence. Deng’s “bide your time” was a pragmatic approach, but it was not synonymous with passivity. Beijing’s strategy shifted in the 1990s to developing cooperative relationships with the neighboring states so as to assure them of the country’s peaceful rise. For this reason, the Chinese government resorted increasingly to invoking UNCLOS provisions to justify its South China Sea claims.

Another significant shift occurred on 25 February 1992, when the “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone” was approved by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress. The new law asserted formal sovereignty over the Paracels, Spratly, Macclesfield and other islands, islets, rocks and reefs, many of which are so miniscule they remain submerged during high tide<sup>473</sup>. Both international custom and UNCLOS understand “territorial waters” to extend twelve nautical miles from the low-water line along a country’s coast. Yet, when China signed UNCLOS, on 10 December 1982 (ratifying it on 15 May 1996), it submitted a host of declarations that effectively redefined the concepts of “territorial waters” and the rights of coastal states outlined in UNCLOS<sup>474</sup>. For all intents and purposes, the practical outcome

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471 See, Marc Lanteigne, “China’s Maritime Security and the ‘Malacca Dilemma’”, *Asian Security*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2008, pp. 143-161.

472 See, Henry Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 438-439.

473 See, Nien-Tsu Alfred Hu, “The two Chinese Territorial Sea Laws: Their implications and comparisons”, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1993, pp. 89-96.

474 For a discussion, see, *inter alia*, Nalanda Roy, *The South China Sea Disputes: Past, Present, and Future*. Lanham Lexington Books, 2016; Xavier Furtado, “International Law and the Dispute over the Spratly Islands: Whither UNCLOS?” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 3, December 1999, pp. 386-404; Sam Bateman, “UNCLOS and Its Limitations as the Foundation for a Regional Maritime Security Regime”, *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Fall 2007, pp. 27-56; and, David Rosenberg, “Governing the South China Sea: From Freedom of the Seas to Ocean Enclosure Movements”, *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 & 4, Winter 2010, pp. 4-12, accessed at: [http://www.southchinasea.org/files/2013/02/Governing\\_The\\_South\\_China\\_Sea.pdf](http://www.southchinasea.org/files/2013/02/Governing_The_South_China_Sea.pdf).

of the “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone” was to formalize the declaration of Chinese sovereign rights and jurisdiction over a 200 nautical miles wide EEZ and the continental shelf<sup>475</sup>. And since the PRC also claims the islands, reefs and other features as national territory, it similarly claims an EEZ extending 200 nautical miles from each of these.

The problem, of course, is that the comprehensiveness of the “line-mile dash” essentially excludes other states from claiming all but miniscule, symbolic EEZ’s in the South China Sea. Under the terms of the “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone”, China would be entitled to exclusive fishing and mineral rights over a sea that presently provides considerable natural resource income for the littoral countries. Filipino and Vietnamese fishermen are not infrequently arrested and barred from their traditional fishing waters because, according to Beijing, foreign fishing vessels are prohibited from practicing commercial activities in “Chinese waters”. China similarly obstructs exploration within these countries’ South China Sea Exclusive Economic Zones<sup>476</sup>. The most vocal of South China Sea claimants, Vietnam, has faced onerous challenges in recent years, with Chinese survey ships and coast guard cutters alike regularly operating in its EEZ while simultaneously impeding Hanoi’s access to their resources<sup>477</sup>. In 2011 and 2012, Vietnamese survey ships mapping the country’s EEZ ocean floor were harassed by Chinese naval forces. As a consequence, in 2012, Vietnam’s National Assembly’s approved a “Maritime Law” reaffirming the country’s Paracels and Spratly claims.

Critically, and in clear violation of customary law of the sea and UNCLOS provisions, “innocent passage” was redefined by the PRC so as to make “prior notification” virtually obligatory, a provision equally applied to warships. Rather than an economic boundary, the country’s EEZ became a political, sovereign boundary. If the PRC were entitled to enforce its sovereignty over the South China Sea, then merchant ships traversing that body of water would become subject to China’s laws, regulations, duties or any other legal restriction China saw fit to impose. Applied to the entire South China Sea, such a set of restrictions would severely hamper the operations of the United States Navy and hinder its ability to protect international shipping and the SLOCs. This is the reason why the United States, Japan and other countries are intensifying their Freedom of Navigation operations in the zone.

Tensions took a turn for the worse in 2009 as the deadline established by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for continental shelf expansion claims expired. Wary of China’s hegemonic intentions relative to the South China

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475 See, Sébastien Colin, “China, the US, and the Law of the Sea”, *China Perspectives*, No 2016/2, pp. 57-62, available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/6994?file=1>.

476 See, Fu Ying and Wu Shicun, “South China Sea: How We Got to This Stage”.

477 Ankit Panda, “Making Sense of China’s Latest Bid to Administer Sovereignty in the South China Sea”, *The Diplomat*, April 21, 2020, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/making-sense-of-chinas-latest-bid-to-administer-sovereignty-in-the-south-china-sea>.

Sea, neighboring states scrambled to maximize their claims. More importantly, in early March 2009, the USNS *Impeccable*, deployed in the South China Sea to monitor submarine activity, was the target of recurring PLA Navy harassment over various days. In fact, Chinese vessels almost forced a collision with the *Impeccable*, avoided only because the American ship made a last-minute emergency stop. The United States protested, deeming the incidents a violation of international law foreseeing “innocent passage” through other countries’ EEZ. China’s Foreign Ministry responded that the Pentagon’s complaints were “gravely in contravention of the facts and confuse black and white and they are totally unacceptable to China”<sup>478</sup>. Although there appeared to be no legal grounds for impeding foreign military vessels from operating in its EEZ, China insisted its actions were in accordance with UNCLOS provisions<sup>479</sup>. Still, for the United States and its regional allies, much worse was on the horizon.

In 2010, the Ministry of Defense declared the PRC’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the South China Sea and, in December 2013, Beijing launched a massive land reclamation and artificial island building spree in the South China Sea<sup>480</sup>. That month, the *Tianjing* dredger began work depositing seabed sediment on the Johnson South Reef, part of the Spratly archipelago and taken by China in 1974 from South Vietnam. Less than four months later, as a PLA Navy warship supervised the *Tianjing*’s dragging operations, a harbor and eleven hectares of “new land” had arisen. Three years later, seven Spratly reefs had been transformed into islets. Since then, in various South China Sea features, Beijing has erected port facilities, installed radar and sensor installations, hardened missile shelters and built assorted military infrastructures, including warehouses for ammunition, fuel and water. Following massive land reclamation, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef have become the largest “islands” in the South China Sea, each possessing an airstrip over three kilometers in length, more than sufficient for accommodating military aircraft.

As was to be expected, PRC island building shifted the territorial *status quo* in its favor of China. Doubtful historic claims to the South China Sea have largely become moot as Beijing creates facts on the ground and takes effective possession of the disputed features. When, in June 2012, China seized the Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines, the White House failed to provide a robust response. A year later, in September 2013, the *Tianjing* was stationed for three weeks at Cuarteron Reef, but did not engage in any land reclamation. Perhaps contemplating the heralding of a G-2 world, Barack Obama once

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478 See, Chris Buckley, “China says U.S. naval ship broke the law”, Reuters, March 10, 2009, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china/china-says-u-s-naval-ship-broke-the-law-idUSPEK9458120090310>.

479 For a comprehensive discussion of the legal complexities of the issue and the various claims involved, see, Jonathan G. Odom, “The True ‘Lies’ of the Impeccable Incident: What Really Happened, Who Disregarded International Law, and Why Every Nation (Outside of China) Should be Concerned”, Michigan State Journal of International Law, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2010, pp. 1-42, available at: <https://jnlsp.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/the-true-lies-of-the-impeccable-incident-odom-msujil-may-2010.pdf>.

480 For a discussion, see, Tara Davenport, “Island-Building in the South China Sea: Legality and Limits”, Asian Journal of International Law, Vol. 8, No. 1, January 2018, pp. 76-90.

again failed to signal that future island building was unacceptable. Only then did China dispatch the *Tianjing* to Johnson South Reef. A little more than a year passed until the Johnson South Reef was endowed with a new harbor and eleven hectares of “new land”. By 2015, Obama’s Defense Secretary, Ash Carter, called for “an immediate and lasting halt” to the land reclamation in progress, warning of the “prospect of further militarization as well as the potential for these activities to increase the risk of miscalculation or conflict among claimant states”<sup>481</sup>. Perhaps not surprisingly, a vertiginous upsurge in construction activity transpired in the final two years of the Obama Administration.

At the same time that the land reclamation program got underway, China and the Philippines enmeshed themselves in a dispute too serious to be ignored by the United States. Visiting Manila in April 2014, a few days after reiterating US treaty obligations to defend Japan over the Diaoyu Islands, Barack Obama, implying Chinese claims constituted a breach of the UN Law of the Sea Treaty but still convinced as to the merits of international law, advised Vietnam and the Philippines to bring their disputes before an international tribunal. Throughout his four-nation Asian tour, Obama reiterated US intent to “rebalance” in the Pacific, saying “we don’t think that coercion and intimidation is the way to manage these disputes”<sup>482</sup>. Surely no unbeknownst to Obama, the Philippines were contesting Chinese claims even before the PRC sent the *Tianjing* to the Johnson South Reef. On 22 January 2013, the Republic of the Philippines initiated formal arbitral proceedings against the PRC under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea<sup>483</sup>. The arbitration focused on the issue of historic rights and the source of maritime entitlements in the South China Sea, the legal status of various maritime features and the lawfulness of Chinese actions in the South China Sea deemed by the Philippines to violate UCLOS.

The Hague International Arbitration Tribunal examined the Philippines’ claim and, in July 2016, ruled that PRC claims to the South China Sea were without merit<sup>484</sup>. The ruling clarified that international law did not impede China’s building program in maritime features under its control. But the court did find that several of the reefs being reclaimed by the Chinese were situated within the boundaries of Manila’s EEZ. In its arguments, China had posited that its reclamation and building programs were indistinguishable

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481 See, Ben Brumfield, “U.S. defense chief to China: End South China Sea expansion”, CNN, May 30, 2015, consulted at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/30/china/singapore-south-china-sea-ash-carter/index.html>

482 See, The White House, “Remarks by President Obama and President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines in Joint Press Conference”, Malacañang Palace, Manila, Philippines, April 28, 2014, available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-president-benigno-aquino-iii-philippines-joi>.

483 See, Lowell B. Bautista, “The Legal Status of the Philippine Treaty Limits in International Law”, *Agean Review of the Law of the Sea and Maritime Law*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 111-139, available at: [https://www.academia.edu/446908/The\\_Legal\\_Status\\_of\\_the\\_Philippine\\_Treaty\\_Limits\\_In\\_International\\_Law](https://www.academia.edu/446908/The_Legal_Status_of_the_Philippine_Treaty_Limits_In_International_Law)

484 The ruling is indispensable reading. Not only are the legal issue exhaustively treated, so is the fragility of China’s historical claims. The ruling may be consulted at: Judge Thomas A. Mensah *et al.*, *The South China Sea Arbitration Award*, 12 July 2016, The Hague, accessed at: <https://pcacases.com/web/sendAttach/2086>.

from those carried out by Southeast Asian claimant states such as Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines ever since the 1970s. When the ruling was made public, the CCP's People's Daily newspaper, characterized the court as "a lackey of some outside forces", adding that the "award disregarded the basic facts, trampled on international law and the basic norms governing international relations, and damaged China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. The Chinese government and people are firmly opposed to it and will not recognize it in whatever manner"<sup>485</sup>. Just as incisive, but resorting to softer diplomatic language, Xi Jinping retorted that his country's "territorial sovereignty and marine rights" would not be altered by the ruling, but prudently added that his country remained "committed to resolving disputes" in the area<sup>486</sup>.

PRC reaction to the arbitration court's ruling confirmed a number of suspicions regarding China's behavior in the South China Sea and its unwillingness to abide by international rules. The island building program was a demonstration of resolve, and therefore a continuation of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal crisis, when Chinese ships seized control of the shoal from the Philippines<sup>487</sup>. More crucially, the uncompromising reaction to the ruling evinced China's intention to create facts on the ground serving to buttress its legal claims. Most important of all, China's dismissal of the court revealed the extent to which the Beijing government was disinclined to abide by international rules, in this case enshrined by UCLOS, if those rules proved inhibitive of its aims and interests. China, in short, adopted a revisionist posture, in no small part because the Obama Administration in due time failed to signal that the United States was unwilling to accept island building and other *fait accomplis* in those waters. And when the Administration, particularly Defense Secretary Ash Carter, did finally begin to employ harsher language, Obama's widely-acknowledged aversion to the use of force, most famously illustrated by the 2012 Syrian "red line" *débauche*, effectively neutralized any deterrence value of such a hardening of positions.

As of late, rather than relying exclusively on the PLA Navy, China has turned to the use of administrative instruments and civilian governmental agencies to reinforce its jurisdiction over the area<sup>488</sup>. The most recent instance of this approach occurred in late April 2020, in the midst of the Covid crisis as attention was centered elsewhere. The Ministry of Civil Affairs opportunely announced the creation of two new administrative districts – Xisha (Paracel) and Nansha (Spratly). Under the new arrangement, "Xisha District will administer

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485 See, "China's determination to safeguard territorial sovereignty and maritime rights unwavering: People's Daily", People's Daily Online, July 13, 2016, available at: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0713/c90000-9085312.htm>.

486 For the PRC's official statement on the ruling, see, "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the Award of 12 July 2016 of the Arbitral Tribunal in the South China Sea Arbitration Established at the Request of the Republic of the Philippines", July 12, 2016, available at: <http://ae.china-embassy.org/eng/xwtd/t1380341.htm>. For a discussion, see, Tom Phillips, Oliver Holmes and Owen Bowcott, "Beijing rejects tribunal's ruling in South China Sea case", The Guardian, July 6, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/12/philippines-wins-south-china-sea-case-against-china>.

487 See, Feng Zhang, "Chinese Thinking on the South China Sea", p. 445.

488 See, Sarah Raine and Chistian Le Mière, Regional Disorder, pp. 78-82.

the Xisha and Zhongsha islands and their surrounding waters, with the district government located on Yongxing Island. Governing Nansha Island and its surrounding waters, Nansha District's government is located on Yongshu Jiao<sup>489</sup>. The Nansha District will be located at Fiery Cross Reef, a militarized feature also claimed by the Philippines and Vietnam, but containing an early-warning radar site and serving as the PRC's command-and-control center for operations in the Spratly Islands. Since 2012, the archipelagos were encompassed under the administrative umbrella of Sansha "city", a "city" of 1,800 residents with an area extending for two million square kilometers (but only twenty square kilometers of land area) encompassing over two hundred features in the South China Sea. Symbolically, the new administrative departments are meant to emphasize that the South China Sea is an integral part of PRC territory, under Beijing's full sovereign authority. Concurrent with the creation of the two districts, the Natural Resources Ministry and Civil Affairs Ministry, in a further affirmation of sovereignty, attributed Chinese names to the area's geographical features. These recent events are part of a pattern whereby, through stealth, China employs its domestic institutions and legal framework to pursue and consolidate its claims in the South China Sea and thereby create inalterable facts on the ground.

Extensive fortification of these island outposts means that the PRC has, *ipso facto*, annexed large stretches of these waters. China's claims are backed up by a rapidly modernizing military that now includes surface vessels, aircraft, submarines, missiles and spaced-based reconnaissance. Chinese naval vessels project power into the South China Sea and the Western Pacific, assisted by a maritime a police force/coast guard and 20,000 so-called "fishing boats", most of which are manned by armed crews trained by state authorities. Deployed inside the nine-dash line, these capacities allow the PRC to affirm a strategic presence in the South China Sea and intimidate its neighbors. In November 2013, one month before dragging began on Johnson South Reef, China unilaterally declared an air defense identification zone over parts of the East China Sea and will surely do the same in the South China Sea in the near-term. Radar facilities in the South China Sea "significantly expand the real-time domain awareness, ISR, and jamming capabilities of the PLA over a large portion of the South China Sea, presenting a substantial challenge to U.S. military operations in this region"<sup>490</sup>. As the days of "bide your time" give way to a palpable assertiveness in the South China Sea, the area emerged as a militarized domain of Chinese power<sup>491</sup>.

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489 See, "China's Sansha City establishes Xisha, Nansha districts in major administrative move", CGTN, April 18, 2020, available at: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-18/China-s-Sansha-City-establishes-Xi-sha-Nansha-districts-PN5hyJkgFy/index.html>, and Richard Javad Heydari, "China lays ever larger claim to South China Sea", Asia Times, April 21, 2020, consulted at: <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/china-lays-ever-larger-claim-to-south-china-sea>.

490 See, "Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Philip Davidson, USN Expected Nominee for Commander, U.S. Pacific Command", n. d., p. 17, available at: [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson\\_APQs\\_04-17-18.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_APQs_04-17-18.pdf).

491 See, Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, "Lying low no more? China's new thinking on the *tao guang yang hui* strategy", China: An International Journal, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2011, pp. 195-216.

In recent years, the US military has been quite vocal in expressing concern over regional developments. For instance, at the 2015 Aspen Security Forum, Admiral Harry Harris, at the time head of Pacific Command, alerted to the fact that China “is changing the *status quo* in the region through aggressive coercive island building without meaningful diplomatic efforts toward dispute resolution or arbitration”, concluding that “China is changing facts on the ground... essentially, creating false sovereignty... by building man-made islands on top of coral reefs, rocks, and shoals”<sup>492</sup>. The Admiral also pointed out that the PRC government was “building ports that are deep enough to host warships and they’re building a 10,000-foot runway at Fiery Cross Reef... They’re building revetted aircraft hangars at some of the facilities there that are clearly designed, in my view, to host tactical fighter aircraft”<sup>493</sup>. Perhaps more importantly, the use of the islands as listening posts extends a surveillance network that could be in place with radars, electronic warfare capabilities and the like<sup>494</sup>.

A few months after Admiral Harris issued his warning, in September 2015, at a Rose Garden joint press conference during Xi Jinping’s first state visit to the United States, Barack Obama revealed that “I conveyed to President Xi our significant concerns over land reclamation, construction and the militarization of disputed areas, which makes it harder for countries in the region to resolve disagreements peacefully”<sup>495</sup>. In response, Xi denied that militarization was taking place, claiming that “relevant construction activity that China is undertaking in the Nansha Islands (Spratly Islands) does not target or impact any country and there is no intention to militarize”<sup>496</sup>. Given the ongoing island-building program in the region, Xi’s blatant negation of confirmed facts on the ground was an act of tremendous audacity. At the same press conference, Xi also made the claim, unsubstantiated by historical fact, that “Islands in the South China Sea since ancient times are Chinese territory... We have the right to uphold our own territorial sovereignty and lawful legitimate maritime rights and interests”<sup>497</sup>. Needless to say, Xi Jinping’s viewpoint as to what constitutes sovereign Chinese territory is certainly not shared either by China’s neighbors nor by specialized international institutions. The Rose Garden press conference evinced the self-confidence and the sheer audacity of the PRC’s recently enthroned strongman and, conversely, Barack Obama’s helplessness. During an October 2018 speech, Vice-President Mike Pence would return to this episode, observing that “while China’s leader stood in the Rose Garden at the White House in 2015 and

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492 See, Kevin Baron, “China’s New Islands Are Clearly Military, U.S. Pacific Chief Says”, Defense One, July 24, 2015, available at: <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/07/chinas-new-islands-are-clearly-military/118591/>.

493 Ibid.

494 Ibid.

495 See, David Brunnstrom and Michael Martina, “Xi denies China turning artificial islands into military bases”, Reuters, September 25, 2015, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pacific/xi-denies-china-turning-artificial-islands-into-military-bases-idUSKCN0RP1ZH20150925>.

496 Ibid.

497 Ibid.

said that his country had, and I quote, “no intention to militarize” the South China Sea, today, Beijing has deployed advanced anti-ship and anti-air missiles atop an archipelago of military bases constructed on artificial islands<sup>498</sup>.

PRC actions stemming from its “nine-dash line” claims have overturned the strategic landscape of maritime Asia. As drawn, China’s “nine-dash line” overrides and effectively nullifies most of the EEZ’s in the region. If PRC claims are allowed to stand, the fish, seabed, and other resources of the South China Sea belong to the People’s Republic. Fishermen from other nations will operate in those waters only with Beijing’s approval. Similarly, the SLOC belong to China and, as a corollary, other nations may use them only if Beijing gives its authorization. By implication, foreign navies, the US and Japanese in particular, will sail South China Sea waters only at China’s pleasure. In written testimony submitted to Congress before substituting Admiral Harry Harris as US Pacific Command chief in May 2018, Admiral Philip Davidson concluded that “China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States” and called for the US to maintain a strong presence in the region and hatch up advanced weapons development<sup>499</sup>.

In May 2018, the US Department of Defense revealed that the PRC had deployed anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles to the Spratly Islands, a signal of American determination to check Chinese designs in the zone but also one more unmistakable step in the militarization of the archipelagos. Later that year, responding to these realities on the ground, Vice-President Mike Pence remarked that China’s aggression had been displayed when a “Chinese naval vessel came within forty-five yards of the USNS *Decatur* as it conducted freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea”, forcing the destroyer, in a replay of the 2009 *Impeccable* incident, to take emergency action “to avoid a collision”<sup>500</sup>. He went on to say that, despite such “reckless harassment, the United States Navy will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows and our national interests demand. We will not be intimidated and will not stand down”<sup>501</sup>. Under the Trump Administration, Freedom of Navigation Operations within twelve nautical miles of the islands and reefs in the South China Sea claimed by China and bomber overflights over the area have been intensified. At present, these actions constitute a direct challenge to Beijing’s sovereignty claims and are meant to maintain sea lanes and international waters open. It is a stalemate that cannot endure indefinitely.

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498 See, The White House, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China”, The Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, October 4, 2018, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

499 See, “Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Philip Davidson, USN Expected Nominee for Commander, U.S. Pacific Command”, p. 18, n. d., available at [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson\\_APQs\\_04-17-18.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_APQs_04-17-18.pdf). Also, “Short of war, China already controls the South China Sea: US admiral”, Asia Times, April 24, 2018, consulted at: <https://asiatimes.com/2018/04/short-war-china-already-controls-south-china-sea-us-admiral>.

500 See, The White House, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China”, The Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, October 4, 2018, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

501 Ibid.

## Remaking the Asian Order

Stimulated by great power competition and starkly contrasting conceptions of regional order, the escalating Sino-American rivalry has led to regular clashes in the broad Asian region. As the distribution of power shifts towards the PRC, America's role *vis-à-vis* China and the region's states is being modified so as to adjust to these new dynamics. The United States' embracing of the "free and open Indo-Pacific" concept denotes a change relative to how the regional order is conceptualized in Washington, Seoul, Tokyo and other capitals. Irrespective of the dissimilarities separating the Obama and Trump approaches to the region, both converge in one critical aspect: Asia has become the primary theater of great power competition and China has become the United States' most formidable rival. America's traditional post-1945 strategic focus has therefore, and quite unequivocally, shifted from the Atlantic to the Pacific (or, in Trump's more comprehensive formulation, to the Indo-Pacific)<sup>502</sup>.

Aimed at preserving American preponderance in the region, Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy was first broadly presented by president Donald Trump during the November 2017 Vietnam APEC Summit. The principal objectives of the new approach were to assure compliance with the rule of law, guarantee freedom of navigation, strengthen alliances and promote a "free and open" Indo-Pacific<sup>503</sup>. A few weeks later, in December 2017, the White House's National Security Strategy proclaimed that China must be countered as it seeks to displace the United States as the leading power in the Indo-Pacific region. Similarly, the Pentagon's 2019 China Military Power Report observes that, in the Indo-Pacific region, "China depicts itself as pursuing a peaceful development strategy and identifies the United States as the dominant regional actor that intends to contain China's rise"<sup>504</sup>. Outlining a view conforming to the Indo-Pacific concept introduced in the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, the Department of Defense's June 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report further clarified the meaning and

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502 On the Indo-Pacific, see, Timothy Doyle and Dennis Rumley (eds.). *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019; Rory Medcalf. *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America and the Contest for the World's Pivotal Region*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020; Richard Javand Heydarian. *The Indo-Pacific: Trump, China, and the New Struggle for Global Mastery*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020 and Oliver Turner and Inderjeet Parmar (eds.). *The United States in the Indo-Pacific: Obama's Legacy and the Trump Transition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.

503 See, The White House, "Remarks by President Trump and President Quang of Vietnam in Joint Press Conference, Hanoi, Vietnam", Presidential Palace, Hanoi, Vietnam, November 11, 2017, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-quang-vietnam-joint-press-conference-hanoi-vietnam/>, and The White House, "Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam", Ariyana Da Nang Exhibition Center, Da Nang, Vietnam, November 10, 2017, consulted at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam>.

504 See, Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2019, China Military Power Report", *Ibid.*, p. 6.

significance of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”<sup>505</sup>. All of these governmental documents affirm the centrality of the Indo-Pacific to US stability, security, and prosperity and all view Beijing as bent on reordering the region through rapid military modernization. Rooted in these assumptions, the concept of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” is, at its core, a restatement of Washington’s commitment to the present regional order and the *status quo* sustaining it.

The National Defense Strategy posits that American military advantage relative to China and Russia is “eroding” and, unless that erosion is checked, a shift in the regional balance of power will ensue. Such a shift, in turn, would empower rivals challenging the free and open order underpinning the overall prosperity and security of the United States and its allies<sup>506</sup>. As for China’s aims and methods, the Pentagon document suggests that the country is “leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future”<sup>507</sup>. The Pentagon’s use of the “all-of-nation long-term strategy” concept to characterize China’s posture is significant since it implies that the competition is full-spectrum, not limited to military and security issues, but encompassing economic, technological, economic, cultural and ideological rivalry<sup>508</sup>. The unstated implication is that Beijing’s quest for regional hegemony is merely the first, preliminary step toward achieving global dominance.

Labeling China a “revisionist” power, and noting that “the People’s Republic of China (PRC), under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), undermines the international system from within by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously eroding the values and principles of the rules-based order”, the National Defense Strategy stresses the relevance and the geographical extent of the Indo-Pacific<sup>509</sup>. Indeed, the document makes this clear in the following terms: “(T)he Indo-Pacific is the single most consequential region for America’s future. Spanning a vast stretch of the globe from the west coast of the United States to the western shores of India, the region is home to the world’s most populous state, most populous democracy, and largest Muslim-majority state, and includes over half of the earth’s population. Among the 10 largest standing armies in the world, 7 reside in the Indo-Pacific; and 6 countries in the region possess

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505 See, The Department of Defense, “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region”, June 1, 2019, accessed at: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>

506 See, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America”, p. 1.

507 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

508 For an example of this “all-of-nation” Chinese approach, see, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. *Unrestricted Warfare: China’s Master Plan to Destroy America*. Dehradun: Natraj Publishers, 2007.

509 See, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America”, p. 7.

nuclear weapons. Nine of the world's 10 busiest seaports are in the region and 60 percent of global maritime trade transits through Asia, with roughly one-third of global shipping passing through the South China Sea alone<sup>510</sup>. Reaffirming its commitment to engagement with the region “as a force for regional stability”, the National Defense Strategy adds that the United States, to continue to play this role, “must be prepared by sustaining a credible combat-forward posture; strengthening alliances and building new partnerships; and promoting an increasingly networked region”<sup>511</sup>. In a similar vein, the Indo Pacific Strategy Report observes that the United States-led network of allies and partners is a force multiplier for achieving peace, deterrence and interoperable war fighting capability<sup>512</sup>. To uphold the international rules-based order, the same Report indicates that the United States will involve allies and partners in a networked security architecture.

Barring great power war, America will retain its military primacy in the Asia-Pacific in the foreseeable future<sup>513</sup>. Sino-American bipolarity will therefore not become the organizational feature of the regional order as long as US primacy is conserved. As China was dedicating great effort to consolidating its economic leadership, America remained Asia's security leader. True, China became the largest trading partner of most countries in the area, but trade relations are not synonymous with strategic dependence. Obviously, such dependence may arise in the future, but, with the exception of Laos and Cambodia, such strategic dependence has not come to pass. If it is the case that these states are not strategically dependent, it is also the case that their participation in BRI and ASEAN Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) makes them susceptible to Chinese leverage. For the time being, countries may look to Washington for security and China for trade. However, at some point the current situation will become unsustainable and the tendency towards greater polarization will accentuate balancing strategies.

America's post-1945 military deployment in the Asia, particularly its bases in Japan and South Korea, has unequivocally molded the manner in which Beijing has been able to fashion its relations in the neighborhood and its capacity to project power. For the People's Republic, limitations of this sort have become excessively onerous and, under Xi Jinping, increasingly unacceptable. Defending its regional hegemony and backed by allies alarmed by the fact that Beijing's assertiveness is upsetting the balance of power, the United States is not willing to permit the PRC to simply establish a new security order. In its 2019 Defense White Paper, “China's National Defense in a New Era”, the Beijing government makes the following evaluation of the regional situation: “As the world economic and strategic center continues to shift towards the Asia-Pacific, the region has

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510 Ibid., p. 1.

511 Ibid., p. 3.

512 See, “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region”, p. 21.

513 See, for instance, Paul Dibb and John Lee, “Why China Will Not Become the Dominant Power in Asia”, *Security Challenges*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2014, pp. 1-22, consulted at: [https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1437/sc10\\_3\\_dibb\\_lee.pdf](https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1437/sc10_3_dibb_lee.pdf).

become a focus of major country competition, bringing uncertainties to regional security. The US is strengthening its Asia-Pacific military alliances and reinforcing military deployment and intervention, adding complexity to regional security. The deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in the Republic of Korea (ROK) by the US has severely undermined the regional strategic balance and the strategic security interests of regional countries. In an attempt to circumvent the post-war mechanism, Japan has adjusted its military and security policies and increased input accordingly, thus becoming more outward-looking in its military endeavors. Australia continues to strengthen its military alliance with the US and its military engagement in the Asia-Pacific, seeking a bigger role in security affairs<sup>514</sup>.

This extract captures the tone of the White Paper and the strategic thinking informing it. In effect, the PRC sees itself as the object of a US-led coalition taking active measures to contain its legitimate rise. Enhancing its forward-deployed troop presence in the area, the United States' deployment of the THAAD missile defense system in South Korea incensed Beijing. Taken in 2016 by President Park Geun-hye before a scandal leading to her impeachment and imprisonment, the deployment decision was characterized by the Chinese as an attempt to undermine the country's nuclear second-strike deterrence capabilities. Beijing's robust reaction to the decision included the demarching of the US and South Korean ambassadors accredited to China and a state-media public campaign denouncing deployment<sup>515</sup>. More insidiously, the PRC, albeit unofficially, began to sanction Korean companies operating in China, including "additional scrutiny" placed on Lotte, the conglomerate that had "swapped land with the South Korean government for the system's deployment"<sup>516</sup>. Viewed from Beijing, such actions by the US and its allies are the true cause of the overturning of the regional balance.

The bedrock of Asia's security order continues to be the 1951 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (revised on January 19, 1960) and the October 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea. Article V of the treaty with Japan affirms that "(E)ach Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes"<sup>517</sup>.

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514 See, "China's National Defense in the New Era".

515 For a summary of the THAAD issue and Beijing's reaction, see, Ethan Meick and Nargiza Salidjanova, "China's Response to U.S.-South Korean Missile Defense System Deployment and its Implications", Staff Research Report, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, July 26, 2017, available at: [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Report\\_China's%20Response%20to%20THAAD%20Deployment%20and%20its%20Implications.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Report_China's%20Response%20to%20THAAD%20Deployment%20and%20its%20Implications.pdf).

516 See, Ankit Panda, "China Hits Back at South Korea's THAAD Deployment Following North Korea's Latest ICBM Test", *The Diplomat*, August 8, 2017, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/china-hits-back-at-south-koreas-thaad-deployment-following-north-koreas-latest-icbm-test/>.

517 See, Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (January 19, 1960), consulted at: [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/mutual\\_cooperation\\_treaty.pdf](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/mutual_cooperation_treaty.pdf).

Article III of the treaty with South Korea affirms that “each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties in territories now under their respective administrative control, or hereafter recognized by one of the Parties as lawfully brought under the administrative control of the other, would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes”<sup>518</sup>. These mutual defense commitments are, in turn, backed up by 28,500 American troops in South Korea and 50,000 in Japan. In conjunction with the assets of other allies, bases Guam and various countries and a powerful blue water Navy, the United States is an indisputable military colossus in Asia.

Irrespective of American defense budgetary outlays, the Donald Trump Administration has continually pressured regional allies, particularly Japan and South Korea, to make greater contributions (burden sharing) to offset China’s significant investments in blue water navy capabilities and, not less important, anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) assets. Not entirely comfortable with alliances, Trump has called upon allies to bear a greater part of the cost of stationing US troops in Asia. Tokyo, however, already accounts for more than 80% of the cost of stationing troops in the Japan. Still, in recent years, Tokyo increased its share of that cost, now assuming responsibility for the payment of utilities, housing repairs and an array of assorted expenses. Similarly, the Trump administration calls for Seoul to cover the cost of the U. S. military presence<sup>519</sup>. However, it has been reported that, in addition to these costs, Washington was seeking part of the cost of maintaining its “nuclear umbrella”<sup>520</sup>. A practical problem is that the nuclear deterrent encompasses a vast range of weapons systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, bombers, nuclear-armed submarines, aircraft carriers, command and control systems, as well as early warning systems. Many of these weapons and systems are, of course, partially or totally secret. That is to say, unless the US decides to open these systems to allies, there is no way of knowing their exact cost, even if it were possible to separate the specific cost of extending the nuclear umbrella to allies.

Suggesting, in March 2016, that Japan and the Republic of Korea should consider the development of nuclear weapons, Donald Trump introduced a surprising degree of

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518 See, Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea, consulted at: [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kor001.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp).

519 In 1966, the two countries signed the Status of Forces Agreement, whose Article V states that the United States will bear all costs for the maintenance of US troops, except those specifically assumed by South Korea. To determine this contribution, Special Measures Agreements (SMAs) have, since 1991, been periodically renegotiated. The last of these, dating from February 2019, and with a one-year duration, Seoul agreed to increase its contribution to \$927 million, \$70.3 million increase from the previous deal. Donald Trump initially asked South Korea to pay \$5 billion. Japan earmarks roughly \$1.8 billion to host U.S. forces, mostly stationed on Okinawa.

520 See, Hiroyuki Akita, “Trump demands Japan and South Korea pay for nuclear umbrella”, *Nikkei Asian Review*, February 4, 2020, accessed at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/Trump-demands-Japan-and-South-Korea-pay-for-nuclear-umbrella>.

uncertainty in the regional balance of power<sup>521</sup>. Japan, for instance, remains bound by its three nonnuclear principles: not to build, possess or allow nuclear weapons on its soil. At any rate, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Japan or South Korea would certainly unleash a spiral of insecurity whose end would be a regional nuclear arms race, probably enmeshing Vietnam and other emerging powers. Inherently dangerous, because it would occur in a geostrategic fault-line, the nuclearization logic would adversely impact Washington. Not only because it would raise the probability of the country seeing itself dragged into a nuclear conflict, but also because nuclearization, however limited, would devalue the strategic import of the presence of American forces in the Pacific.

Attempting to restore greater predictability to US regional policy, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis prudently reaffirmed the United States' "firm commitment" to its regional allies<sup>522</sup>. The reaffirmation of US intent was crucial because Chinese naval and air forces are increasing probing in the Japanese island chain. Tokyo's 2019 annual Defense White Paper noted that China's "unilateral escalation" of activities was arousing strong security concerns and emphasized Xi Jinping's determination to transform the PLA into one of the world's top fighting forces by the middle of the XXI century, as well as Beijing's intent to engage in "unilateral, coercive attempts to alter the status quo based on its own assertions that are incompatible with existing international order"<sup>523</sup>. Moreover, according to the same White Paper, "Chinese military and other developments, coupled with the lack of transparency surrounding its defense policy and military power, represent a serious security concern for the region including Japan and for the international community"<sup>524</sup>. Diplomatic niceties were observed as the report also noted that China is showing interest in initiatives to avoid unexpected and unintended air and sea clashes. Unsurprisingly, the 2019 Japan White Paper places particular emphasis on strengthening the US-Japan alliance. The deployment of the latest military equipment, such as F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters, stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, shows firm commitment to the alliance by the US and will contribute to the security of Japan and Asia Pacific region. Japan's ballistic missile defense system, conjugated with the now suspended Aegis Ashore system, is meant to enhance national defense capabilities.

At any rate, there is a strategic issue, possibility more relevant to this part of the globe, virtually impossible to manage in the absence of Chinese cooperation: North Korea's

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521 See, for example, Demetri Sevastopulo, "Donald Trump open to Japan and South Korea having nuclear weapons", *Financial Times*, March 27, 2016, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/c927017c-f398-11e5-9afe-dd2472ea263d>, and "Full Rush Transcript: Donald Trump, CNN Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall, CNN", March 29th, 2016, consulted at: <https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2016/03/29/full-rush-transcript-donald-trump-cnn-milwaukee-republican-presidential-town-hall/>.

522 See, Michael R. Gordon and Choe Sang-Hun, "Jim Mattis, in South Korea, tries to reassure an ally", *The New York Times*, February 2, 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/world/asia/james-mattis-us-korea-thaad.html>.

523 See, Ministry of Defense, "Defense of Japan 2019", p. 44, available at: [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/pdf/2019/DOJ2019\\_Full.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2019/DOJ2019_Full.pdf).

524 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

nuclear program. Considering that North Korea is commercially and financially dependent on China – 85 per cent of Pyongyang’s foreign trade is with the PRC –, Beijing has considerable leverage in Pyongyang. Said differently, Kim Jong-un is largely hostage to Beijing’s choices. However, there is little indication that Xi Jinping has chosen to use political capital to alter Korean behavior. Perhaps this is understandable since the abrupt, unforeseen collapse of the Pyongyang regime would bring dreadful consequences, including massive refugee flows, into Chinese soil. Beijing must be prudent in the manner in which it exercises its influence with the Kim clan<sup>525</sup>. The scenarios resulting from the collapse of the Kim dynasty are therefore dissuasive of greater Chinese assertiveness, especially because the peninsula’s unification under the tutelage of Seoul would amount to a drastic alteration of equilibriums unfavorable to Beijing. Considering these factors, Washington seems to have concluded that Beijing would never take punitive measures that could result in the toppling of the Kim dynasty.

China and the United States do not share a common understanding of the regional order and, as a consequence, their view of the *status quo* in the region is not coincidental. Under Donald Trump, the United States has gone beyond “rebalancing” to expounding a “free and open” Indo-Pacific. Yet, missteps have also plagued Washington’s efforts. TPP and multilateral relationships have given way to bilateral trade deals, at the same time that the US makes greater demands on all states. In contrast to the American approach, China has sought to reinforce multilateral webs through the BRI, its support of the ASEAN inspired Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership talks and the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The United States is committed to augmenting its presence in the broader Indo-Pacific at a moment when some states, wary of China’s ambitions, look anew to Washington for leadership. Astride the sea lanes of communication between the Middle East and East Asia, India may see the Quad as a means of reducing its exposure to seaborne threats. Geographically straddling the Indian and Pacific oceans, Australia is invested in the security of both regions and in reducing its economic dependence on China. Japan is the most unequivocal of the Quad states, certain that Chinese nationalism mobilizes against Japan. If the Indo-Pacific is accepted as the new organizing principle of the foreign policies of Australia, India, Japan and the US, the four will come together in the Quad.

## The Quad Democratic Community

Beijing’s 2019 Defense White Paper depicts the Chinese military as “a staunch force for world peace, stability and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind”<sup>526</sup>. To neighboring states unsettled by Chinese military power, such a portrayal

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525 See, for instance, Thomas Plant, “China, North Korea and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons”, *Survival*, Vol. 55, No. 2, April/May 2013, pp. 61-80.

526 See, “China’s National Defense in the New Era”, n. p.

emphasizing the country's benign intent obviously lacks credibility. However, at present, the People's Republic is not the sole major power advancing with a broad geopolitical plan for the region. The Trump Administration's Indo-Pacific strategy constitutes Washington's roadmap for resisting China's hegemonic intentions. Curiously, the State Department's November 2019 Indo-Pacific report claims that the "US vision for the Indo-Pacific excludes no nation. We do not ask countries to choose between one partner or another. Instead, we ask that they uphold the core principles of the regional order at a time when these principles are under renewed threat"<sup>527</sup>. Despite the inclusionary rhetoric, the formulation does indeed exclude the PRC since Beijing, defined in the National Security Strategy as a "revisionist" power, does not (a revisionist power, by definition, *cannot*) "uphold the core principles of the regional order". Logically, a balancing strategy against China requires the United States to congregate the region's democratic states under its leadership. That has not proven to be an entirely unproblematic undertaking.

More than a decade ago, a prolonged and not altogether fruitful experience with the "Quad" – the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue encompassing the US, Australia, Japan and India – evinced the complexity of balancing against China in the region. Although the Quad arose from the Tsunami Core Group created to address the incalculable challenges posed by the underwater earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004 that claimed over 200,000 lives, Shinzō Abe's arrival at the pinnacle of Japanese politics is what really propelled the Quad to the center of the regional political agenda. Contesting the Liberal Democratic Party's leadership, Abe outlined a foreign policy based on shared values and the deepening of a Community of Democracies, at the time under discussion in various capitals<sup>528</sup>. Assuming the prime minister's chair in the Summer of 2006, Abe, in early November of that year, announced that one of his foreign policy objectives would be the fashioning of "an arc of freedom and prosperity" in the Asia region<sup>529</sup>. Shortly after, in a speech fleshing out the country's novel approach to external affairs, Foreign Minister

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527 See, Department of State, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision", November 4, 2019, p. 6, accessed at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

528 See, "Toward a Community of Democracies Ministerial Conference", Final Warsaw Declaration: Toward a Community of Democracies, Warsaw, Poland, June 27, 2000, available at: [https://archive.is/20130414143601/http://www.ccd21.org/articles/warsaw\\_declaration.htm](https://archive.is/20130414143601/http://www.ccd21.org/articles/warsaw_declaration.htm). For a discussion of the "Community of Democracies", see, Ivo H. Daalder and James Lindsay, "Democracies of the World, Unite," Public Policy Research, Vol. 14, No. 1, March/May 2007, pp. 47-58; John McCain, "An Enduring Peace Built on Freedom", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 86, No. 6, November/December 2007, pp. 19-34; and, Robert Kagan, "Case for a League of Democracies", Financial Times, May 13, 2008, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/f62a02ce-20eb-11dd-a0e6-000077b07658>.

529 See, Yuichi Hosoya, "The Rise and Fall of Japan's Grand Strategy: The 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' and the Future Asian Order", Asia Pacific Review, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011, pp. 13-24. On the Abe Doctrine, see, *inter alia*, Michal Kolmaš. National Identity and Japanese Revisionism: Abe Shinzō's Vision of a Beautiful Japan and Its Limits. London: Routledge, 2019; Hugo Dobson, "Is Japan Really Back? The 'Abe Doctrine' and Global Governance", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2017, pp. 199-224, and H. D. P. Envall, "The 'Abe Doctrine': Japan's new regional realism", International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 2020, pp. 31-59.

Tarō Asō reaffirmed the call to build an “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” encompassing Central Asia, Mongolia, India, Southeast Asia and Korea to promote universal values and closer relations with like-minded countries<sup>530</sup>. Tokyo’s bold attempt to formulate a response to China’s rise rested on a strategic convergence between the region’s four main democracies and a panoply of other states willing to balance China. The vision was, in effect, one of Chinese encirclement.

The Quad democracies faced a common challenge: dealing with China’s economic regional leadership while resisting its strategic assertiveness. When Shinzō Abe called for a “quadrilateral strategic dialogue” to defend the “rules-based” order, his proposal was correctly viewed by Beijing as a strategy designed to contain China. For various reasons, Australia, India and the United States were, at the time, reluctant to embrace such a path, but officials representing the four governments nevertheless did agree to discuss the initiative in Manila on the sidelines of the May 2007 ASEAN Regional Forum. Later that same year, Japan, Australia and Singapore joined the India-US bilateral Malabar naval exercise, provoking protests from the PRC over Tokyo’s inclusion in the hugely expanded maneuvers<sup>531</sup>. Rather than a formal, institutionalized alliance, the ‘Quadrilateral’ was conceived as a loose geostrategic alignment of states concerned with China’s challenge to their respective interests and values. Lest they be viewed as provoking the PRC, not one of the four suggested formally transforming the Quad into a treaty alliance. Although that did not prevent the Quad’s opponents from characterizing the initiative as an embryonic NATO, the truth is that the lack of cohesion and strategic convergence between the four nations made any structured alliance a pipedream.

Opposition to the Quad, including critics within the four countries, largely rested on the assumption that the PRC was simply not a threat in need of containment; that is, Beijing’s peaceful rise was a win-win proposition. At worst, China would become the region’s economically preponderant power, but would, nonetheless, remain unwilling to press its interests so far as to illicit a military response from the United States. In essence, such arguments, rooted in perceptions and intentions mirroring Beijing’s line, failed to appreciate China’s enhanced capacities and its willingness to use them. A more serious approach suggested that the Quad could actually lead to the degradation of the

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530 The concept was first articulated in a November 2006 speech given by Tarō Asō, Japan’s Foreign Minister. See, “Speech by Mr. Tarō Asō, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons’”, November 30, 2006, available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html>. A subsequent speech seeking to clarify the concept, see, “On the ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity’. An Address by H.E. Mr. Taro Asō, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Founding of the Japan Forum on International Relations, Inc.”, International House of Japan, March 12, 2007, accessed at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar/address0703.html>.

531 On the importance of the 2007 Malabar exercises, see, Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Joint Naval Exercises: A Post-Malabar-2007 Appraisal for India”, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, IPCS Issue Brief, No. 52, New Delhi, September 2007, pp. 1-4, available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/44702/IPCS-Issue-Brief-No52.pdf>.

regional security order because Beijing would interpret the initiative as encirclement. Even if the security environment was not degraded as a result of pursuing the Quad, the initiative's ultimate danger would be to reinforce Chinese foreign policy hawks calling for an even more assertive posture. Such an observation, of course, presupposed that issues beyond timing separated Beijing's doves and hawks; indeed, hawks merely sought to accelerated the realization of PRC objectives common to all foreign policy factions.

Ultimately, the debate was settled by the interjection of the domestic politics of each of the four countries. Discussions on the future of the Quad were effectively paused when, in late 2007, Shinzō Abe's leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) began to waver after the LDP, for the first time in over five decades, lost control of the upper house. Conjugated with financial impropriety scandals and a controversial monarchical succession, the electoral loss left Abe with virtually no room to maneuver and, on 12 September 2007, he announced his resignation<sup>532</sup>. Yet, the LDP commanded a majority in the lower house, thus guaranteeing that the winner of the party's leadership contest would be selected head of government. Having defeated Asō Tarō for the LDP leadership, Yasuo Fukuda became Prime Minister on 25 September 2007. Not sharing Abe's views on China, Fukuda proceeded to define a policy of engagement. When the dovish opposition Democratic Party took over the executive, in 2009, talk of the Quad was unequivocally abandoned.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh did not reject outright the Quad initiative, but neither did he warmly embraced it. During the George W. Bush years, India had deepened its relationship with the United States and, for that reason, New Delhi was certainly willing to entertain the proposal. During the Cold War, India had sided with the Soviet Union, signing a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow. China and India had been engaged in a brief border war in 1962, and border issues relating to territorial claims had yet to be fully resolved. Yet, China was on friendly terms with Pakistan and New Delhi did not want to abandon all leverage in Beijing. Any containment strategy was therefore problematic, particularly since the two countries were, at this point, attempting to extend cooperation in forums such as BRIC and G-20<sup>533</sup>. Singh made his first visit to China in early January 2008 and, while there, signed a joint statement designed to promote a "Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity"<sup>534</sup>. After Kevin Rudd's Australian government cooled on the Quad, the Indian Prime

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532 See, Hiroko Nakata, "Abe announces he will resign", *The Japan Times*, September 13, 2007, consulted at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2007/09/13/national/abe-announces-he-will-resign/#.XrorHS2ZMxc>.

533 On some of the limitations of the Sino-Indian relationship, see, Hu Shisheng and Peng Jing, "The Rise of China and India: Prospects of Partnership", in Sudhir T. Devare, Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah (eds.). *Emerging China: Prospects of Partnership in Asia*. New Delhi: Routledge India, 2012, pp. 348-374.

534 For context of the issues surrounding Sino-Indian relations at the time of the trip, see, Jabin T. Jacob, "Manmohan Singh's Visit to China: New Challenges Ahead", *China Report*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2008, pp. 63-70, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234051740\\_Manmohan\\_Singh's\\_Visit\\_to\\_China\\_New\\_Challenges\\_Ahead](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234051740_Manmohan_Singh's_Visit_to_China_New_Challenges_Ahead).

Minister, during the first BRICs July 2009 summit in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, assured Hu Jintao that “China is not a competitor” and “India will give top priority to its relations with China”<sup>535</sup>.

Generally accused of sinking the Quad, Australia, for multiple reasons, was the country most subject to intense pressure from the Chinese government. Indeed, Canberra’s vulnerability had been accentuated by the increasing dependence of the Australian economy on Chinese investment and demand for natural resources<sup>536</sup>. On 5 February 2008, a mere four months after Kevin Rudd’s Labor Party won the November 2007 elections, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, during a Canberra press conference with his Chinese counterpart, Yang Jiechi, declared that “(O)ne of the things that caused China concern last year was a meeting of that strategic dialogue... I indicated when I was in Japan that Australia would not be proposing to have a dialogue of that nature”<sup>537</sup>. In effect, Australia effectively abandoned the Quad to launch a “strategic dialogue” with Beijing.

The man responsible for that decision, Kevin Rudd, in an extremely revealing if self-justifying article, suggested that the Quad was of such limited relevance that “(A)s Prime Minister I visited Washington in March 2008 just after we had made clear that we would not be continuing Australian participation with the Quad. In a full day of meetings with President George W. Bush and the most senior members of his cabinet, not once was the Quad raised by the American side”<sup>538</sup>. More intriguingly is Rudd’s candid understanding of Australian national interests when he writes: “would it be wise to consign the future of our own bilateral relationship with China to the future health of the China-Japan relationship over which we could exercise no influence or control whatsoever? The uncomfortable truth was that centuries of mutual toxicity colored deeply the lens through which Beijing and Tokyo viewed each other. For Australia in 2007 therefore, to begin embroiling itself in any emerging military alliance with Japan against China, in the absence of any formal reconciliation between Tokyo and Beijing over the events of the Second World War, was incompatible with our long-term national interests”<sup>539</sup>. In many

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535 See, “Hu meets with Indian prime minister”, *China Daily*, June 16, 2009, available at: [http://www.china-daily.com.cn/world/2009recovery/2009-06/16/content\\_8602161\\_2.htm](http://www.china-daily.com.cn/world/2009recovery/2009-06/16/content_8602161_2.htm).

536 Much recent public debate on Chinese influence in Australia was provoked by the publication of Clive Hamilton’s book detailing the manner in which “the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is engaged in a systematic campaign to infiltrate, influence and control the most important institutions in Australia” and whose “ultimate aim” is to “break our alliance with the United States and turn this country into a tribute state”. See, Clive Hamilton. *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*. London: Hardie Grant Books, 2018, p. 1.

537 Cited in Frank Ching, “Asian Arc doomed without Australia”, *The Japan Times*, February 22, 2008. Accessed at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2008/02/22/commentary/asian-arc-doomed-without-australia/#.XmoMyC2eYxc>.

538 See, Kevin Rudd, “The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the Quad”, *Nikkei Asian Review*, March 26, 2019, accessed at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-Convenient-Rewriting-of-the-History-of-the-Quad>.

539 *Ibid*.

respects, it is a candid confession of realist political considerations and there is no reason not to take it as the truth<sup>540</sup>. It was also an extremely short-sighted view.

Ten years later, during the 2017 ASEAN Summit, Malcolm Turnbull, Shinzō Abe, Narendra Modi and Donald Trump agreed to re-launch the quadrilateral dialogue. Much had changed in the intervening decade, particularly China's South China Sea policy, Xi Jinping's assertiveness and Beijing's use of the Belt and Road Initiative to consolidate positions in neighboring countries such as Pakistan. Mounting apprehension over Beijing's regional ambitions was the prime motivation propelling the Quad's revival, but the shared political values and a commitment to the regional order were equally relevant. Yet, the principal driver for the Quad's reactivation was Donald Trump's shift in strategic orientation. Indeed, one of the pledges contained in the Trump Administration's National Security Strategy was, precisely, to "increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India"<sup>541</sup>. The reengagement with the region came after Trump's decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an incalculable mistake that raised skepticism relative to Washington's commitment to the regional security order<sup>542</sup>. Taking immediate advantage of Trump's misstep, Xi Jinping wasted no time in promoting China as the new global champion of free trade and early indications suggested that some US regional allies, such as Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, were gravitating towards Beijing on issues of economic leadership.

Other reasons explain the renewed interest in the Quad. First, deference to Chinese sensibilities leading to the abandonment of the initial proposal did not alter PRC regional behavior. Indeed, China no longer denies its desire to assert its strength and shape the regional order. Second, abandoning Deng Xiaoping's "bide your time" approach, Beijing also abandoned its policy of freezing disputes until a later time, a shift particularly evident in the South China Sea. Third, domestic political conditions in all four countries had changed dramatically. The governments in power in the four capitals were considerably more inclined to work together to check China's growing might. In sum, the Quad was recuperated because Chinese assertiveness had fundamentally transformed the regional security environment and the domestic political situation in the four democracies had also been significantly altered.

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540 Ibid. This is not to suggest that the Rudd government was entirely unconcerned about China's role in Australia. As Rudd pointed out some time after leaving office, in his "The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the Quad" article, "Australia was also the first non-American government in the world to deny Huawei's ability to sell its products -- into the Australian National Broadband Network -- on national security grounds. And our 2009 Defense White Paper explicitly named China's expanding military budget and its unexplained regional deployments as a reason for Australia doubling its submarine fleet and increasing its surface fleet by one third".

541 See, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America", p. 46.

542 Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, visiting Washington in August 2016, was quite blunt in stating that US rejection of the TPP would damage its credibility with regional allies. See, Pearl Lee, "PM Lee Hsien Loong warns of harm to US' standing if TPP isn't ratified", *The Straits Times*, October 27, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pm-lee-warns-of-harm-to-us-standing-if-tpp-isnt-ratified>.

The Australian Liberal coalition government under Malcolm Turnbull and the Japanese Liberal Democratic coalition government took the lead in reviving the Quad. In late October 2017, acting prime minister Julie Bishop signaled that Canberra welcomed “discussions between Australia, India, Japan and the US to strengthen co-operative arrangements and to maximize our opportunities within the Indo-Pacific region in which international law and the rules-based order is respected, so that countries may continue to prosper”<sup>543</sup>. Similarly, in the wake of Shinzō Abe’s 2017 re-election, Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno said that Tokyo wanted the democracies to jointly promote free trade and defense co-operation across the Indo-Pacific to thwart Beijing’s building of security and trade infrastructure through the BRI<sup>544</sup>. Japan’s initiative was immediately embraced by Alice Wells, US acting Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, remarking that the “quadrilateral the Japanese foreign minister discussed would be building on a very productive trilateral we have with India and Japan... to reinforce those values in the global architecture”<sup>545</sup>. Predictably, Wells dismissed the notion that the Quad would be aimed at containing China, but she did affirm that the revamped partnership would seek alternatives for infrastructure and economic development “that don’t include predatory financing or unsustainable debt”, an euphemism for PRC practices<sup>546</sup>.

Responding to the new realities, and to attenuate Beijing’s worsening relationship with Washington, China sought to de-escalate strategic tensions with India and Japan. Abe made a visit to Beijing in October 2018, signaling the end of a seven-year freeze in the relationship<sup>547</sup>. India, however, pursued a more ambiguous course. Seeking to preserve his margin of maneuver, Narendra Modi held a bilateral summit with Xi Jinping in April 2018, expressing a degree of hedging motivated by legitimate doubts as to reliability of the Trump Administration<sup>548</sup>. New Delhi, recalling Rudd’s brusque abandonment of the Quad ten years before, was also reluctant to include Australia in recent trilateral Malabar naval exercises held with the United States and Japan<sup>549</sup>.

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543 See, David Wroe, “Australia weighing closer democratic ties in region in rebuff to China”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 31, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-weighing-closer-democratic-ties-in-region-in-rebuff-to-china-20171031-gzbzhq.html>.

544 See, Saki Hayashi and Yosuke Onchi, “Japan to propose dialogue with US, India and Australia”, *Nikkei Asian Review*, October 26, 2017, accessed at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-to-propose-dialogue-with-US-India-and-Australia2>.

545 See, David Brunnstrom, “U.S. seeks meeting soon to revive Asia-Pacific ‘Quad’ security forum”, *Reuters*, October 27, 2017, consulted at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-asia-quad/u-s-seeks-meeting-soon-to-revive-asia-pacific-quad-security-forum-idUSKBN1CW2O1>.

546 *Ibid.*

547 For an overview of Sino-Japanese relations, see, Ezra F. Vogel. *China and Japan: Facing History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019.

548 On the Trump-Modi relationship, see, Varghese K. George. *Open Embrace: India-US ties in the Age of Modi and Trump*. Haryana: Viking, 2018.

549 See, Suhasini Haidar and Dinakar Peri, “Not time yet for Australia’s inclusion in Malabar naval games”, *The Hindu*, January 22, 2019, consulted at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/not-time-yet-for-australias-inclusion-in-malabar-naval-games/article26058080.ece>.

Increased quadrilateral cooperation is an indication of how profoundly the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific has shifted. At the same time, domestic agendas and national interests not infrequently impede greater Quad cooperation, as was evident in the first attempt to generate Quad cooperation. Moreover, all countries are wary of being drawn into conflicts not of their making simply because one of the other democratic states becomes involved in a skirmish with Beijing. These difficulties are not insurmountable, but robust US leadership is required if they are to be overcome. For each country, the relationship with Washington is the single most important bilateral tie. But China is the second most critical of these ties, outstripping the importance of the other democracies. As a consequence, to avoid confronting Chinese sensibilities, the temptation will invariably arise to placate Beijing at the expense of fellow Quad democracies. China's reaction to the Quad is predictable since a rising power with hegemonic designs naturally seeks to prevent states from constraining its actions. Yet, in Washington, the Quad appears to be understood as an instrument for containing China's geopolitical assertiveness; indeed, the Quad is "controversial because it's perceived to be a way of containing China"<sup>550</sup>. As a military grouping with a containment agenda, the Quad would perhaps polarize the region; without a militarized agenda, divergent interests and domestic agendas will prevent the "community of democracies" from acting in unison.

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550 See, Huong Le Thu (ed.), "Quad 2.0: New Perspectives for the Revised Concept. Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2019, p. 2, accessed at: [https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-as-pi/2019-02/S1134%20Quad%202.0%20New%20perspectives\\_0.pdf?Ml2ECFvmUJTTFzK.RsBIsskCR-RAqEmfP](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-as-pi/2019-02/S1134%20Quad%202.0%20New%20perspectives_0.pdf?Ml2ECFvmUJTTFzK.RsBIsskCR-RAqEmfP).

## Postface

“We are advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun”

Mao Zedong, *Problems of Revolutionary Strategy*

Originating from both within and without China’s borders, mass violence and untold destruction was wrought upon Zhōngguó and its people through imperialist avarice, European, Russian, American and Japanese alike. Local warlords and various governments, imperial and republican, perpetuated tremendous atrocities as they contained rebellions, fought infinite civil wars or simply struggled to maintain power. For its part, the Chinese Communist Party caused the death of dozens of millions through famine provoked by the disastrous choices made during the Great Leap Forward or through the political chaos unleashed by the Cultural Revolution. These waves of mass famine, terror and violence would only terminate in the mid 1970s with the purging of the Gang of Four and the return to power of Deng Xiaoping and the Eternals. Today, under the rule of Xi Jinping, the overt violence of earlier times has been supplanted by insidious mass surveillance and the internment of over one million Uigher<sup>551</sup>.

China’s contemporary “century of humiliation” narrative was first coherently outlined by the Guomindang in the 1920’s, following the passing of Sun Yat-sen, when the events of the First Opium War were redefined as a “national tragedy” rather than a “dispute”. That conflict began a “century of humiliation” defined by war, occupation and socio-political turbulence. The loss of self-confidence and the ensuing domestic upheaval generated by military defeat at the hands of Japan and the West eventually led to the erosion of the legitimacy of the Manchu Qing dynasty, increasingly seen as foreign usurpers. A new generation of reformers and revolutionaries, a number of whom would later find their way into the Chinese Communist Party, began to wrestle with the question of why China had fared so badly in an international system of competitive nation-states. In 1911, the Qing dynasty collapsed and the centralized Chinese state gave way to weak national governments undermined by communist insurrection, Japanese occupation and regional warlord fiefdoms virtually independent of the center’s authority.

The “century of humiliation” exposed China’s weakness and, as a consequence, the empire’s vulnerability to outside powers in a world undergoing vertiginous change. Through numerous unequal treaties forcing the Chinese to compromise their sovereignty and terri-

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551 See, for instance, Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang”, CFR Backgrounder, Council of Foreign Relations, November 25, 2019, accessed at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-ughurs-xinjiang> and the Reuters Investigates presentation “Tracking China’s Muslim Gulag”, accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/muslims-camps-china/>.

torial integrity, China was displaced from its central place in the world-system, effectively subjugating and straddling the Middle Kingdom with an inferior status unbecoming of its civilization and national greatness. The “century of humiliation” thus became a byword for the displacement of China’s centrality in the world, the overturning of “all things under heaven”. The brutal intrusion of a barbarian world that had long played a minimal role in China’s outlook devastated the imperial elite’s self-image. Indeed, it may be said that “at the fundamental level it was the incongruity between the Chinese world order and Western powers’ Westphalian vision of state sovereignty, and the clash of Chinese and Western empires, that a series of military conflicts ensued” during the Opium Wars<sup>552</sup>.

A “century of humiliation” at the hands of foreigners still resonates with China’s elites, viewing China as unjustly treated and demeaned at the hands of Westerners, Russians and Japanese. This humiliation proved even more traumatic because the Chinese understood themselves as Asia’s indispensable nation, an exceptionalism that continues to influence the country’s behavior. To understand this narrative of national humiliation is to understand Mao Zedong’s feat of uniting the country under centralized government. Proclaiming the creation of the People’s Republic, Mao announced that China had “stood up”. In reality, by “leaning to one side”, the PRC abandoned the capitalist world system, trading the inequities of imperialism for dependence on the Soviet “big brothers”.

Mao’s People’s Republic of China may have “stood up”, but it had yet to achieve the national greatness that the tyrant had envisioned. The disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution convinced the CCP’s elite to alter its strategy in the aftermath of the Great Helmsman’s 1976 death. Following a brief power struggle, Deng Xiaoping and a group of senior revolutionaries consolidated their power and, at the December 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, set the course for an economic miracle that would propel the country into the XXI century. As Deng proceeded with “openness and reform”, the 1989 Tiananmen massacre revealed the limits of reform. In the aftermath of those events, a cautionary tale for the CCP elite, it became unequivocally clear that “political reform” excluded calling into question the CCP’s monopoly of power and, of course, also excluded any sort of transition to liberal democracy. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” was still “socialism” constructed through the enlightened leadership of a Leninist party.

The demise of Soviet communism could not but have a profound impact on China’s communist elites, further convincing them that “political opening” would end in the same disastrous fashion. Yet, Western nations did not fully appreciate that democratization was not forthcoming in China. Having defeated the Soviet Union, Americans and Europeans concluded that communist ideology had, to paraphrase Marx, been cast into the dustbin of history. The CCP seemed nothing more than a historical relic, an outdated artifact of a country undergoing a rapid conversion to capitalism. Molded by a host of modernization theories and some rather questionable assumptions about democratization, Washington

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552 See, Phil C. W. Chan. “China’s Approaches to International Law since the Opium War”. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 27, No. 4, December 2014, p. 866.

and Brussels came to the view that engaging with China would transform the PRC into a responsible “international stakeholder” and, concurrently, unleash domestic regime change. Bill Clinton, in particular, defined a strategic course that, ironically, was to take the PRC into the WTO and facilitate the country’s vertiginous rise. What the advocates of globalization and engagement seemed unable to comprehend, however, was that the regime was not interested in becoming a good global citizen; it was interested in replacing the post-1945 liberal order.

Xi Jinping’s rise to power was therefore almost certainly destined to lead to greater tensions with the United States. On his way to attaining and consolidating power, Xi purged party, state and military, eliminating untold adversaries under the guise of anti-corruption campaigns. A politico-ideological crackdown followed, targeting expression, religious groups and ethnic minorities, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang. The limited pluralism previously consented by the regime in universities, think tanks and the media was replaced by the strict orthodoxy under the supervision of Huang Kunming’s Central Propaganda Department. Ideological rigidity became the new normal and Xi’s China effectively metamorphosed into a post-modern surveillance society monitored by cameras, apps, cell phones and other technological instruments. As a corollary, a social credit system to better infer loyalty to party and state is currently being implemented. The state has also returned in force to the economic sphere, tightening its grip on all areas of economics and finance. Not least importantly, the state has fostered the creation of national champions that are now upturning markets, supply chains and entire economies. In the process, the role of companies such as Huawei have generated acute political controversy all over the world. Yet, despite all, there was also pushback as Hong Kong, a beachhead of democracy and autonomous civil society, rebelled against Beijing’s attempt to quash its freedoms. A prosperous and democratic society, Taiwan, too, has remained outside of Beijing’s reach.

On the international stage, China’s foreign policy initiatives bear Xi Jinping’s signature. Today, few if any strategic decisions are taken in the absence of his direct consent and supervision. Like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, the CCP’s new strongman, if he remains in power, will surely become a transformative leader taking China into a brave new world of great power status. Under Xi’s guidance, the PRC has undoubtedly become a self-confident assertive power guided by a “China Dream” of national resurgence and affirmation. Xi’s final intention is, to borrow a familiar formula, to “Make China Great Again”. Calling for a new, post-liberal global order to realize his “community of shared future for mankind”, Xi launched the Belt and Road Initiative, a trillion-dollar program arousing intense suspicion in the West and increasing debt burdens in numerous developing countries. A strategic relationship with Russia threatens to upturn the international balance of power and, in the immediate neighborhood, the PRC has pitted itself against the US and its allies as it challenges the *status quo* in the South China and East China Seas. A prolonged period of strategic confrontation with the United States seems to be a foregone outcome. In response, the US has delineated an alternative plan for preserving the regional order, a “free and open Indo-Pacific”. At the global level, Washington and Beijing dispute accepted norms, internal law and multilateral institutions such as the WTO and the World

Health Organization (WHO). In a very literal sense, we are witnessing a universal conflict between two powers vying to mold two distinct and largely incompatible futures.

To some extent, that future arrived with the Covid crisis. The CCP bungled its initial response to the outbreak of the worst public health crisis in the history of the People's Republic. Wuhan has become a byword for a failure of transparency, public opinion manipulation and governmental callousness. In light of the ongoing crisis provoked by the coronavirus, many past certainties are being discarded. Even before the onset of the crisis, long-term predictions regarding PRC GDP growth depended on a number of variables that Chinese authorities cannot readily control. Despite significant advances made by PRC over the last decades, the United States continues to count on a host of advantages relative to China: a younger population, technological superiority and flexible international corporations. Barring fundamental ruptures in the international economic and financial order that may ensue as a consequence of the present crisis, significant American benefits will also continue to accrue from the dollar being the world's leading currency, a status that has allowed the US to import capital and thus export inflation and offset low levels and savings. These advantages appear destined to be extended for some time into the future, particularly since widespread concern remains over the opaqueness of China's financial system and debt levels. This is not to suggest that American hegemony is guaranteed or that challenges to US dominance will not intensify in the months and years to come. Even before the present crisis, an increasing number of states expressed varying degrees of discomfort over the Trump Administration's weaponization of the dollar, particularly the White House's extensive use of sanctions. Still, the US domestic market, with its capital markets and its millions of prosperous consumers, continues to be a magnet for international companies. The move towards digital currencies backed by central banks may raise numerous issues for the dollar's hegemony, but will not likely displace it in the near future.

The Covid crisis has, at any rate, made one victim: the particular type of globalization created over the last forty years. Predictably, Washington's strategic confrontation with Beijing implies some degree of trade and financial "decoupling". The concerns expressed over medical and biopharma supply chains, matters of national security for the Americans and one of the ten Made in China 2025 priorities, will increase the pressure for a renationalization of production in key sectors. Such a tendency is already apparent in Tokyo's call for Japanese companies to come home and the state support offered to offset the cost of such re-shoring<sup>553</sup>. Donald Trump too believes that restricting Chinese

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553 See, Mercy Kuo, "Japan prods firms to leave China, affecting ties with Beijing and Washington", The Japan Times, May 8, 2020, available at: [https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/08/national/politics-diplomacy/tokyo-china-us-relations-business/#.Xrt\\_Yi2ZMxc](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/08/national/politics-diplomacy/tokyo-china-us-relations-business/#.Xrt_Yi2ZMxc). For a Chinese perspective from the regime's Global Times news outlet, see, Liu Zhiqin, "Shifting production out of China would be a big mistake for US, Japanese companies", Global Times, April 13, 2020, available at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1185500.shtml>. It is not Japanese companies that are abandoning the PRC. Korean companies are also considering a move, see, Rajesh Chandramouli, "Korean companies keen to move out of China to India", The times of India, April 14, 2020, accessed at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/korean-companies-keen-to-move-out-of-china-to-india/articleshow/75130387.cms>

access to America's technology and market will slow China's power. Reducing US dependence on the PRC and constraining its economic power are now part of the emerging, post-Clintonite bipartisan consensus on China. The January 2020 "interim deal" pausing the "trade war" is just that: a pause. Economic decoupling will surely follow, whether or not Donald Trump remains in the Oval Office<sup>554</sup>.

Less dependent on exports than in the past, China will be adversely impacted by decoupling. Since regime legitimacy remains rooted in economic performance, the CCP may confront a downturn in popular support and Xi's promise of a "moderately prosperous society" may have to be extended into the distant horizon. In theory, the CCP should be capable of avoiding or mitigating the damage from an economic slowdown<sup>555</sup>. Beijing could, of course, retrench from the BRI and channel funds into its banking system and domestic social services. More likely, Xi Jinping will beat the drums of Chinese nationalism. Ever since the 1989 Tiananmen events, the CCP has resorted to nationalism to enhance its legitimacy. Decoupling, and a resulting economic slowdown, would give Beijing the opportunity to reanimate historical animosities and further demonize the United States and Japan, accused of attempting to derail China's rise. If all else fails, the party retains its sophisticated mechanisms of social and political repression. Suppressing internal challenges would certainly be costly, but, with Xi loyalists dominating the CCP and the PLA, the party, unlike the CPSU, will not "dissolve like a flock of sparrows".

Lastly, a word on democracy in the current conjuncture. Democracy and openness assure, over the long term, greater probabilities of resolving social tensions and of managing institutional change. True, Western democracies face significant domestic challenges and much must change so as to guarantee that manageable challenges will not become frontal assaults on the core precepts and fundamental pillars of liberal institutions and politics. It is useful to recall that polarization was becoming accentuated in the United States even before the current president occupied the Oval Office. A tendency toward extreme partisanship and tribal politics, driven largely by the media and social networks, intensified during the Trump presidency. But President Trump's heterodox approach to political competition has also led his adversaries to assume strident political language and tactics. Still, there is no reason to suppose that the country's political institutions will not withstand these very real challenges. As a matter of fact, a longer historical outlook suggests that American political institutions are sufficiently sturdy to overcome such severe tests.

The caveat is that the rise of the People's Republic is accompanied by an alternative political model in a world where democracy has, by and large, been the dominant form

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554 See, for instance, Jack Detsch and Robbie Gramer, "The Coronavirus Could Upend Trump's China Trade Deal", *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2020, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/21/coronavirus-trump-china-trade-war/>.

555 For a provocative, if somewhat overstated reading of the PRC's capacity to withstand these challenges, see, Minxin Pei, "China's Coming Upheaval: Competition, the Coronavirus, and the Weakness of Xi Jinping", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 3, May/June 2020, pp. 82-55.

of ideological and political legitimation. Yet, the rise of democracy occurred in a world made by the United States and its allies. Contesting the liberal order those allies created, Xi Jinping now offers an alternative vision of global governance. Granted “socialism with Chinese characteristics” appears to inherently defy universal application; after all, it is specifically Chinese. On closer examination, the model is really about politics-as-performance. That is to say, if a cohesive authoritarian regime employing mass surveillance can deliver prosperity, the political specificity of the regime becomes rather inconsequential. Chinese authoritarianism is Chinese, but it is also authoritarianism. That message, that authoritarianism works, now commands a significant following in Russia, Iran and Turkey, but in Budapest and other Western capitals as well. That appeal to escape from freedom is, in the long-run, surely the most treacherous.



## DRAGON REJUVENATED: MAKING CHINA GREATEST AGAIN

The paper explores China's rise to great power status. The objectives guiding the current Chinese leadership have been defined in conformity with the legacy established by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. In effect, there is a tremendous amount of continuity in China's outlook on international relations. The paper also considers the United States' response to the emergence of China, as well as the issues separating the parts, and the impact of these divergences on the emerging regional order.

