



Spring 5-2023

## The Eagle's Eye on the Rising Dragon: Why the United States Has Shifted Its View of China

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### Recommended Citation

Scott, Jackson Craig. "The Eagle's Eye on the Rising Dragon: Why the United States Has Shifted Its View of China." University of Tennessee - Knoxville, May 2023.

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**The Eagle's Eye on the Rising Dragon:  
Why the United States Has Shifted Its View of China**

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May 1, 2023

## Abstract

Since 1978, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has long been viewed as an economic trading partner of the United States of America (US). The PRC has grown to be an economic powerhouse, and the US directly helped with that process and still benefits from it. However, during the mid-2010's, US rhetoric began to turn sour against the PRC. The American government rhetoric toward the PRC, beginning with the Obama administration, switched. As Trump's administration came along, they bolstered this rhetoric from non-friendly to more or less hostile. Then, Biden's administration strengthened Trump's rhetoric. Over the past ten years or so, the world has seen the US shift its view of China from a trading partner to now an international threat. The question this paper will attempt to answer is why did this switch happen?

I hypothesize that the US has switched its view because of seven reasons. Some of the reasons that are listed first are fairly logical, while others are more complex. The factors I examine include: (1) the American capacity to make the switch, (2) the American realization that they must take a realist approach to international affairs in order to maintain hegemony, (3) the rise of Xi Jinping, (4) the China debate in the US, (5) national security concerns taking precedence over US business interests, (6) PRC economic and research espionage, theft, and aggression, and (7) human rights abuses. The following paper will examine these factors one at a time to assess why and how they played a part in the United States shifting its view of China. The results of this paper show that the United States' shift has been a slow one, however, there are ample reasons why they have shifted. Furthermore, the results show that it is a highly complex issue. Particularly, the most important factors were the American reclamation of realism regarding international affairs, the CCP's nationalistic rhetoric, and the American's obtaining a

better understanding of the PRC. The factor that is least important, however still contributed to the American switch and provided moral motivation, are the CCP human rights abuses.

## Introduction

**“After a long split, a union will occur; after a long union, a split will occur.” - *Romance of the Three Kingdoms***

General Michael A. Minihan, who is in charge of the United States’ Air Force’s fleet of refueling and transport aircraft, sent a grave memo to his soldiers dated February 1, 2023. In this memo he stated the following in regards to China: “I hope I am wrong. My gut tells me we will fight in 2025.” He goes on to direct his soldiers to, “Aim for the head.”<sup>1</sup> General Minihan is at the forefront of the military hawks. His impending view of war with China as soon as two years certainly does not represent all of the United States government or even the Department of Defense. However, the concern of war with China in the next decade is shared by many experts.

What is shocking is not that American experts have this view but how fast the United States switched its view of China. As recently as 2011, during the process of the Obama Administration’s “Asia-Pivot,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “A thriving China is good for America.”<sup>2</sup> The United States completely switched its view of China and did so quickly. First was the rhetoric, then the actions that showed this switch.

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Lamonthe, “U.S. General Warns Troops that War with China is Possible in Two Years,” *Washington Post*, January 27, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The Inevitable Rivalry,” *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 6 (November 2021): 48–58, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=153083053&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

I attempt to answer the question why did the United States shift its view of China from an economic partner to an international threat?<sup>3</sup> This is a sophisticated topic with varying pieces that move at different times, in different ways, and for different reasons. For example, the policy makers of the US switched their view of China at a different time than the US intelligence community did. I hypothesize that the United States has shifted its view of China because of seven main reasons: (1) the American capacity to make the switch, (2) the American realization that they must take a realist approach to international affairs in order to maintain hegemony, (3) the rise of Xi Jinping, (4) the China debate in the US, (5) national security concerns taking precedence over US business interests, (6) PRC economic and research espionage, theft, and aggression, and (7) human rights abuses. These reasons start simply, with their capacity to switch to China, yet, other reasons are more complex.

The hypothesis about their capacity to switch may seem irrelevant to even mention, however, it is important because without it, none of the other hypotheses could have occurred. The second reason that is hypothesized, realism, is shown by real world events. Theory is useful because it can be paired with examples to make a potent case. The actions taken by the US show that it readopted realism in regards to China. The nationalist rhetoric from China is seen by its white papers and secondary sources. This rhetoric has grown immensely with the rise of Xi Jinping. The two tied together create the third hypothesis as to why the US switched their view of the People's Republic of China. Fourth, the hypothesis regarding the US' better understanding

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<sup>3</sup> This paper will go to show the threatening actions that the People's Republic of China has taken. It will make China sound like a bully on the international stage and in their own country. However, this needs to be made clear: when this paper refers to wrongdoings of the People's Republic of China, China, the Chinese Communist Party, or the People's Liberation Army, it is only accurate to tie those actions to the government. These actions are not being committed by the people. The country of China has a rich and beautiful culture and history. Their contributions to the world are endless and paramount. This author in no way is trying to promote hate against the people of China, merely attempting to explain why the United States government views the government of China differently than they did in the twentieth century.

of China alludes to the vast differences of world views and cultures between the two states. This will be shown by examining some highlights from the history of China and how it applies to current events. It will also be shown by explaining how Chinese international relations theorists attempt to move away from Western international relations theory to create their own form of thought. China helping US enemies and their allies and citizens helping China is the fifth hypothesis. This is shown by providing data that shows the PRC helping known enemies of the US. Furthermore, data is provided that shows the US' own citizens and their allies give help to China. The sixth hypothesis is how China economically grew and continually expanded their economy. This was done by economic and research espionage, theft, and aggression; this has caused the US' gaze to turn hostile toward China. Furthermore, nationalist rhetoric, a large population, and a sizable military, combined with a thriving economy has caused the United States to view China in an ill, competitive light. Finally, the seventh hypothesis is China's human rights abuses which has contributed the least to the US' switch. This may seem a surprise to some. However, if one looks at US partners around the globe, they do not always have the best human rights record. What this piece of the overarching argument will show is why the US began to pay attention and try to hold specifically China accountable for their human rights abuses when it has not done so for other allies abusing human rights, or even China's human rights record in the past few decades. What is important about this hypothesis is the idea that the US will start to highlight a state's human rights abuses when that state begins to act unfavorably toward the US.

## **Background of US-China Relations**

From August of 1945 to December of 1991, the United States and western Europe were fixated on the threats of the Soviet Union. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the 1990s was a period of relative peace. Then, from September 11, 2001 to August of 2021, the United States and the Western world's attention was focused on the Middle East and Central Asia in an effort to combat terrorism. During that time however, there was another state that was rising. This state slowly emerged as a global economic superpower, the manufacturer for the world, the state that most others depend upon for many goods, and a self-proclaimed place of peace and harmony. This state is the People's Republic of China, the dragon of the east. China had been quietly waiting, biding its time, until the moment was right to spread its wings.

The United States wanted to create diplomatic relations with China to ensure that China did not fall in the Soviet camp, and officially did so in 1979. After that, the US helped China become a modernized developed state—quite literally helping another state become powerful enough to challenge them on the world stage, and that is precisely what they are doing now. The US' view of China started off as favorable; they were another actor that could help us combat the Soviet Union. Now, though, the tide has turned to a place of hostility. This switch in sentiment certainly did not happen overnight. For example, in 1991 questionable nuclear exchanges between Algeria and China took place. During a senate hearing, our current president and then senator, Joseph R. Biden, had this to say regarding China, "...it appears China is rapidly becoming a rogue elephant among the community of nations." He also said he believed the US had been repeatedly misled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regarding promises that Beijing would not help with technology for such weapons of mass destruction as missiles or nuclear bombs. He went on, "...we should be prepared to retaliate with a clear and unequivocal

message that they will understand—that is, denying China ‘most favored nation’ trade status.”<sup>4</sup> Our relationship with China has obviously not always been benign and is instead highly complicated, even in times of peace and cooperation.

The past 10 years have seen tensions grow more and more to present, when it is at its most tense. It would be rare to find any prominent member of the United States government, academia, or think tank that speaks positively of China currently. This unfortunate nature of the competition is new. Besides discussion on trade, diplomacy between the two states has almost completely vanished. There is nothing about the two states’ relationship that is moving to a positive place.<sup>5</sup> In fact, as previously mentioned, US Air Force General Michael Minihan just recently warned that war with China would happen as soon as 2025, and many share this opinion of looming conflict.<sup>6</sup> This type of rhetoric would have never been stated ten years ago. To add to the complicated relationship between the two states, this was not a sudden or cohesive shift of opinion, as different parts of the United States government have shifted its view of China at different times.

For example, the intelligence community (IC) never saw China as a friend and has monitored the CCP led government for years. They simply could not pay close attention to them because they were so heavily involved in the Middle East and Central Asia for the past twenty plus years. A more appropriate word to describe their recent view of China has been a highlight, not a shift. The IC, and the United States as a whole, are not as involved in the Middle East and

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<sup>4</sup> R. Jeffrey Smith, “China Aid on Algerian Reactor May Violate Pledges,” *Washington Post*, April 20, 1991, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/04/20/china-aid-on-algerian-reactor-may-violate-pledges/4999ec01-b2aa-46cc-bc56-b8e36f2c00cb/>.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Movroydis, “The China Challenge: Hoover fellow Elizabeth Economy and her colleagues seek to deepen our understanding of Chinese ambitions,” *Hoover Digest*, no. 2 (2021): 110+. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed March 28, 2023).

[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A661724992/AONE?u=tel\\_k\\_cedgrv&sid=googleScholar&xid=eed33b55](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A661724992/AONE?u=tel_k_cedgrv&sid=googleScholar&xid=eed33b55).

<sup>6</sup> Lamonte, “U.S. General Warns Troops that War with China is Possible in Two Years.”



Central Asia as they used to be, so they were able to recently highlight China more. Through the years, the IC slowly has turned more focus toward China, starting in 1995. This decision came from the Pentagon after intel findings showing a hostile China, the discovery of surprise scenarios from China, and war games against China where the US lost.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding our military, ideas of a hostile China and thus a needed refocus towards China can further be traced back all the way to the 1990s. However, the true switch for the US military did not happen until around 2006-2008. More war games were conducted and showed that the US would lose a war to China. Michael Pillsbury then wrote two influential papers about China's newly realized intentions and capabilities.<sup>8</sup> These war games were also what influenced the Obama administration to make the initial switch to view China more negatively than positively, marking China as a potentially dangerous enemy.<sup>9</sup>

Continuing with politics, in 2011, Democrat President Barack Obama announced the US' "Asia-pivot." This was a friendly way of saying the US will now focus more on the growing role of China and the potential threats a rising China could pose for the U.S. and its allies in the region. Then, the administration of Republican President Donald J. Trump released their National Security Strategy in 2017, which painted China quite villainously. Following the Republicans' stance of the PRC, the administration of President Joe Biden put forth an interim National Security Strategy in 2021 and a completed one in 2022. They both were equally anti-CCP as Trump's, if not more so. This shift towards China is, remarkably, one of the few issues that is truly bipartisan.

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Gertz, "China's High-Tech Military Threat," *Commentary*, April 1, 2012, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/gertz-bill/chinas-high-tech-military-threat/>. War games are simulations militaries conduct to see their strengths and weaknesses.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, (New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), 135.

Finally, the views of academics and China experts on this changing relationship are perhaps the most complicated. John J. Mearsheimer theoretically made the switch in the 1990s; however, he did not specify that China would be the US' competitor until 2014. Some, like James Mann, made the switch around 2007, even before the Obama administration. Others, like Michael Pillsbury, were heavily involved with China their entire career and simply missed the clues as to what China was doing. Now, Pillsbury is one of the most outspoken critics of China. Additionally, there is a whole school of academics that were obtaining large amounts of money for writing about China in a positive way, so their switch was slow or still has not happened.<sup>10</sup>

## Methodology

The research question that is answered in the following paper is “Why has the United States of America switched its view of China from a long term economic partner to now a global threat?” A plethora of data answered this question. The primary type of data used was qualitative data with use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were mainly official documents and reports from the U.S. and China. I mainly used these primary sources to juxtapose against their counterparts. I either compared US documents with earlier US documents to show how the US stance changed or I contrasted PRC documents with official reports and secondary sources about the reality of China. Secondary sources were used to give a broader source of information as well as support to the primary sources. Furthermore, a range of articles were used from newspapers, think tanks, and other qualified institutions.

I had a few different criteria for the data that I collected. First, they had to be credible sources and second, they had to be relevant enough regarding when they were created and the

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<sup>10</sup> James Mann. *The China Fantasy: Why Capitalism Will Not Bring Democracy to China*. (New York City: Penguin Books, 2007), 59-63.

topic that they were about. Regarding primary sources, they mainly had to be from the government of either the United States or China. For example, the study used documents from the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. National Security Strategies along with white papers from the PRC. The study also used some newspaper articles that had recorded events in China. The data from the following sources was collected and sorted into varying groups that all contributed to a better understanding as to why the United States switched its view of China. Furthermore, the United States government documents and articles provided maps and charts that contributed to a better understanding of certain issues. Thus, while some of those were quantitative, they were used in support of the qualitative evidence.

The process and analysis that I achieved with the sources was briefly mentioned before. For example, I would read a People's Republic of China document, then cross reference it with a U.S. government source or a secondary source; or I would cross reference an earlier US document with a later one. The following study can best be described as a study by juxtaposition of qualitative data to reach a conclusion regarding the recent switch of U.S. views of China. The recurring theme regarding the use of sources is cross references with how the U.S. government documents show that the U.S. switched its view of China and how statements from the PRC are not lining up with reality, which is further supported by secondary sources.

I chose this method of juxtaposing primary and secondary sources in a qualitative manner because I believed that it would be the best and most effective way to answer the research question. A purely quantitative method would not have best explained the reasoning behind the United States' switch. A qualitative study with small quantitative support was the best strategy for this paper. This approach contributes to knowledge of the subject matter, and it shows how publicly available Chinese government documents do not portray reality when compared to other

sources that corroborate this. The main limitations I ran into were valuable sources and documents are classified by the United States government and the Chinese government does not disclose everything either.

## **Why It Took the United States So Long to Switch Its View**

**“The Earth is littered with the ruins of empires that believed they were eternal.” -**

**Camille Paglia**

Many people may wonder how the United States could watch such a formidable foe like the People’s Republic of China get to where it is today without much apparent concern. This section of the paper will explain why the United States did not switch its view for so long and how the United States observed China become a rising power. This is not a part of the previous seven reasons listed why the shift took place but is instead for background information and a better understanding of how the United States got to the place it was in. There are five main reasons why this climb to power was allowed.

The first factor is that the United States was caught up in wishful thinking regarding China. James Mann, author of *The China Fantasy*, has three terms for this wishful thinking strategy: the Soothing Scenario, the Upheaval Scenario, and the Starbucks Fallacy. The Soothing Scenario’s main idea was that economic opening, development, and capitalism will bring democracy to China. It was used by both sides of the American political aisle. Writing in 2007, James Mann proclaimed:

Over the past decade, in order to win the nomination for the presidency in either of America’s two major political parties, it has become virtually obligatory to offer the American people some version of the Soothing Scenario: One must say, or at least

suggest, that economic development and trade are eventually going to bring democracy to China.<sup>11</sup>

For example, regarding China joining the international economic community, Bill Clinton said this: “By joining the W.T.O., China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products; it is agreeing to import one of democracy’s most cherished values: economic freedom. The more China liberalizes its economy, the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people.”<sup>12</sup>

However, American politicians were ignorant or in denial as to what was going on in China. Instead, they simply excused away the evidence of non-American ideals in China. For example, if something terrible happened in China that the world heard about, experts and politicians would acknowledge it and then focus on the progress China was making. An instance of this was the American response to China after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. America harshly condemned China for a while, but not for long. They soon returned to a positive outlook of China. George H. W. Bush wrote in his diary about advice from Richard Nixon regarding the Tiananmen scenario. Nixon told Bush: “‘Don’t disrupt the relationship. What’s happened has been handled badly and is deplorable, but take a look at the long haul.’ According to Bush, Nixon did not ‘think we should stop our trade [or do] something symbolic, because we must have a good relationship in the long run.’”<sup>13</sup> This is called Two Steps Forward, One Step Back, which is a sub point under the Soothing Scenario also coined by James Mann.<sup>14</sup>

The second wishful thinking strategy labeled by James Mann and employed by pro-China Americans is the Upheaval Scenario. This claims some type of disaster will come to China because the government cannot continue the political repression. Either an economic collapse or

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>12</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World*, (London: William Collins), 2020, 128.

<sup>13</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 83.

<sup>14</sup> Mann, *The China Fantasy*, 5-7.

political overthrow will take place.<sup>15</sup> However, history does not show that this disaster will take place.<sup>16</sup> The third is the Starbucks Fallacy. This refers to the claim that once Chinese people get wealthy, they will call for more democracy in China. What this ignores is that the people who have obtained wealth since 1979 are the minority of Chinese. The majority are still peasants, urban workers, and migrants.<sup>17</sup> The middle class will not vote to change the system they got wealthy off of. Thus, they are not going to try and change the government's non democratic policies. As Mann states it, "The new middle class in Chinese cities is coming to favor the status quo nearly as much as does the Communist Party itself."<sup>18</sup> Or as the former prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew said, "If you believe that there is going to be a revolution of some sort in China for democracy you are wrong.... The Chinese people want a revived China."<sup>19</sup>

Moving on from Mann's wishful thinking strategies, the second reason why it took the United States so long to switch their view of China was the appearance of change. China appeared to be changing during the 1990s as elections began to take place in the small local villages. This implied to the world that China was moving toward a democratic future. However, these elections did not move past the local level.<sup>20</sup> Especially after the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the Chinese Communist Party was not going to let the people have a meaningful say in the government. Tiananmen Square was the end of the dream that American politicians and academics had about China.<sup>21</sup> They just did not realize it yet.

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<sup>15</sup> Mann, *The China Fantasy*, 7-10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> Graham Allison, Robert D. Blackwill, and Ali Wyne, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States, and the World*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), xxvii, in Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 230.

<sup>20</sup> Mann, *The China Fantasy*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 84-85.

The third reason why the United States only slowly changed their view of China was because they had many false assumptions and misunderstandings about China. The US thought China had a weak, unstable economy and strengthening the economy would help both China and the US. Because of this, the US and many states in the international community helped China leave its status of an impoverished state. Yet, China is now challenging the US because from the mid-1990's to the mid-2010's China's economy more than doubled.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the average American citizen certainly does not know much about contemporary China and not much about China's history. Many policymakers and academics in the late 20th century knew more than the average citizen but they were exceedingly hopeful and again, misunderstood China. They thought China wanted to be democratic, like the US and other democracies. Little did the United States know, Chinese statecraft emphasizes deception.<sup>23</sup>

Adding to the false assumptions and misunderstandings about China, critics of China were looked down upon. People like Michael Pillsbury, John J. Mearsheimer, James Mann, and Elbridge Colby, American hawks some might say, were looked down upon by politicians and other academics until recently. The claim was their views of China were dangerous and unneeded. However, everything they argued for, has become true.

US leaders and academics also thought China's war hawks were weak in regards to their influence on their government. Not only has this been proven false, but the Chinese hawks are also out to avenge the century of humiliation, which took place from 1839-1949 in China, and replace the US as the global superpower. Not only are the hawks super influential in the CCP, but the doves are also looked down upon. The government sponsored newspaper, the *Global*

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<sup>22</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 10-12.

*Times*, said the doves are “the cancer cells that will lead to the demise of China.”<sup>24</sup> This empowerment of the Chinese hawks especially came after the Tiananmen Square Massacre when Deng Xiaoping believed the CCP rhetoric that America was to blame for the protest.<sup>25</sup>

Years after the United States opened to China, Americans began to realize this was their plan all along. When Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger began to devise a plan to create relations with China, they did not know what they were meddling with. Michael Pillsbury highlights this dilemma well. Furthermore, as McMaster states, “being successful in a competition requires knowing and understanding both one’s competitors and oneself.” The more the US began to learn about China the more the view shifted. Chinese Communist Party war hawks look back at their rich history of statecraft to learn lessons to apply to today. The Chinese hawks study a particular time in Chinese history called the Spring Autumn and Warring States periods (771 BC-221 BC). They look at writings of classic Chinese thought from around this time period. This time period was an era of immense and complicated power struggle, deception, and open war between the Chinese leaders. Each leader was trying to be the *ba*, which translates to something similar to hegemon in English. Learning lessons from the Warring States period rose in trend in the 1990s. Every few years until at least 2015, CCP generals host a conference to discuss how they can apply Sunzi’s *The Art of War* to real life scenarios.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, there is now evidence that shows Mao Zedong wanted to create relations with the United States before Nixon did. This was because he realized that the Soviet Union could no longer help him. He wanted to have the US help China rise to become the new hegemon. All these ideas were not known to us in the past. Yet, they were always in the minds of the Chinese.<sup>27</sup> Being patient and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 12-14.

<sup>25</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 84-85.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 31-34.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 54-60.



playing the long game has been vital to Chinese strategy since ancient times. Americans have dates they look at like 1776, Chinese have eras and dynasties. A hundred years to them is nothing. They are patient and are completely fine playing the waiting game.

Yet, there is also another reason the United States took decades to realize their view of China was wrong. This reason has been proposed by H.R. McMaster and is the fourth reason. In his book, he paints a convincing picture as to why the United States watched China become the powerhouse they are today and not try to slow their rise. He recalls how in 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, which kickstarted the collapse of the US' largest rival since 1945. Immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the American military became involved in Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait. The result of that war was a quick and decisive American victory. After the Cold War and Desert Storm, US leaders were overconfident regarding their military capabilities. They had forgotten they had to compete to keep their freedom, security, and prosperity.<sup>28</sup> During the 1990's, the United States was truly the only superpower. No one challenged them because no one *could* challenge them. However, "America's stature as the only superpower encouraged narcissism, a preoccupation with self, and an associated neglect of the influence that others have over the future course of events. Americans began to define the world only in relation to their own aspirations and desires."<sup>29</sup> This caused three major flawed assumptions about the post-Cold War era. First, that "ideological competition was finished." Second, that "great power competition was passé." And third, that "military competition was over."<sup>30</sup>

Instead of bringing themselves back to reality, America went the opposite direction through shattering moments of crisis. Starting in 2000, American confidence began to decline

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<sup>28</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

because of three main events: The attacks on 9/11, the unexpectedly long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>31</sup> Thus, a process of self-pity and international apologies began.<sup>32</sup> With the Obama administration, this led to a self-chastisement and public acknowledgement of what he thought was America's past failures. This administration agreed with the new rhetoric that Western capitalist imperialism was the main causation of the world's troubles.<sup>33</sup> The combination of the US believing they did not have to compete to be the superpower along with the later self-criticism created the idea of strategic narcissism. This is defined as "the tendency to view the world only in relation to the United States and to assume that the future course of events depends primarily on U.S. decisions or plans."<sup>34</sup> Whatever the Obama administration's goals were, they made the United States look weak on the international stage. They began to stop competing while also apologizing for America's past. That makes for a self-destructive combination, which is exactly what happened.

As time has gone on, US academics and government officials realized how wrong they had been about China. Pillsbury and his coworkers assumed that the Chinese thought the way Americans did. Chinese aggression did not fit with their view of China and their Chinese contacts made sure to emphasize that their actions were not a part of some overall plan to replace the US as the hegemonic power. They assumed that China's grand plan had no real urgency.<sup>35</sup> Pillsbury took a trip in the fall of 2013 to Beijing and realized how wrong many China watchers and policy makers in the US had been. He had mistakenly thought the strategy from China's leaders of "bide our time, keep a low profile" meant they were not going to try to be a global

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Max Fisher, "Obama, Acknowledging U.S. Misdeeds Abroad, Quietly Reframes American Power," *New York Times*, September 7, 2016.

[https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx#/?&\\_suid=167626393688305094135059539919](https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx#/?&_suid=167626393688305094135059539919).

<sup>33</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 208-209.

power until 2049.<sup>36</sup> Some Chinese leaders have stated that China is ahead of schedule by ten or maybe even 20 years.<sup>37</sup> As a result in 2014, US government workers told Congress there were new habits of aggressiveness from China.<sup>38</sup> Now that the reason the United States took so long to switch their view has been explained, it is time to turn to the first reason why the switch has occurred: the United States was *able* to make the switch.

### **The Capacity to Make the Switch**

**“He who exercises no forethought but makes light of his opponents is sure to be captured by them.” -Sunzi**

In this section, I hypothesize about the ability of the US to shift its policy toward China because of a simple shift in capacity – moving away from focusing on other regions of the world and other national security concerns. This reason may seem simple, almost insignificant. While the former is certainly true, the latter is not. The United States’ capacity to switch has four parts which then will lead to the explanation of the implications of said parts.

The first cog in the wheel of the US’ switch is President Obama’s declaration that the United States military would leave Iraq by 2011. This promise was delivered upon.<sup>39</sup> This allowed the United States to begin to focus more on the rising threat of the People’s Republic of China. Massive amounts of attention were previously focused on Iraq; however, this attention could now be pivoted to the Indo-Pacific. Unfortunately, for the United States, their absence created a power vacuum in the Middle East. This gave rise to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 210-211.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>39</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “Timeline: The Iraq War,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war>.

and the United States had to return for a relatively short time to defeat them, which slowed the pivot to Asia.

Secondly, President Obama made another declaration: the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. President Obama said that July of 2011 would be the start of a decrease of American troop presence. Over the next decade, American troops began to overall decrease. Finally, on February 29, 2020, after many complications, the United States and the Taliban signed an agreement. November of 2020 saw the United States announce a troop withdrawal, and finally on August 30, 2021, the last United States service member left Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> The ending of the withdrawal was heavily criticized. However, there was a silver lining: the United States had completely left Iraq and Afghanistan and could truly focus on the People's Republic of China and other threats to national and international security.

As a result, the United States refocused and switched its attention to The People's Republic of China and away from the Middle East and Central Asia. This important reason caused the United States to simply have the ability to switch to the Indo-Pacific. In 2011, the United States went from creating statements that said they welcomed a "strong, prosperous, and successful China" that aligns with global standards and values and strengthens security and peace in the East Asia sphere and around the world to a different position a decade later.<sup>41</sup> In 2021 the United States stated that the PRC was their "pacing challenge" and that "the PRC has long viewed the United States as a competitor and has characterized its view of strategic competition in terms of a rivalry among powerful nation states, as well as a clash of opposing

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<sup>40</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: The U.S. War in Afghanistan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, Accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan>.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011), I, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2011\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2011_CMPR_Final.pdf). Accessed January 29, 2023.

systems.”<sup>42</sup> In addition to increased U.S. capacity to focus mainly on China and the Indo-Pacific after the end of the Middle East wars, a realist approach to foreign policy and national security is another influential factor.

## Realism

**“There cannot be two suns in the sky, nor two emperors on the earth.” -Confucius**

An important event that shows the American readoption of realism happened on October 28, 2008. A war game was taking place amongst United States of America military leaders. The game was China’s military against the US military. This was after multiple years of similar games. The result was China defeating the US in a conflict. Previous games had also predicted this. However, it was this game in 2008 that convinced the US military to readopt realism in regards to China. As a result, the US military leaders said it was necessary to develop American forces and capabilities to be able to defeat China.<sup>43</sup> While this is just one event, it is indicative of the return of realism after two decades of a different approach focusing on interdependence and international organizations.

Realism has affected the world in many ways throughout the course of history. It is affecting it right now with NATO’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Similarly, it also contributed to the United States’ shift toward the People’s Republic of China. Interestingly, China is also acting as realism would predict. The two states are reacting to each other and increasing their power capabilities. This section argues that the United States believes that

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<sup>42</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), I, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>. Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Gertz, “China’s High-Tech Military Threat.”

survival and sovereignty are the most important parts of a state and so does China. China began to act hostile towards the United States and the world, so the United States responded. This back-and-forth reactionary process is called the balance of power.

Before discussing the redevelopment of realism in the United States, it is important to define realism and explain why the theory itself is valuable and necessary. Realism can be defined by three main ideas. First, “states are the principal actors in world politics.” Second, actions taken by the world’s leading powers are due to external events, not internal values. Third, the calculating power is what governs states’ thinking, and that all states compete for power against each other.<sup>44</sup> Hans Morgenthau, an American-German bastion of realist thought who was active in the mid-20th century, argued that human nature realism, or classical realism, shows how states will act. This form of thought says that human beings have a desire to gain power ingrained into them from birth as they are the ones leading states. Consequently, states always seek out ways to gain power over other states.<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Waltz, another legend in the realist form of thought, argues for a slightly different theory called defensive realism. He says that states first and foremost try to simply survive. They wish to have security. He also states that the world is anarchic, and states will compete against each other to be a great power because that would ensure the best chances for survival.<sup>46</sup>

John J. Mearsheimer, a contemporary realist scholar argues that the most accurate way states act is what he calls offensive realism. This theory says that states, specifically great powers, are constantly trying to seek ways to gain power over hostile states. Their end goal is to be the hegemon. Mearsheimer claims there are five assumptions about states. First, the

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<sup>44</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014, 17-18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 19.

international system is anarchic. Second, great powers have offensive military capabilities. Third, states will never absolutely know the intentions of other states. Fourth, survival is the first and most important goal of states. Fifth, great powers are rational actors.<sup>47</sup>

There is much criticism of theory. Many people believe that using theory, any type of theory, is worthless because it is based on ideas that have no real-world evidence. The problem when academics use theory is that they often use it to describe the past. Admittedly, this is a wrong usage of theory. It is valuable, necessary, and important to use theory, so long as it is used correctly. Theory must be used for future events as the world has little guaranteed facts about the future, and using theories can predict what is likely to happen. Or, as Thomas Hobbes said it, “The present only has a being in nature; things past have a being in the memory only, but things to come have no being at all.”<sup>48</sup> Because of this, there are simply few other options to argue with and have discussions about the future that are not theoretical.<sup>49</sup>

In regards to the relationship between realism and the United States, it was in heavy use during the Cold War. However, after the Soviet Union fell and the United States scanned the horizon for competitors and found none, realism began to fall out of favor. With realism falling out of favor, great power competition and actively ensuring one’s status as a global hegemon began to be unpopular too. Also, as mentioned previously, after the United States saw their greatest adversary since World War II crumble into history with the fall of the Soviet Union, they also unconditionally won against Iraq in 1991. The United States was the clear and obvious global hegemon in the 1990’s. So, they began to stop competing.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 29-31.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1985), 97 in John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 361.

<sup>49</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 360-362.

<sup>50</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 4-11.

Over-optimism, strategic narcissism, and wishful thinking caused American leaders to be blind to the reality of the world. During this time and due to liberalism becoming infused in American international relations policy, they began to help China. They could have hampered its rise; however, they guided it to become a peer competitor. American policy makers were persuaded that trading with China and intertwining their economies, a key part of liberal institutionalist theory, would be the ideal way to keep China from threatening the US hegemony. The effort to work with China through trade and investment was a potent and truly bipartisan effort. Now, however, as most people know, what many people saw as a sleeping authoritarian dragon has appeared from underneath the mountain that is an enemy of the Americans.<sup>51</sup> Mearsheimer argues that engagement with China failed and it “may have been the worst strategic blunder any state has made in recent history: there is no comparable example of a great power actively fostering the rise of a peer competitor. And it is now too late to do much about it.”<sup>52</sup> While this is just one scholar's opinion of China, it is beginning to be broadly accepted.

Unfortunately for the United States, great power competition is back. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, then later invaded the rest of Ukraine. They intervened in Syria, and continually tried to politically undermine the US and its western allies. China stopped hiding the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) capabilities, started building artificial islands in the South China Sea, took greater and stricter control of their people, and extended its diplomatic, economic, and military influence internationally. Never seen before challenges from China also appeared in realms like space, cyberspace, cyber-enabled information warfare, and emerging

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<sup>51</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The Inevitable Rivalry,” *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 6 (November 2021): 48–58, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=153083053&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 48–58.



disruptive technologies.<sup>53</sup> Now, the US intelligence community has deemed great power competition as a threat to them. Now they realize that in order to survive, as that is all states' first priority, they had to act like a realist state. In response to China's increasingly belligerent behaviors, the United States has awoken from liberalism and has shifted more toward realism. This started with Obama's Asia-pivot. His administration rhetorically switched. They created the launch pad; however, they did not launch. In Mearsheimer's view, the Obama administration still had a policy of engagement.<sup>54</sup> Besides creating the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was an economic deal that would divert Asian states away from being economically dependent on China,<sup>55</sup> and sending 2,500 Marines to Australia, the Obama administration mainly continued to engage with China rather than contain China or compete with China.<sup>56</sup>

If the Obama administration created the launch pad, the Trump Administration actually launched the realism rocket, showing the bipartisan view of China. However, this bipartisan view was different from the last. The United States' leaders shifted back to realism together, in the same way they shifted to liberalism after the Cold War together. This was brought forward and catalyzed in the Trump administration primarily by H.R. McMaster, who was his national security advisor, and Michael Pillsbury along with others. When McMaster and Trump first met, they discussed a new strategy regarding China called competitive engagement. They also talked about gaining a new understanding of China and its goals on the global stage.<sup>57</sup> McMaster said, "Being successful in a competition requires knowing and understanding both one's competitors

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<sup>53</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 17-18.

<sup>54</sup> Mearsheimer, "The Inevitable Rivalry," 48-58.

<sup>55</sup> White House, "The Trans-Pacific Partnership." National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed April 6, 2023. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/economy/trade#:~:text=The%20TPP%20is%20a%20trade,to%20benefit%20America%27s%20middle%20class>.

<sup>56</sup> Mearsheimer, "The Inevitable Rivalry," 48-58.

<sup>57</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 16.

and oneself.”<sup>58</sup> This new and more thorough understanding of China will be discussed in a later section.

What the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, more so the latter two than the former, began to act like was that survival needed to be the first priority of America because it was the first priority for China. This is not a shocking shift because it is basic realism behavior: if a state wants to maintain hegemonic power, they must have survival as their first priority. The United States wanted to keep control over the international order it had created since the ending of World War II, as all states wish to maintain the order they create.<sup>59</sup> In order to do this, they had to shift their view of China. If a state wants to be the hegemon or keep their hegemonic status then “the inescapable outcome is competition and conflict. Such is the tragedy of great-power politics.”<sup>60</sup> This was a major shift from the hopeful belief about China. The US government had been acting in the realist fashion but toward the Middle East, not China. This can best be seen from George W. Bush’s administration. Obama’s administration saw the dragon preparing for flight. This should not have been a surprise to anyone because China is trying to gain hegemony, similar to how the United States did. The United States and China are both acting now how realism would predict. America and China view the world in zero sum terms and decipher what would be the best actions for them to achieve their power interests.<sup>61</sup> The United States switched its view of China because it realized it was going to have to be selfish in regards to the international community. States that are in a self-help world don’t care about helping others in the international community as “it pays to be selfish in a self-help world.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>59</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 30-32.

<sup>60</sup> Mearsheimer, “The Inevitable Rivalry,” 48–58.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid 48–58.

<sup>62</sup> Mearsheimer, “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,” 33-36.

The United States switched because they realized they were going to have to stop China's rise or else their golden throne would be taken by the dragon. Furthermore, China was becoming more aggressive, which was smart considering that from 1815 to 1990 the state that went on the offensive won 60% of the time. The best defense is a good offense and the United States began to see that China was rising as a threat, so they shifted their view of China. However, for China, it is all about calculation and knowing when to attack and when not to. They will refer back to examples like Adolf Hitler's mistake when he invaded the Soviet Union for that.<sup>63</sup> China *will* try and defeat the United States, at least in the Indo-Pacific region, because that is what realism says.

Prior to 2009, it was fairly easy for the People's Republic of China to challenge the United States. However, since the United States has shifted their view, they will do what they have always done regarding a rising power in a distant land: stop them, as power transition predicts. One simply just has to look at history and follow the trend. Wilhelmine Germany began their rise in 1890 and fell in 1918. Imperial Japan began their rise in 1937 and fell in 1945. Nazi Germany rose in 1933 and fell in 1945. The Soviet Union rose in 1945 and fell in 1990. In all four of these scenarios, the United States acted in a realist way to defeat a rising power in a far off land. It is using the same tactics with China.<sup>64</sup>

The United States realizes that their state can only be secure if the Indo-Pacific is too, and this was shown by the Second World War.<sup>65</sup> The best case scenario for the United States would have been to buck-pass to states to contain China. Buck-passing is when a state gives responsibilities to another state so they do not have to complete a task. Unfortunately for the US, those states are not strong enough to do that. Thus, the United States began to take the lead with

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 37-40.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 365-368.

<sup>65</sup> White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, February 2022), 4. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

new alliances like they do in NATO and use old alliances for threats in the Indo-Pacific. To combat China's rise with a realist perspective, the United States has stated it will "modernize [their] long-standing alliances, strengthen emerging partnerships, and invest in regional organizations."<sup>66</sup> Five Eyes, an intelligence alliance which is made up of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom, has been used to combat China. The Quad, a security dialogue, was reestablished in 2017, with the United States, Australia, India, and Japan being the current members. A great example of US-European alliances being played out in the real world is when a carrier strike group went through the South China Sea in the summer of 2021.<sup>67</sup> The purpose of this was to carry out training missions with allies in the area.<sup>68</sup> However, one can reasonably assume that it was also a way for the US and its allies to let China know that the South China Sea is not up for Chinese conquest. The US has carried out similar naval missions in the past that promote freedom of navigation.

AUKUS, a security alliance between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia was created in 2021 to combat China's rise. Furthermore, the United States has stated that they are "renewing in innovative ways" the allies that are closest to them. They are strengthening their five regional treaty alliances with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. The United States also is trying to create strong relationships with "leading" states in the area like "India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands." They also desire for states in the region to fortify their alliances with each other, specifically Japan and the Republic of Korea.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Bill Hayton, "The Carrier Strike Group in the South China Sea," *The Council on Geostrategy* No. GPE03 (July 27, 2021): 1, <https://www.geostrategy.org/research/the-carrier-strike-group-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>69</sup> White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 9.

The United States has additionally increased its defense interactions with India directly. In 2008, the defense trade between the two states was close to zero, and in 2020, it was over \$20 billion. In 2016 the United States made India a Major Defense Partner, and in 2018, raised them to a Strategic Trade Authorization tier 1 status. Also in 2018, the Bay of Bengal Initiative was created and provided over \$145 million in Foreign Military Financing for maritime capacity building in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives to help stop hostile actions in the Bay of Bengal. Since 2003, India has received \$1 billion of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding; this creates interoperability between the US and Indian militaries. India has also participated in US security exercises like the Tiger Triumph (US and India), Rim of the Pacific, and Malabar (US, India, and Japan).<sup>70</sup> In response, China puts pressure on those states by using economic and diplomatic practices; they also have interfered in the domestic politics of some US allies to alter their politics. This is a switch in attitude from China;<sup>71</sup> they used to be less hostile in regards to the US presence in the Indo-Pacific.

These are all examples of how the United States believes they cannot afford to buck-pass and believes they must lead the way in the Indo-Pacific. The only example of buck-passing is them promoting and encouraging a “strong and independent” Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>72</sup> Other than that, the United States has been acting like an authentic realist state in regards to its relationship with other states in the Indo-Pacific.

As mentioned above at the beginning of this section, the United States has reacted how realism would predict in response to actions taken by China. The actions taken by China can also

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<sup>70</sup> Department of State, *U.S. Security Cooperation with India* (Washington, DC: Department of State, January 20, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>71</sup> Evan S. Medeiros, “The Changing Fundamentals of US-China Relations,” *The Washington Quarterly* 42:3, (October 11, 2019): p. 96, DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2019.1666355.

<sup>72</sup> White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 4.

be categorized as realist. China views US actions against them as a part of a larger campaign to prevent China's rise and sabotage CCP rule. They will continue to use increased numbers of air, naval, and maritime law enforcement to intimidate rivals in their region and show that they have power in disputed areas; this will take place in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, one of the goals of the PLA is to stop the Taiwan independence movement.<sup>74</sup> This is not a new goal,<sup>75</sup> however, they increasingly have the capabilities to complete what they claim is unification unlike in previous years. Regarding the US' unfavorable rhetoric toward Chinese reunification, they claim the US is trapped in a Cold War mindset and that some in the US insist on making China look like a major strategic opponent and long-term threat.<sup>76</sup> This previous point about Taiwan will be covered further when nationalism is discussed. They claim the US has taken on defense and national security strategies that only concern China. This has caused intense competition to rise among the main states. They also say the US has increased their defense spending and pushed for further capacity in nuclear, space, cyber, and missile defense. Furthermore, they claim the US has hurt global strategic stability.<sup>77</sup> This blame on the United States is the PRC trying to delegitimize the US' switch back to realism.

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<sup>73</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* (McLean, VA: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 7, 2022), p. 6-7, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2022-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

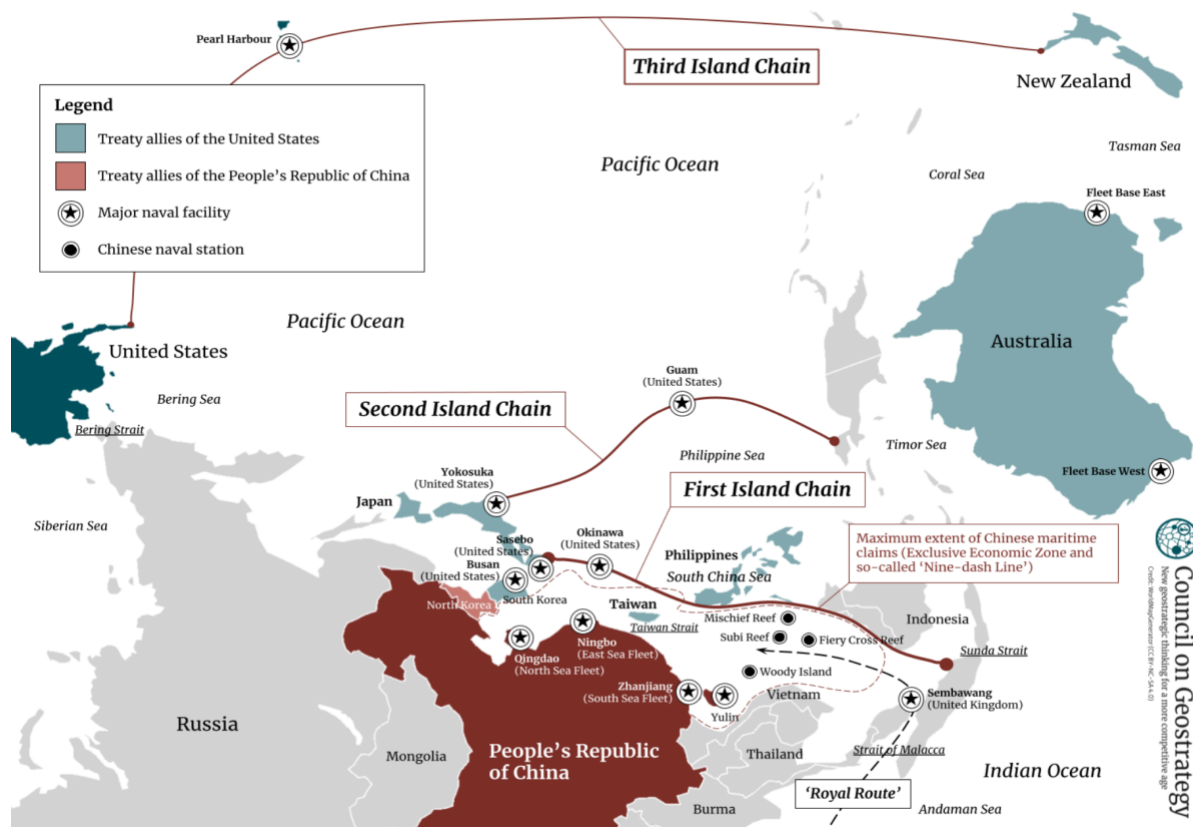
<sup>74</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era* (Beijing: The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, July 2019), [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html), Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office & Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China* (Beijing: Taiwan Affairs Office & Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, August 1993), <http://www.china.org.cn/english/taiwan/7953.htm>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office & Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era*, (Beijing, Taiwan Affairs Office & Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, August 10, 2022), [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202208/10/content\\_WS62f34f46c6d02e533532f0ac.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202208/10/content_WS62f34f46c6d02e533532f0ac.html).

<sup>77</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, (Beijing: The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, July 2019), [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html), Accessed January 29, 2023.

It is necessary to define and explain some of these actions that the PRC has taken. It is also necessary to explain why China feels like they should have to act in this way. One of the best ways to understand China's realist actions is to view the world around them from their perspective. That is exactly what this map does:<sup>78</sup>



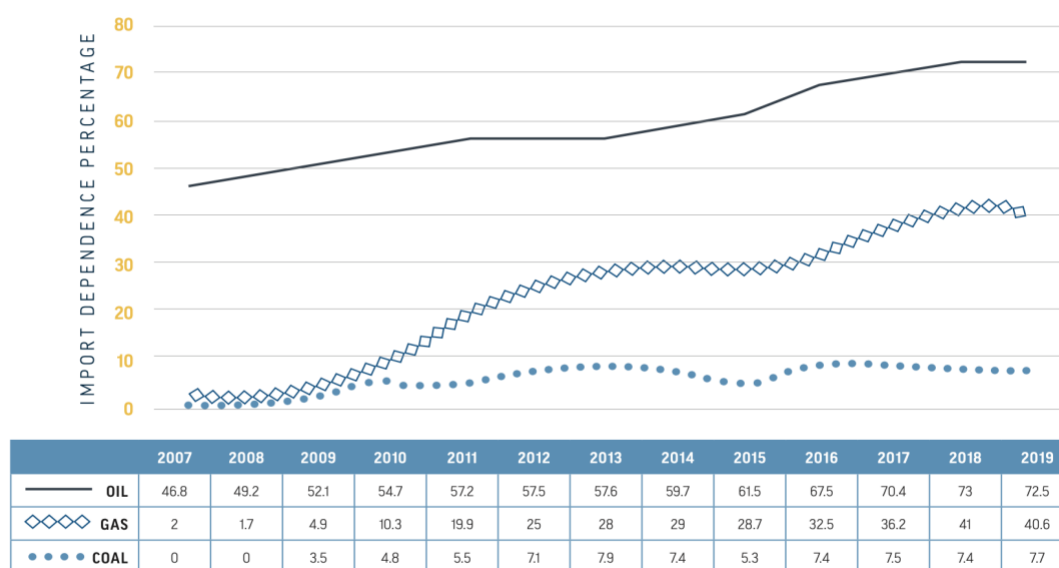
This map shows what CCP and PLA members see when they stand on their Pacific coast. They see multiple hostile naval bases along with states that have alliances with the US. They see themselves as getting encircled by their enemy. Avoiding encirclement is one of the most important practices according to ancient Chinese strategy, something the Chinese still study today.<sup>79</sup> China takes note of US “rebalancing” strategies and that they have increased its military presence and

<sup>78</sup> Map from Kevin Rowlands and Edward Hampshire, “The Chinese Navy: From Minnow to Shark,” *Council on Geostategy* No. GPE12. (December 2022), p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 20.

alliances in the region.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the PRC is dependent on maritime routes for transporting imports and exports. It ranks second in oil consumption globally and third in natural gas consumption. Therefore, securing maritime routes and not being surrounded by hostile nations is highly important to them. In response, they have increased their naval capabilities.<sup>81</sup> The following chart also shows how from 2007 to 2019, they have only become more dependent on oil, gas, and coal importations:<sup>82</sup>

**FIGURE 3**  
**CHINA'S OIL, GAS, AND COAL IMPORT DEPENDENCY, 2007-2019**



Note: Figure illustrates the percentage of China's total oil, gas, and coal consumption from imported sources.  
Source: International Energy Agency, "Oil, Gas, and Coal Import Dependency in China, 2007-2019."

These actions to secure these maritime routes support realist doctrine because realism states that survival is the number one priority to states. The US and their allies have seen this as

<sup>80</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, (Beijing, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015), [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/05/27/content\\_281475115610833.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm), Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>81</sup> Rowlands and Hampshire, "The Chinese Navy: From Minnow to Shark," 2.

<sup>82</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Executive Summary and Recommendations of U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, November 2022, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022_Executive_Summary.pdf), 18.



unnecessary and hostile and in response have increased their capabilities too; this is an example of power balancing.

### **People’s Liberation Army Expansion**

Due to these concerns about maritime routes and power balancing, China has expanded their military capabilities to help defend its sovereignty and security in the spirit of realism. For clarity, the PRC calls their entire military their army. The People's Liberation Army should be read as “People’s Liberation Military,” then the branch is clarified immediately after.

Starting with the PLA Navy (PLAN), its development can be categorized into four phases. Phases 1 and 2 are not necessary to explain for this paper’s purpose. Phase 3 was from about 2000 to about 2020, in which China moved to distant sea defense to use their navy past the Second Island Chain (shown in the map above) and sometimes even beyond. Furthermore, Phase 3 was the time when China began using anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) tactics and coercive diplomacy over the “nine-dash line.” They also claimed the Senkaku Islands (which the US government gave back to Japan in 1971<sup>83</sup> and what the Chinese would call the Diaoyu Islands) and began “the reclamation, occupation and construction of artificial islands on low tide elevations.” Additionally, they advanced intimidation tactics toward the American Navy and their allies’ navies. Continually, they sent ships to the Baltic Sea in 2017 to have joint practices with the Russian Navy. This phase was a time when the PLAN was learning how to be a global navy. Significantly, in 2019, it stopped being a piece of the army, and its leaders began to report directly to the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the CCP.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Florian Schneider, “Reconceptualising World Order: Chinese Political Thought and Its Challenge to International Relations Theory,” *Review of International Order* 40, No. 4 (October 2014): p. 695, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24564316.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9bcb2447eab92add299537424b0a9806&ab\\_segments=0%2FSYC-6646\\_phrase\\_search%2Fltr&origin=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24564316.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9bcb2447eab92add299537424b0a9806&ab_segments=0%2FSYC-6646_phrase_search%2Fltr&origin=&acceptTC=1), Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Rowlands and Hampshire, “The Chinese Navy: From Minnow to Shark,” 5-6.

Phase 4 started in 2020 and is ongoing. Their vision is to create a blue-water navy that has ballistic submarines and aircraft carriers. It wishes to be a regional naval hegemon and challenge the United States. To do this, the PLAN has constructed a naval base in Djibouti in 2017 with two more facilities being planned for Cambodia and Equatorial Guinea, giving them a naval base in the Atlantic. From an outsiders' perspective, this rapid development of a near blue-water navy may come as a shock. However, it has been in development for about forty years. Furthermore, the PLAN is not the only maritime military organization in China. They have a coast guard, maritime militia, and merchant marine which can be used for military means during appropriate times, like many other states. They have taken a whole "sea power of the state" approach to ensure its survival. This is a note taken from Sergey Gorshkov, who was an Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union, who created this idea.<sup>85</sup> This increase in naval power is China's attempts to balance the power and help them gain an advantage over the United States.

Furthermore, China has made efforts to depend less on foreign technology. In March of last year, the PRC stated that its defense spending would increase by 7.1% in 2022. Experts predict that the Chinese economic growth will slow which in turn would cause defense spending to decrease. This may be true eventually, but it has not happened yet. Furthermore, since 2018, the PLAN has seen an increase in personnel. Also, the Chinese Coast Guard have doubled their number of ships in the past decade. China intends to focus on the PLAN going forward with their military strategy. The PLAN's modernization objectives can be placed into three different groups: homeland defense, territorial claims, and economic prosperity. Regarding economic prosperity, China is extremely vulnerable to a maritime blockade because they are surrounded by hostile nations and US naval presence. They have responded as realism would predict: increasing

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 6.

their naval capabilities and challenging a US led world order. The CCP knows that their power and control over China depends on economic prosperity. Their economy is threatened by their immense dependence on maritime trade.<sup>86</sup> Directing their attention to the South China Sea to ensure economic security makes sense because almost 40% of the world's trade by sea crosses these waters, and nine out of the ten busiest container ports in the entire world are in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>87</sup> In closing, in order for the CCP to survive, it has increased China's naval capabilities, just like theory says it would.

Moving away from just the PLAN, China has increased its military in other areas too. China has made it obvious that this is important to them for competing with the United States. The United States Department of Defense (DOD) in 2011 stated that they welcomed a “strong, prosperous, and successful China.”<sup>88</sup> Yet, in the same document, the US DOD noted that in December of 2010, PRC Defense Minister Liang Guanglie said that, “making the country prosperous and making the armed forces strong are two major cornerstones for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>89</sup> This US statement shows that liberalism was still infused in American rhetoric around that time.

In juxtaposition, the 2021 report on China from the DOD said that China has viewed the US as a competitor and rival for a while, and the competition between the two nations is two opposing systems clashing. The DOD continued by saying that China wishes to remake the international order to make it more favorable toward authoritarian regimes and its national goals.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 7-12.

<sup>87</sup> Anup Phayal, Aaron Gold, and Brandon Prins, “Interstate Hostility and Maritime Crime: Evidence from South East Asia,” *Marine Policy* 143, 105134 (September 2022), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105134>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>88</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011), [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2011\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2011_CMPR_Final.pdf), Accessed January 29, 2023, I.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 9.

The wish is to achieve the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>90</sup> They highlight the same wording about China’s desires to remake their state to where it once was, except in the 2021 document it is in a much more negative tone. The US now acknowledges that China hopes to achieve “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” by 2049 and surpass them in regards to power, get rid of US partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, and create an international order more favorable to their regime and interests.<sup>91</sup> According to the US, the PRC has evolved their military so that, according to them, they can “fight and win wars” against a “strong enemy.” That “strong enemy” most likely means the United States. They are also evolving so that they can make Taiwan and other states do what they want in territorial disputes.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, according to a PRC Defense Ministry spokesperson, China reached its goal of mechanization in 2020 which means a broad modernization of weapons and equipment that can be networked with different systems.<sup>93</sup> Put plainly, “Chinese military modernization is directed at constraining US power projection in the Western Pacific, and in particular that China has made great strides in eroding traditional US military advantages in Asia.”<sup>94</sup>

Even more recently, the DOD has stated that the PRC’s strategy shows that they are trying to concert all parts of its national power to place the PRC in a “leading position.” They have targeted 2027 as the goal for the PLA to be integrated with mechanization, informatization, and “intelligentization”; if this happens, they could be a much more credible military to take Taiwan.<sup>95</sup> Specifically, the PLA Army has participated in joint exercises with the Russian Army

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<sup>90</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), I, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, III.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, V.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, VI.

<sup>94</sup> Medeiros, “The Changing Fundamentals of US-China Relations,” p. 96.

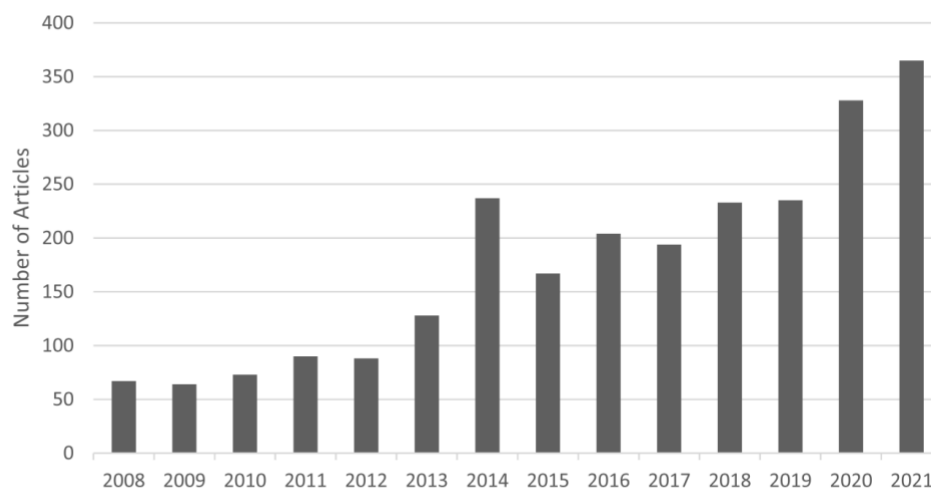
<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, I.

in the PRC for the first time. Returning to the PLAN, by number of vessels, they are now the largest navy in the world. The PLAN Aviation and PLA Air Force combined make up the largest aviation force in the area and third largest in the world. The PLA Air Force is quickly catching up with Western air forces. The PLA Rocket Force is furthering its long-term plans for modernization, helping its “strategic deterrence capabilities.” In 2021, they launched more ballistic missiles for testing and training than the rest of the world combined, besides ballistic missiles used in places where there is conflict. Regarding space, the PLA sees space superiority and being able to control information in space as a priority. Continually, they see being able to stop their enemies from accessing their space-based information and communication capabilities as highly important when it comes to managing an informatized modern force. Because of these reasons, they continue to invest in their space-based capabilities.<sup>96</sup> These rapid increases have caused the United States to realize they needed to revert back to realism to ensure their global hegemony. The following charts are helpful to understand the PLA increase and why the United States began to realize the threat that they were. The first one shows how the *PLA Daily* refers to a “Strong Enemy” (which is most likely in reference to the United States, as previously noted):<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2022), VI-VII, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>97</sup> Joel Wuthnow and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Military Strategy for a ‘New Era’: Some change, More Continuity, and Tantalizing Hints,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, March 1, 2022, 19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2043850>.



**Figure 4.** References to 'Strong Enemy' in *PLA Daily*, 2008–2021.

The second<sup>98</sup> and third<sup>99</sup> ones show the increase of the PLA rocket/missile force from 2011 to 2021, respectively:

<i>China's Missile Force</i>			
<i>System</i>	<i>Missiles</i>	<i>Launchers</i>	<i>Estimated Range</i>
ICBM	50-75	50-75	5,400-13,000+ km
IRBM	5-20	5-20	3,000+ km
MRBM	75-100	75-100	1,750+ km
SRBM	1,000-1,200	200-250	300-600 km
GLCM	200-500	40-55	1,500+ km

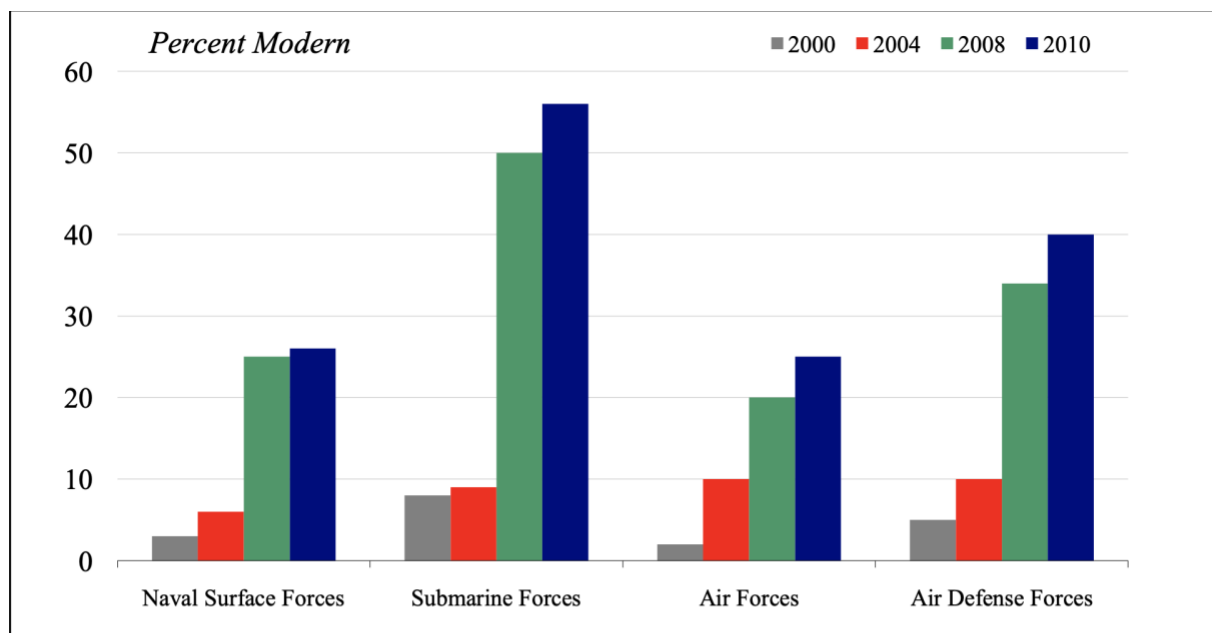
<sup>98</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011), 78, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2011\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2011_CMPR_Final.pdf), Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>99</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), 163, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

## China's Rocket Force

<i>System</i>	Launchers	Missiles	Estimated Range
<i>ICBM</i>	100	150	>5,500km
<i>IRBM</i>	200	300	3,000-5,500km
<i>MRBM</i>	250	600	1,000-3,000km
<i>SRBM</i>	250	1000	300-1,000km
<i>GLCM</i>	100	300	>1,500km

The fourth one shows the PLA modernizations by four of the branches from 2000 to 2010.<sup>100</sup> It shows that those four branches have all increased over the years.

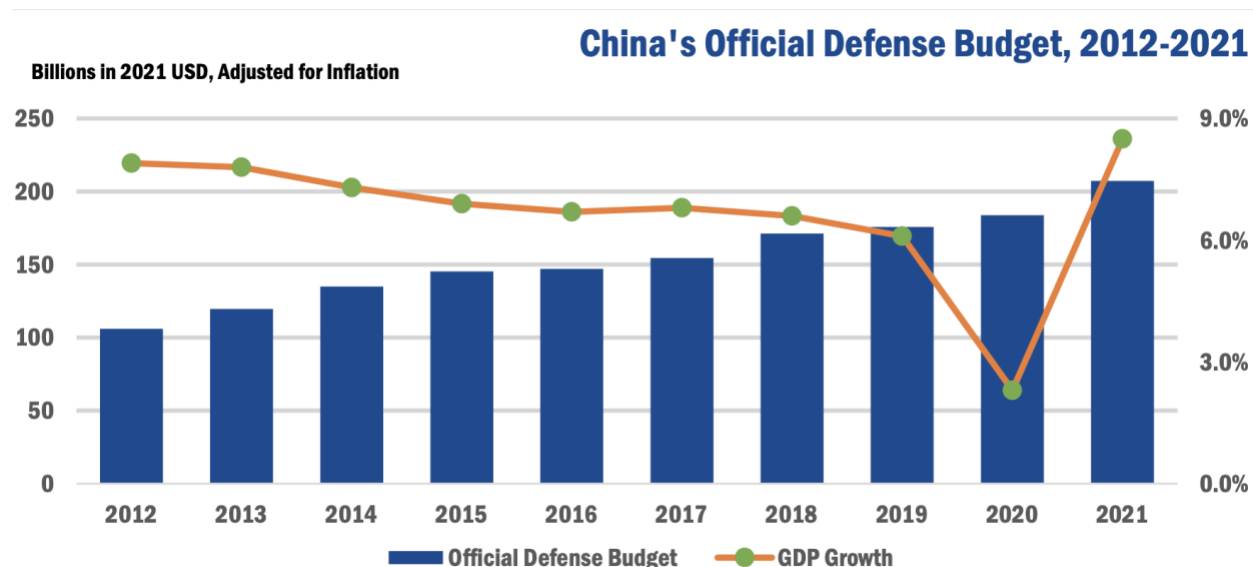


**PLA Modernization Areas, 2000 – 2010.** This graphic compares the expansion of modern operational systems within the PLA in 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2010.

Footnote: For surface combatants “modern” is defined as multi-mission platforms with significant capabilities in at least two warfare areas. “Modern” for submarines is defined as those platforms capable of firing an anti-ship cruise missile. For air forces, “modern” is defined as 4th generation platforms (Su-27, Su-30, F-10) and platforms with 4th generation-like capabilities (FB-7). “Modern” SAMs are defined as advanced, long-range Russian systems (SA-10, SA-20), and their PRC indigenous equivalents (HQ-9).

<sup>100</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011), 43.

The fifth<sup>101</sup> chart shows China's official defense budget from 2012 to 2021 along with where their GDP was in the same years. Interestingly, even though the GDP has steadily and gradually decreased from 2012 to 2020, their defense budget did the opposite which shows their dedication to building their military and power balancing:



The sixth one shows their budget compared to regional states which shows their large military budget differs from those around them.<sup>102</sup> They are almost four times as much as the next state:

<b>Regional Comparison of Official 2021 Defense Budgets</b>	
	<b>Defense Budget (In Billions, USD)</b>
PRC (Official Defense Budget)	\$209
India	\$64.8
Japan	\$55
Russia (National Defense Budget)	\$66.8
South Korea	\$48
Taiwan	\$15.4

<sup>101</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), 142.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 143.



The PLA also have been developing unconventional warfare throughout the years. What the PLA calls these tactics is “shashoujian”; the translation that US intelligence and military leaders use is the assassin’s mace. This comes from an old Chinese legend similar to David and Goliath. As mentioned before, during war games conducted by the US, whenever the Chinese team used unconventional warfare, the Chinese team won every time. This term in military contexts means asymmetric weapons used to strike the enemy’s weak points.<sup>103</sup> As Michael Pillsbury continued to explore and study Chinese military documents, this term kept appearing;<sup>104</sup> it appeared in three books and over 20 articles by modern Chinese military strategists.<sup>105</sup> Americans see conflict only through the lens of the military, while the Chinese see it through intelligence, economics, law, and military. This whole military approach is taught by ancient Chinese philosophers like Sunzi, which will be further discussed later. The authors of *Unrestricted Warfare* are colonels of the PLA and two days after 9/11 said the attacks could be “favorable to China” and showed that America was vulnerable to unconventional warfare. The Assassin's Mace is not just an aspirational idea, as they are building high tech weapons now to hit US weak points, and the US has not been noticing until recently. Such strategies reflect the Chinese strategy “...to keep it small in scale so as not to alarm the West.”<sup>106</sup>

Another PLA development in recent years is the potentiality of biological weapons. Their chemical and biotechnology framework is capable of doing research and creating some amount of chemical and biological agents or toxins on a large scale. They most likely have the ability to weaponize chemical and biological warfare agents and their weapons could deliver them. This partaking in biological dual use applications could violate the Biological Weapons Convention.

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<sup>103</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 136-139.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 146-147.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 136-139.

PRC military medical institutions are a place where potent toxins with dual use applications are studied. The US cannot verify that they have met the agreements under the Chemical Weapons Convention because of concerns regarding the PRC's research on pharmaceutical-based agents and toxins with potential dual-use applications.<sup>107</sup>

### **Military-Civil Fusion**

The next example that shows why the United States has switched to a realist perspective regarding the international community is the PRC's adoption of the Military-Civil Fusion strategy. This was started in the early 2000's because the Party was trying to find methods to better the PRC's overall growth. Its ambitions have grown since then because the Party now sees it as a way to bridge economics and social development with its security development that goes along with the PRC's goal to create a new China.<sup>108</sup> Regarding the US' view of Military-Civil Fusion, Ret. Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster claims it is a part of a larger strategy to create vassal states.<sup>109</sup> The Military-Civil Fusion has six goals that are related to each other:

1. "Fusing China's defense industrial base and its civilian technology and industrial base"
2. "Integrating and leveraging science and technology innovations across military and civilian sectors"
3. "Cultivating talent and blending military and civilian expertise and knowledge"
4. "Building military requirements into civilian infrastructure and leveraging civilian construction for military purposes"
5. "Leveraging civilian service and logistic capabilities for military purposes"
6. "Expanding and deepening China's national defense mobilization system to include all relevant aspects of its society and economy for use in competition and war"<sup>110</sup>

Another reason in the dimension of realism as to why the United States switched its view of China is realist rhetoric began to come from them. After Mao Zedong's death and certainly

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<sup>107</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2022, X.

<sup>108</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), 24-25.

<sup>109</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 110.

<sup>110</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2022), V.

after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, much of the Chinese public stopped supporting communism, so the CCP began to appeal to nationalism for support.<sup>111</sup> China has been consistently challenging the post-World War II, American-created global order. After World War II, Western democratic powers created a liberal world order, and now China is trying to challenge that world order. It is much quieter than Russia's contemporary attempt; however, it is much more alarming. For example, China is against international communities getting involved in internal affairs of states. They showed this in 2017 when they and Russia vetoed sanctions at the United Nations (UN) against Syria for using Chemical weapons; they did not gain from that, they just did it because they could potentially use the same tactics against their own people. China wants a world where states don't have to agree on every rule, as they claim that is a Western idea.<sup>112</sup> Obviously, the United States does not want to allow China to do this, and they want to be in control of the international community. In response, they realigned their view of China to a more hostile one than it was 15 years ago. The US recognizes that China is the only competitor who wants to and can reshape the global order. They know that they have the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.<sup>113</sup> In response, they have stated that they will make sure that America, not China, sets the global agenda.<sup>114</sup>

Additionally, Chinese leaders see the reunification of the state as vital. The problem is who defines reunification. The Chinese say that Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, the South China Sea, the Senkaku Islands, and parts of the disputed Indian border are their territory. However, people in those places and other states who also have territorial claims disagree.

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<sup>111</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 401.

<sup>112</sup> *The Economist*, "A New Order: China Wants to Change, or Break, a World Order Set by Others," *The Economist*, October 10, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/10/10/china-wants-to-change-or-break-a-world-order-set-by-others>.

<sup>113</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, 23.

<sup>114</sup> White House, *The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, (Washington, DC: White House, March 2021), 20, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>. Accessed January 29, 2023.

Furthermore, the United States disagrees. China states that East Turkistan independence and Tibetan independence are creating problems for them.<sup>115</sup> Military buildup around Taiwan also supports this hypothesis. They believe it is theirs; they have used a nationalistic argument for reunification for many years now. In 1993, the CCP blamed the US for intervention after World War II and stated that, “Reunification of the countries embodies the fundamental interest of the Chinese nation.”<sup>116</sup> Over the years regarding Taiwan, China has used more and more hostile rhetoric and more and more military action around Taiwan to intimidate Taiwan. In 2022, they stated that China’s full reunification cannot be stopped.<sup>117</sup> The following map<sup>118</sup> shows live-fire actions from the PLA around Taiwan from 1996 compared to 2022; it is an clear increase:

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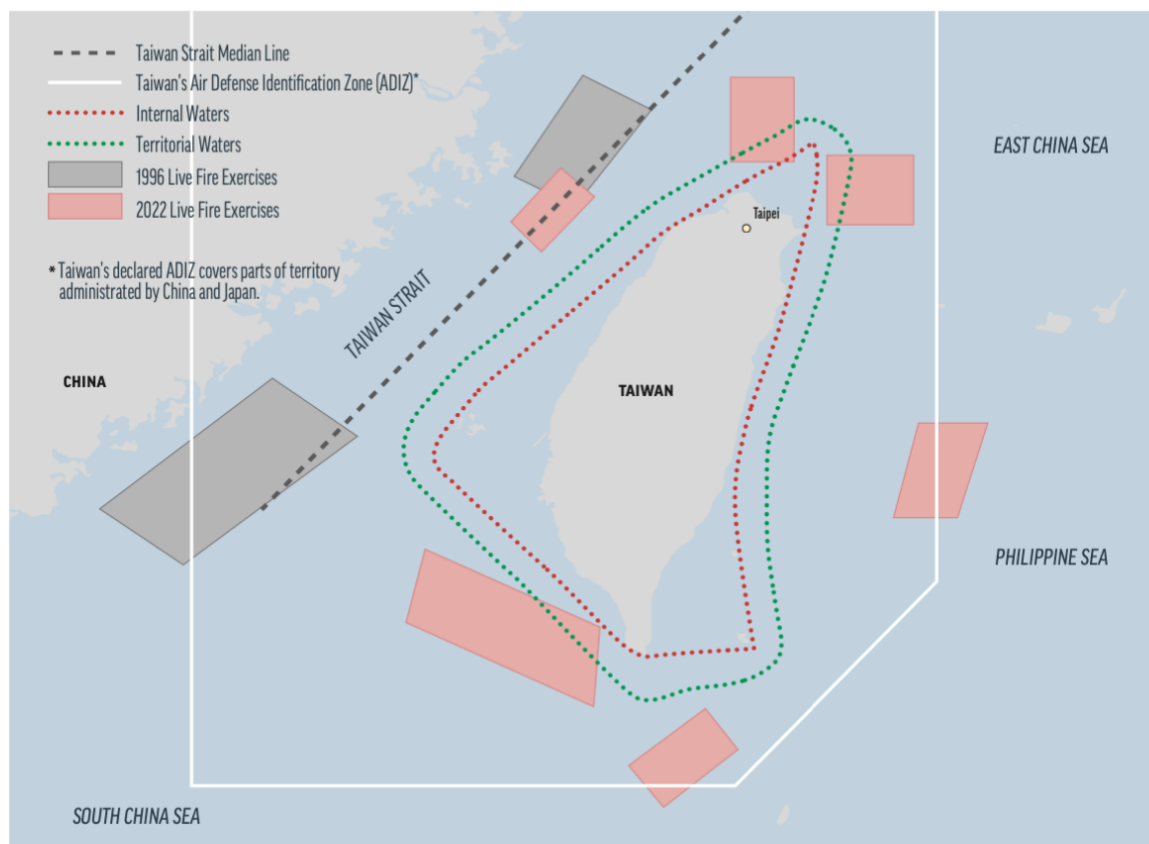
<sup>115</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Military Strategy*, 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office & Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China*, 1993.

<sup>117</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office & Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era*, August 10, 2022.

<sup>118</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 29.

**FIGURE 7**  
**CHINA'S 1996 AND 2022 LIVE-FIRE EXERCISES AROUND TAIWAN**



Source: Adapted from Kathrin Hille, "China's Military Response to Pelosi Visit Raises Escalation Fears," *Financial Times*, August 3, 2022.

As a response, the United States has taken certain actions. In January 2010, the US approved a \$6.4 billion arms deal to Taiwan. The response from China was incredibly negative which was different from how they acted before. They claimed it was a “gross intervention into China’s internal affairs.” Due to this response, the US decided to not sell F-16s to Taiwan and increased military engagement with China. Taking note of the date of the arms deal with Taiwan, liberalism was still infused in US international relations. Recently, the US has taken a stronger approach to Taiwan. In August of 2022, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan to show her support for the state. She was the highest-ranking US official to visit Taiwan in 25 years, and

China announced military operations as a response.<sup>119</sup> The recent visit to Taiwan shows the clear transition to a new era of how the US views the topic of Taiwan.

Regarding the South China Sea, the history of Chinese claims date back to over a hundred years. Importantly, in December of 1947 China published a map that had a line drawn in the shape of “U” which laid claim to the South China Sea. Today, that line is called the nine-dash line. In 1996, they claimed parts of the South China Sea in what they said were “historic rights” with no approval from international law.<sup>120</sup> Aggression started in 1995 when China took the Mischief Reef which was in the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. In May of 2010, China had a summit meeting with the US. They laid claim over the Spratly Islands; the claim also included 10,000 square miles of ocean. In response, the Filipino president said, “At what point do you say, ‘Enough is enough’? Well the world has to say it—remember that the Sudetenland was given in an attempt to appease Hitler to prevent World War II.” China responded by saying the statement was “outrageous.”<sup>121</sup> Hyper aggression started in 2012 when the PRC started using quasi-military and conventional military forces to go into the South China Sea. They also started to build military bases on reefs and man-made islands.<sup>122</sup> By 2018, It was evident that Xi had lied about the island building; satellite images showed construction of military infrastructure. These later also had air defense and anti-ship missiles added to them.<sup>123</sup> As a response, the US conducted a freedom of navigation operation in 2022. The US “upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging restrictions on innocent

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<sup>119</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer, “Why Pelosi Went to Taiwan, and Why China’s Angry,” *AP News*, August 3, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-biden-asia-united-states-beijing-e3a6ea22e004f21e6b2a28b0f28ec4c5>.

<sup>120</sup> Hayton, “The Carrier Strike Group in the South China Sea,” 3.

<sup>121</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 203.

<sup>122</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 123-124.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

passage imposed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Vietnam, and Taiwan.”<sup>124</sup> The Chinese think they need to secure what they believe is theirs, whether that be the conflicts on the Indian border, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, or reunification with Taiwan. They believe reunification with Taiwan is a part of “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

Moreover, there have been clear examples in the 21st century of nationalism in China. This started in China in the 1990’s and the most concerning quality of it is that it has influenced the CCP elite and common people, not just one or the other.<sup>125</sup> It could be seen after the accidental US bombing of a Chinese embassy in the 1999 Kosovo war. It could be seen after an American spy plane ran into and took down a Chinese military aircraft over the South China Sea. It could also be seen after skirmishing happened between China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands. As time goes on and the relationship between the US and China turns more and more foul, hypernationalism—“the belief that other nations are not just inferior but are dangerous, and must be dealt with harshly, if not brutally,”<sup>126</sup>—will take hold in China.<sup>127</sup>

Another example of realism is the term *tianxia*. Zhao Tingyang’s *The Under-Heaven System: The Philosophy of the World Institution*, which has gained increasing respect in mainstream Chinese beliefs, uses the word *tianxia* which means “under-heaven,” “empire,” and “China.” It really means a global order where China’s civilization is at the top. This world order promotes “order over freedom, ethics over law, and elite governance over democracy and human rights.” Pillsbury met with Zhao in Beijing in July 2012 and asked him what would happen to a state under *tianxia* if they did not obey. He responded that that was not a difficult question to

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<sup>124</sup> U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs, “7th Fleet Cruiser Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea,” United States Navy, Accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3229970/7th-fleet-cruiser-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/#:~:text=The%20freedom%20of%20navigation%20operation,%2C%20Vietnam%2C%20and%20Taiwan.>

<sup>125</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 401.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 401.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 402-403.

answer, and that the *Rites of Zhou* called for a four-to-one military advantage to be sure that the emperor could keep *tianxia* intact. *Tianxia* will be discussed further in the next section. If China surpasses the US economically, its hegemonic status will have to be protected militarily. It will need a more powerful force than any other state in the world.<sup>128</sup>

Another way to describe *tianxia guan* is “an ancient world view with China at the center, and the influence of Chinese civilization radiating out to all compass points.”<sup>129</sup> One China scholar translates the term to “a unified global system with China’s ‘superior’ civilization at the top.”<sup>130</sup> This term has been in widespread use amongst the Chinese elite. The US has picked up on this term and its meaning and as a result has taken action to stop China’s rise. They realize that they can no longer be complacent and sit by with their fingers crossed and hope China will go along with the US’ world order. Perhaps the most important quality about *tianxia* is that Xi Jinping personally supports the idea. Xi’s “great rejuvenation” of China reflects the tributary system that saw Asian kingdoms and tribal states pay obeisance to Chinese emperors in return for trading rights and other benefits.”<sup>131</sup> This leads to the fourth reason for the US switch regarding China: the rise of president Xi Jinping.

## **The Rise of Xi Jinping**

**“We can form a single united body, while the enemy must split up into fractions. Hence there will be a whole pitted against separate parts of a whole, which means that we shall be many to the enemy’s few.” -Sunzi**

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<sup>128</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 29-30.

<sup>129</sup> The Economist, “A Stronger Actor: China is Exerting Greater Power Across Asia—and Beyond,” *The Economist*, October 10, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/10/10/china-is-exerting-greater-power-across-asia-and-beyond>.

<sup>130</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 29.

<sup>131</sup> The Economist, “A Stronger Actor: China is Exerting Greater Power Across Asia—and Beyond.”



At the beginning of Xi Jinping's rise to power, there was hope that he would be moderate and begin the liberalization process.<sup>132</sup> When Xi Jinping became general secretary of the CCP in 2012, his role before president, he used the phrase "strong nation dream" which is a phrase that no other Chinese leader had ever used. He was referring to the book *The China Dream*, which was published in China in 2009 and would go on to be a national bestseller. The book was written by a colonel in the PLA who at the time was a prominent scholar at the National Defense University in China which trains future generals of the PLA. It explains how China would be the global hegemon, rather than the US. The author stated in the book that, "China's grand goal in the 21st century is to become the world's No. 1 power."<sup>133</sup> In one of his first speeches when he replaced Hu Jintao, Xi declared that, "1.3 billion Chinese people should bear in mind the mission, unite as one, and gather into invincible force with the wisdom and power." He continued by saying, "We must make persistent efforts, press ahead with indomitable will, continue to push forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strive to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."<sup>134</sup> This was much more nationalistic from his predecessor's speech to the United Nations in 2005.<sup>135</sup>

More recently, China's CMC released their new military strategy in 2019. The strategy said it was the guideline of the CCP's "new era," however it was mainly a "rebranding" or "relabeling" of the one created in 2014. There were hardly any changes in terms which is the first time a report has been made from 1949 to 2014 without some type of small changes at least.<sup>136</sup> The point of the new strategy was not to redefine the plans for the PLA. It had another purpose:

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<sup>132</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 227.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>134</sup> China Today, "President Vows to Bring Benefits to People in Realizing "Chinese Dream,"" *China Today*, March 17, 2013, [http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/zhuanti/2013-03/17/content\\_528129.htm](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/zhuanti/2013-03/17/content_528129.htm).

<sup>135</sup> Hu Jintao, "Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity," September 15, 2005, <https://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf>.

<sup>136</sup> Joel and Fravel, "China's Military Strategy for a 'New Era,'" 2-3.

to place Xi Jinping at the center of PLA strategy. The only substantial change was the relabeling of the “strategic guiding thought” component of the guideline as “Xi Jinping Military Strategic Thought.”<sup>137</sup> This rebranding has allowed Xi to polish what people think of him. He is trying to be seen as both a government leader and military strategist. It shows that he is in charge of the PLA, not just the CCP.<sup>138</sup> The 2019 military strategy phrase “strategic guiding thought” is tied directly to Xi; it is described as “Xi Jinping Military Strategic Thought.” Now when the PLA uses the phrase “strategic guiding thought” it is tied to Xi.<sup>139</sup>

Even more recently than 2019 was the CCP 20th Congress which took place in October of 2022. A Party Congress can be defined as the event that “sets the guiding policy for the CCP and state for the next five years.” The new membership of the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee showed that there is only one piece of Chinese politics today: the Xi faction. The past ten years have shown Xi’s intention to put ideology at the forefront of political, economic, and social life. The CCP uses documents to share their beliefs; after the congress dismissed, they planned to start a program to have these documents studied by all members from the Politburo down to the village level.<sup>140</sup> Xi sees himself as the catalyzer of the third phase of Chinese Marxism. Xi wants to shape people’s belief by his ideology by molding them but will use force if he has to. More than 70% of party laws and regulations have been adjusted in the past ten years.<sup>141</sup> Xi also declared that, “China opposes protectionism, the erection of ‘fences and barriers’, decoupling, disruption of industrial and supply chains, unilateral sanctions, and

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>140</sup> Charles Parton, “The 20th Party Congress: What it means for the CCP and the world,” *The Council on Geostategy* No. GPE11, (November 22, 2022), <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-20th-party-congress-what-it-means-for-the-ccp-and-the-world/>, 2-3.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

maximum-pressure tactics.”<sup>142</sup> The US sees this as the highest form of hypocrisy because they look at China’s actions and believe that they are doing what they claim to oppose.

Finally, Xi Jinping wants to strengthen faith in the CCP among the youth. They don’t have the emotional attachment that their parents had. 80% of students join the Communist Youth League which can be joined at 14 and is an on-ramp to party membership which takes place at 18. Most just see it as a resume booster; state owned enterprises (SOEs) and government jobs require party membership. In 2019 Xi stated “the party had to ‘win over vast numbers of the youth’ to ensure its cause passes ‘from one generation to the next.’” This will be accomplished by placing patriotism at school, creating new youth appeal online, and bolstering censorship. Many of the youth don’t care about the CCP posters, however, there is one idea that resonates with them: the CCP rescued China from the “century of humiliation” which was caused by foreign powers. “Only by standing up to the West, the message goes, can China rise again.”<sup>143</sup>

The CCP has created new tactics of bringing the CCP to the youth with the development of modern pop culture and technology. Games shows, raps, and language that speaks to the youth is being created to help foster an idea that the CCP must be loved without question. However, other efforts are menacing. Quickly after Xi took over, CCP officials were called to secret meetings about a party memo called “Document Number Nine.” The memo “banned schools from teaching seven Western concepts, such as constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society and a free press. This had a big impact on universities as centres of student activism and political debate.”<sup>144</sup> Nationalism and Xi do not just stop there either. New students at 36

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>143</sup> The Economist, “Patriotism and the Party: How Nationalism is Shaping China’s Young,” *The Economist*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2021/01/21/how-nationalism-is-shaping-chinas-young>.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

universities must take a course about Xi Jinping Thought along with the traditional courses about Karl Marx and Mao Zedong.<sup>145</sup> To solidify his power, in 2018 Xi did away with term limits.<sup>146</sup>

In closing, after reviewing the evidence of the third hypothesis, it is clear that the rise of Xi Jinping is the third reason that the United States shifted its view of China. The United States could no longer ignore the concerning rhetoric and actions being taken by Xi Jinping.

Additionally, he stopped using language that went along with the global order; he wishes to change the global order to better align with China's interests. Due to his switch in attitude and actions, the United States also switched from liberalism to realism so that they could ensure they kept making the rules of the international order. The fourth hypothesis that will be discussed is the US had a better understanding of China.

### **The China Debate in the U.S.**

**“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.” -Sunzi**

This section hypothesizes that the fourth reason the United States of America shifted its view of the People's Republic of China was because there was a continued debate about how threatening China really was. For many years, a plethora of American leaders from a variety of places said engaging with China was beneficial for America; and, in many ways it was. However, as time progressed, the reality of China's goals and intentions began to be clearer. The pro-China group began to fall out of favor for this reason and those that had been previously

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 95.

looked down upon began to gain prominence. Thus, they impacted the switch in the American view of China.

To begin, it is necessary to discuss how several academics, think tanks, politicians, and policy makers viewed China in a way that was not indicative of its aggressions, military growth, and realist behavior. These China watchers had five main assumptions regarding China. First, Nixon's opening of China would lead to them helping with international problems; thus far, that has not been the case. Second, China is in the process of creating a democracy; this has obviously been proven false. Third, China is a developing state whose economy could collapse so the US wanted to help them. However, "while [they] worried about China's woes, its economy more than doubled." Fourth, the United States thought China would evolve into a more democratic state like other advanced economies once the economy flourished. Fifth, China's war hawks had little influence, as they are on the fringes of the government. In reality, Chinese war hawks wish to avenge the century of humiliation and replace the US as the global superpower. Their power in the CCP was much more potent than US policy leaders thought.<sup>147</sup>

There were two main reasons that some in the US and wider Western world had a different view of China. From the 17th century to contemporary times, China experts, missionaries, and academics were led astray and believed a falsified and glamorous version of Chinese history. They studied the part of Chinese culture about Confucianism which emphasizes pacifism. They completely missed the part about the cruel Spring Autumn and Warring States

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<sup>147</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 7-14.

periods. Secondly, Mao Zedong's attempt to erase China's history caused Westerners to think that China had disconnected from its past.<sup>148</sup>

In the past decade, an increasing number of China watchers began to acknowledge that the Chinese and importantly the People's Liberation Army still hold a high respect and value for their nation's history going as far back as ancient history. Generals and war hawks study and draw lessons from the time of Chinese history known as the Spring Autumn and Warring States periods (770 BCE to 221 BCE). This was a time of brutal wars and politicking. It had power politics, intrigue, deception, and warfare among the Chinese warlords. The warlords were trying to become the *ba*, or hegemon.<sup>149</sup> This drawing from this era of ancient Chinese lessons had an increase in the mid-1990's. Every few years thirty generals had a conference that was about applying Sunzi's *Art of War*.<sup>150</sup> The Chinese drawing on their past for lessons is not a rare occurrence, it is happening systematically.

Additionally, Chinese international relations theorists join the PLA in looking back to their history.<sup>151</sup> They are trying to create a new form of international relations theory that was not founded by Western states. Florian Schneider explains:

...establishing a national [international relations theory] project is imperative because, so the logic goes, 'China' needs its own perspective of the world as it takes its rightful place as a Great Power. It should come as no surprise that advocates of such an argument then assure readers in 'the West' (or in East Asian countries bordering on PRC territory) that perceptions of a renewed nationalism in China are based on myths (*shenhua*), misunderstandings (*wujie*), and unnecessary worry (*danxin*), all of which are rooted in the so-called 'China Threat theory' (*Zhongguo weixie lun*). Analyses of nationalism in China then become a domination strategy by 'the West' to keep China down, instead of acknowledging that 'China is still the mother of East Asian civilization'.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

<sup>151</sup> Schneider, "Reconceptualising World Order," 687.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 691.

This shows that this strategy is not just amongst policy leaders and military leaders. In his article assessing Chinese and Taiwanese international relations, theory Florian Schneider claims that, “The relevance of conceptual frameworks from China or Taiwan is thus not that they represent the views of a perceived rising Great Power, but that they draw from rich and diverse cultural traditions that can offer insights into the workings of international politics.”<sup>153</sup> While this author acknowledges Schneider’s claim that Chinese international relations theorists do not represent the views of a nationalistic rising power, he would argue that those with the most influence on the CCP and PLA do. This is shown by the evidence discussed previously. This author does agree with Schneider’s latter claim that they look back to their history to help theorize about current issues.

Chinese theorists are not focused on the accuracy of historical events, they are more interested in morally assessing how historical events can be used for contemporary political behavior. An example of this is *Thoughts on World Leadership and Implications*, edited by the famous realist Yan Xuetong and his student Xu Jin. It is a collection of essays that gives a pre-modern Chinese political thought survey via a present-day international relations perspective. They look at writings like the Guanzi, Laozi, the writings credited to Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, Xunzi, Han Feizi, the Commentary of Zuo, the Book of Rites, the Stratagems of the Warring States, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. One common thread in the book is how states can get to be the global hegemon, or obtain *wangba tianxia*. The essays are rightly criticized for combining ancient Chinese thought with actual historical practice. Yan had hoped that the essays would contribute to already created international relations theories and complete the strategy of China’s rise. Yan’s later writings show that he is less concerned with academia and more

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 685.

concerned with advising policy for China's rise. He reaches into the past searching for ideas that support his realist perspective. He liberally studies China's past to promote his own agenda which is to pass moral judgment and promote realist foreign policy in the PRC.<sup>154</sup>

Returning to *tianxia*, Qin Yaqing describes the terms as follows: “The Chinese world referred to everything under heaven and on the earth...It was a complete whole where no dichotomous opposites existed.” Schneider expands upon this description: “This idea of ‘all-under-heaven’ serves its advocates as a framework to study (and possibly revitalise) the institutions and processes of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the legendary Golden Age in which the relatively small state of Zhou was able to govern a large territorial expanse and a significant number of foreign states with allegedly little recourse to military violence.”<sup>155</sup> The political philosopher Zhao Tingyang, who was briefly mentioned earlier, has an idea of *tianxia* that has a more utopian goal. It is strictly conservative and fueled by anti-Western beliefs. It is generated by nationalist feelings of anger and annoyance toward President George W. Bush's “American Empire,” along with a strong distrust of types of populace participation. He believes that Western philosophy is defective. According to him, electoral democracy has no use and says that Chinese traditional order is superior.<sup>156</sup>

What is interesting about the Zhou Dynasty and how Chinese international relations theorists study it is that they created a tributary system that has been idealized by some scholars. Certain interpretations are driven by a political agenda; this is obvious because they view Chinese foreign policy as always being compassionate and passive. They completely ignore the reality of China's imperial past.<sup>157</sup> Or, perhaps, they accept it as an empire and wish to replicate

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 687-688.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 689

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 690.



it. The Chinese theorists studying the Zhou tributary system can logically be applied to the modern day CCP Belt and Road Initiative which will be discussed later. The way international relations Chinese theorists sometimes use pre-modern history and philosophy to advise about contemporary Chinese issues is done in a way that is irresponsible when it comes to the sources of the time.<sup>158</sup>

Lastly, the Chinese theorists' idea of highlighting only certain events throughout the Warring States period and other eras of Chinese history to promote their nationalistic version of international relations does a disservice to the rest of their history. No major schools of thought during the Warring States, except the Legalists, promoted war that could unmistakably be used by the government or approved of a militaristic state. Rather, they promoted peace. China's 21st century leaders wish to build a society of harmony domestically and create peace internationally that is apparent in Chinese history.<sup>159</sup> However, this goal does not line up with their actions. In fact, their actions more line up with the previous listed strategies.

China claims that it can rise peacefully because it has a deeply Confucian culture. They claim it is a culture of moral virtue, harmony, and rules out aggression toward neighbors; it promotes benevolence. There are three main problems with this. First, it does not mirror how Chinese leaders have spoken and thought about international relations over the history of the PRC. China's past is not one of Confucius Pacifism and alternatively it has behaved like other nations to its neighbors: ambitious and harsh. Second, the more dominant international relations theory is a violent and cultural realist approach, as previously explained. Third, the rhetorically skilled person can spin Confucius' teaching to promote aggressive as well as defensive

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> John Gittings, "The Conflict Between War and Peace in Early Chinese Thought," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 10, Issue 12, no. 5 (March 19, 2012), 1, 7-9, <https://apjpf.org/2012/10/12/John-Gittings/3725/article.html>.

behaviors; it allows Chinese leaders to talk like idealists and behave like realists. There is no evidence that China has or will act like a Confucius pacifist state.<sup>160</sup>

This section highlighted the significant debate in the US about the influence of Chinese culture and history and how it would affect Chinese strategy today. It showed how Americans believed interacting with China would lead to a great partnership and that they would be their allies. It did lead to a partnership that helped both countries economically for many years. Recently, however, Americans are realizing that China's intentions have turned hostile. This begins to turn to the next hypothesis which is that the US government began to prioritize security over US business benefits due to their relations with China.

### **US National Security Concerns vs. Business Interests**

**“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” -Sunzi**

Another hypothesis about the shift toward China has to do with the fact that US businesses greatly benefitted from China. Businesses around the US exported their manufacturing to China for cheap labor, thus making them dependent on China. Regarding American businesses in China, James Mann outlines the reality of the early 2000s:

In the larger sense, the Chinese and American elites share a common interest in the existing economic order, in which China serves as the world's low-wage, high volume, all-purpose manufacturing center...Look beneath the surface, however, and you will find a more troubling reality: The business communities of China and the United States do not harbor these dreams of democracy. Both profit from a Chinese system that permits no political opposition, and - for now, at least - both are content with it.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, US companies with business interests in China are intimidated to call out CCP faults. Non-Chinese companies being absorbed into the CCP's strategies causes them to

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<sup>160</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 403-407.

<sup>161</sup> Mann, *The China Fantasy*, 67.

conform to the CCP's wishes. It happened to Marriott in 2018, Mercedes-Benz in 2018, Cathay Pacific Airways in July 2019, and Daryl Morey of the Houston Rockets in October 2019.

Regarding the latter, the CCP threatened to remove the NBA's streams of revenue in China.<sup>162</sup> It was not until China's military growth and aggression that caused the United States government to realize that a strong China was not favorable to the US. However, American businesses still have not made the switch.

In closing, the American government has switched because of the military growth and aggression from the Chinese. However, businesses in America have not switched because they still greatly benefit from having healthy ties to China. The switch in the US government can be seen by the numerous documents mentioned throughout this thesis. US companies benefited from the relationship with China, however, the US government began to not. Thus, the switch occurred. The government began to take the stance that security was more important than business interests. Though the explanation of this hypothesis was a short one, it was an incredibly important one. Staying on topic with economics, this paper will now turn to the sixth hypothesis as to why the United States views China differently: economic and research espionage, theft, and aggression.

## **Economic and Research Espionage, Theft, and Aggression**

### **All warfare is based on deception. -Sunzi**

Superficially, economic growth as a hypothesis may not seem like a viable argument. If the hypothesis were simply that China's economic growth has caused the United States to view it

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<sup>162</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 118-119.

in a hostile light, then this would be true. The United States has repeatedly helped nations grow their economies. As has been previously stated, the United States even helped China gain a strong economy. However, the United States began to realize how the Chinese gained a strong economy and what they began to do with a strong economy was problematic and threatening. Thus, the hypothesis can be summarized as follows: the sixth hypothesis relating to why the United States switched its view of China is because of their economic coercion – lies, espionage, theft, aggression, and a tributary system—the Belt and Road Initiative.

It was President Barack Obama who began to realize the problems of the rising Chinese economy. He realized that countries in the region would possibly go to China for economic help rather than the United States. Thus, he created the Trans-Pacific Partnership to help countries to work together with the United States so that they would not be dependent on China.<sup>163</sup> His predecessor, President Donald Trump, had a rather confusing view of China. This statement may be surprising because of his aggressive rhetoric against the CCP. However, he did not agree with the partnership. He thought it was unfair to the United States. As a result, he left the agreement. This may be surprising, but the Chinese government actually wanted Trump to win the 2016 election because of reasons like this. Trumps' rhetoric, as anti-CCP as it was, was also pro-American business. Thus, if he thought something was unfair to American businesses, he was not going to be a part of it; this indirectly benefited China. It is still important to note though, as just mentioned, that he was still not afraid to call out China's unfair economic policies. And this is what Trump began to do during his campaign and throughout his presidency.

On May 29, 2020, Trump stated this in a speech:

China's pattern of misconduct is well known. For decades, they have ripped off the United States like no one has ever done before. Hundreds of billions of dollars a year were lost dealing with China, especially over the years during the prior administration.

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<sup>163</sup> "The Trans-Pacific Partnership."

China raided our factories, offshored our jobs, gutted our industries, stole our intellectual property, and violated their commitments under the World Trade Organization. To make matters worse, they are considered a developing nation getting all sorts of benefits that others, including the United States, are not entitled to.<sup>164</sup>

For these reasons, the Americans acknowledged more and more that an economically strong China meant a powerful China, and this was concerning. The Americans had been previously hypnotized by wishful thinking regarding China's economy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They truly believed that democracy would follow. Yet, instead of creating a Western free market style economy, China created something of an almost fascist economy. Pillsbury describes it as follows: "They instead designed the hybrid, mercantilist strategy and essentially covered it up for three decades. The *ying pai* hawks had won again. We had no real chance to influence the debate because, once again, we did not know who was who."<sup>165</sup>

If someone wishes to create a large manufacturing company, the CCP has to approve of it. To a pro-China American, this may seem like a worthless point because the US government has to approve of new companies in America. However, it will be shown later in this section that the two governments' definitions of approval are quite different. For the sake of foreshadowing, President Xi has taken over economic decisions to guarantee the preservation of the CCP.<sup>166</sup> Now, the US has a rogue enemy state that has a strong economy. Lee Kuan Yew stated, "Their great advantage is not in military influence but in their economic influence.... Their influence can only grow and grow beyond the capabilities of America."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China" (speech, Washington, DC, May 30, 2020) National Archives, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china/>.

<sup>165</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 176.

<sup>166</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Executive Summary and Recommendations of U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 13.

<sup>167</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 230.

American leaders, like Bill Clinton, promoted this economic growth in hopes that it would help democratize the country. A way American leaders did this was to welcome China into the World Trade Organization (WTO). As mentioned previously, Clinton claimed that by China joining the WTO, it is importing US products and democracy.<sup>168</sup> China joined the WTO in 2001 and the US economy has been hurt by this. The American trade imbalance with China was about \$15 billion a year in 1993. In 2000, it was around \$70 billion, near the time of congressional approval of China's admittance to the WTO. By 2005, it was about \$200 billion per year. Additionally, "Clinton's predictions about democracy and political freedom coming to China have not been borne out either."<sup>169</sup> Regardless of Clinton's and the US Congress' motives for admitting China to the WTO, it has only hurt the United States and not affected any part of the movement toward democracy for China. Furthermore, China has not and currently does not adhere to the rules of the WTO.

China agreed to certain terms when they joined in 2001 that are mandatory of all WTO members. They did not honor any of them. For example, they will not report state given financial support to Chinese firms. They also make foreign firms contribute technology to China in order to gain access to Chinese markets. Furthermore, they still claim they are a developing state which gives them certain privileges. They say they should not be held to global rules and standards.<sup>170</sup> Governments of members of the WTO are not supposed to influence in any way the economic decisions of SOEs. Yet, China continues to influence them.<sup>171</sup>

China has been cheating at the international economic game, and they are winning. They steal technology, advocate for Chinese monopolies, protect its SOEs from international

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<sup>168</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 128.

<sup>169</sup> Mann, *The China Fantasy*, 84.

<sup>170</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 145.

<sup>171</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 164-165.

competition by using unfair methods, and break international trade laws. China is the front runner of internet protocol theft. Around \$107 billion is lost in supplemental yearly sales and costs 2.1 million jobs in just the US. China is able to obtain cheap capital, and low-priced inputs which are not an option to international rivals. They are also increas international investment as they attempt to create larger markets, carelessly attain natural resources, and build more advanced technology. Additionally, China passed an anti-monopoly law in 2007. However, SOEs are not affected by it. The law was targeted toward foreign companies trying to get Chinese businesses. Foreign companies face bans, limits on foreign ownership, constraints on hiring, duplicative testing, and slow government approval procedures for permits. This helps China to not let foreign companies in their nation even though it still has most-favored-nation status amongst WTO members.<sup>172</sup> China has simply played by its own rules regarding international economics even though they said differently; no one has called them out until the US recently. In 2022, the US National Security Strategy stated that “...autocratic governments often abuse the global economic order by weaponizing its interconnectivity and its strengths.”<sup>173</sup>

Turning to the specific strategies as to how the CCP has illegally grown their economy, Nicholas Eftimiades conducted a report of 595 official cases on the international stage of Chinese espionage efforts.<sup>174</sup> There are five categories of espionage that the CCP utilizes. They are Traditional Espionage, Covert Action (FARA), Economic Espionage, Illegal Exports, and Research Violations.<sup>175</sup> Due to these five tactics, China is “changing the global balance of power, impacting the US an foreign economies, and providing challenges to domestic, national security,

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 189-190.

<sup>173</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, 10.

<sup>174</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage: Operations and Tactics*, Vitruvian Press, 2020, 2.

<sup>175</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, “A Comparative China’s Economic Espionage Tactics,” *Shinobi Enterprises*, 2020, <https://www.shinobienterprises.com/video>. Accessed January 29, 2023. Note: this is a video that can only be accessed through a password that is found on page 50 of Nicholars Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage: Operations and Tactics*, Vitruvian Press, 2020.

and foreign policy formulation.”<sup>176</sup> Over 450 cases of Chinese espionage have taken place since 2000.<sup>177</sup> The CCP makes all parts of their state help in its global espionage attempts. If the Ministry of State Security (MSS) of the CCP asks a part of the government to help with intelligence operations, they have to. Furthermore, in 2014, 2015, and 2017, the National People’s Congress and State Council published the mandates that stated every Chinese citizen and companies, domestic or abroad, had to help with gathering intelligence.<sup>178</sup> This returns to the previous idea that CCP company approval and US company approval are certainly different. The PRC organizations that conduct espionage include: MSS, CMC Joint Staff Department, Intelligence Bureau, SOEs, private companies and individuals, PLA Political Department Liaison Office (which targets Taiwan), United Front Work Department (UFWD), and a swath of universities that fall under the State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND).<sup>179</sup> A particular group of universities in China are called the Seven Sons of China because they go to work in the defense field.<sup>180</sup>

Regarding SOEs, there are 150,000 of them, and 50,000 of those are owned by the central government.<sup>181</sup> 112 SOEs are considered “national champions” because they help the government immensely.<sup>182</sup> In 2003 the CCP started to plan the creation of so-called “national champions.” This was a plan by the CCP that would financially assist fifty companies to get them to the Fortune Global 500 list by 2010. They reached that goal. National champions that are firms in strategic industries receive help from the CCP by means of land and energy subsidies, generous tax policies, and below-market interest rates from government banks with little or no

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<sup>176</sup> Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage*, Vitruvian Press, 2020, 3.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 7-8.

<sup>180</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, “A Comparative China’s Economic Espionage Tactics.”

<sup>181</sup> Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage*, Vitruvian Press, 2020, 7.

<sup>182</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, “A Comparative China’s Economic Espionage Tactics.”



expectation at all to repay the loans.<sup>183</sup> Of the 50,000, there are “aerospace and defense companies, subordinate research institutes, and technology transfer organizations...In 2018, Xi Jinping directed all SOEs to amend their bylaws to ensure the concepts of service to the CCP – national and economic security – are placed above profit.”<sup>184</sup> Broken down, of the 595 cases that was studied by Nicholas Eftimiades, 20% of the espionage came from SOEs, 16% came from the MSS, 23% came from private companies, 19% came from the PLA, and 22% came from the PRC or “other.” This shows that one sector is not committing significantly more theft than another showing a whole societal, planned effort.<sup>185</sup>

### **Economic and Research Espionage, Theft, and Aggression Tactics**

The previous statistics regarding SOEs beg the question, “What exactly is China stealing?” Eftimiades answers this question, as for the SOEs, they mainly steal “advanced military technology and associated research.” Regarding private companies and individuals, they mainly steal “commercial technologies, intellectual property, and military technologies.” The PLA, Joint Intelligence Bureau mostly steals “defense information, armaments, and military (or dual use) technology.” The MSS’ objective is usually “political and defense information, foreign policy, overseas dissidents, military capabilities, and foreign intelligence services.” The Chinese Universities, of which there are several, seek to steal “foreign technology to support advanced military weapons systems development and commercial endeavors.” Specifically to the United States, their main espionage attempts are the “illegal export of military and dual use technology.”<sup>186</sup> Information technology is yet another example of a high priority for the PRC.

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<sup>183</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 171.

<sup>184</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage*, 7.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

The number of cases relating to information technology, 113, is second only to technology about aerospace. This shows that “China has placed strong emphasis on stealing information technology to include advanced semiconductors and manufacturing technology.”<sup>187</sup> In the United States, China’s focus for espionage is “the illegal export of military and dual use technology.”<sup>188</sup>

In conclusion regarding Eftimiades case study, here were his main findings:<sup>189</sup>

1. China has rapidly increased its espionage attempts in the 21st century.
2. Chinese entities partaking in espionage include government agencies, the People’s Liberation Army, SOEs, private companies, individuals, and several higher education establishments.
3. Nearly 50 percent of China’s global collection objectives are military and space technologies.
4. Over 90 percent of these espionage actions are done by ethnic Chinese and more than 80 percent are committed by males.
5. The MSS uses social media to target foreign people who have the ability to obtain sensitive information. The quality of recruitment attempts changes greatly.
6. MSS uses China’s visa and border control systems to find possible recruitments and manage secret assets.
7. MSS espionage tradecraft has shown improvements over the last four years. This is at least partially because of US counterintelligence efforts.
8. Almost 50 percent of China’s usual espionage efforts (political and military secrets) and secret action campaigns are targeted against Taiwan.
9. China’s foreign science and technology collection attempts are tied closely to the priority technologies identified in the following government strategic planning documents, *Made in China 2025*, *Space Science and Technology in China*, and *A Road-map to 2050, the National Key Technologies R&D Program*, and *the 13th Five Year Plan*.
10. China’s ‘whole of society’ approach to espionage hurts the American economy, diplomatic influence, and military capabilities. Furthermore, China’s behavior threatens both European national and economic security through espionage and coercion against government entities and business decision making.

## **Made in China 2025**

Moving to Chinese economic aggression, this part of the sixth hypothesis will cover two tactics and programs used by the Chinese: Made in China 2025 and the Belt and Road Initiative.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 2.

The Made in China 2025 program is trying “to make China a largely independent science and technology innovation power.”<sup>190</sup> With Made in China 2025, the CCP is attempting to “to fuel China’s economic growth with a vast amount of transferred technology and eventually dominate sectors of the emerging global economy that will give it military as well as economic advantages.”<sup>191</sup> Telecommunication companies like Huawei and ZTE are vital to Made in China 2025 because they are at the forefront of acquiring new technologies, like microchips and energy storage. They also create ways for the Chinese to know how to be self-sufficient in the high-end manufacturing realm.<sup>192</sup> 435 of the 595 cases that Nicholas Eftimiades studied were attempts to collect technology requirements specifically for Made in China 2025.<sup>193</sup> The ten industries for Made in China 2025 are railway equipment (two cases of espionage), power equipment (11 cases), ocean engineering equipment (23 cases), new materials (35 cases), information technology (113 cases), energy saving/new energy (34 cases), biopharma and medical devices (46 cases), automated machine tools (45 cases), agricultural equipment (10 cases), and aerospace and aeronautical (116 cases).<sup>194</sup> It is clear that the CCP is prioritizing information technology and aerospace and aeronautical capabilities.

### **Belt and Road Initiative**

The next subsection of the maligned CCP economic practices is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formerly known as the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR). The Belt and Road Initiative was started in 2013 and can be defined as a program that:

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<sup>190</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 110.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 110-111.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 141-142.

<sup>193</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage*, 12.

<sup>194</sup> Nicholas Eftimiades, *Chinese Espionage*, 13.

seeks to foster closer economic integration with countries along China's periphery and beyond thereby shaping these countries' interests to align with the PRC's, while promoting regional stability and dulling criticism over the PRC's approach to issues it views as sensitive. OBOR also helps PRC state-owned enterprises (SOEs) find productive uses for their excess capacity in the cement, steel and construction sectors, as well as creating investment opportunities for the PRC's large reserve of savings. Countries participating in OBOR could develop economic dependence on PRC capital and be subject to predatory lending, which the PRC could leverage to pursue its geopolitical interests.<sup>195</sup>

Since its creation, as many as 140 countries have signed BRI cooperation documents, up from 125 countries in 2020.<sup>196</sup> The World Bank defines the BRI as, "a China-led effort to improve connectivity and regional co-operation on a trans-continental scale through large-scale investments." However, this is not a realistic description. A more accurate description would be to state that China is using the BRI to create a world order that favors the CCP. It is President Xi's creation, which draws back to his rise. The creation is one that, as much as it is an economic attempt, is a political attempt to make the new president look favorable. The word "belt" in the title also means "industrial zones and economic corridors with manufacturing, logistics, construction, and more." Adam Bohler, the former head of the new US International Development Finance Corporation, said it was "100% like a house of cards, because of heavy debts, badly built infrastructure, corruption and lack of transparency." This is perhaps an exaggeration, yet still holds some truth.<sup>197</sup>

For a state to get involved with the BRI, the steps are typically as follows. Step One: The CCP economically absorbs countries with terrible loans from Chinese banks. Step Two: Once in debt, the CCP makes the state's leaders agree to China's foreign policy goals. These goals

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<sup>195</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2021, 20-21.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>197</sup> The Economist, "China's Belt and Road: China Wants to Put Itself Back at the Centre of the World," *The Economist*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2020/02/06/china-wants-to-put-itself-back-at-the-centre-of-the-world>.

include removing the influence of the US and its allies like Japan, Australia, India, and European nations. Step Three: Then, they have access to that state's energy, natural resources, increase the Chinese need for jobs and products, and allow the CCP to control physical and communications infrastructure. These so-called "deals" are giving the CCP a triple win: Chinese firms and workers internationally produce money to give back to the Chinese economy, the Chinese banks benefit from lofty interest loans, and the CCP gains great influence over the state's economic and diplomatic ties.<sup>198</sup>

The PRC utilizes the BRI to help its plan of national rejuvenation. This is accomplished by growing its global transportation and trade connections to support its plan of development and strengthening its economic integration with nations along its borders and globally. 2021 was a major year for the BRI with greatly increased connections with African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries as well as the placement of public health, digital infrastructure, and green energy opportunities as a priority. Furthermore, the BRI will cause the PRC to grow its international security presence to protect the assets that it builds.<sup>199</sup>

There are also subsets of the BRI: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC),<sup>200</sup> the Digital Silk Road,<sup>201</sup> and the Belt and Road Initiative Space Information Corridor.<sup>202</sup> The CPEC helps strengthen ties between China and Pakistan so they can better combat their mutual enemy of India.<sup>203</sup> The Digital Silk Road, which was announced in 2015 as digital subset of BRI, "seeks to build a PRC-centric digital infrastructure, export industrial overcapacity, facilitate expansion

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<sup>198</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 111-112.

<sup>199</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2022, IV.

<sup>200</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Executive Summary and Recommendations of U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 27.

<sup>201</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2021, 21.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Executive Summary and Recommendations of U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 27.

of the PRC's technology corporations, and access large repositories of data." The Belt and Road Initiative Space Information Corridor, announced as a subset in 2016, "contributes to the PRC's goal to 'build China into a space power in all respects,' and promotes its 'strong and sustained economic and social development,' according to a 2016 White Paper. Perhaps the most important element of the "Space Information Corridor" is the PRC's *Beidou* satellite navigation system, which is paired with infrastructure around the globe and along [BRI]."<sup>204</sup>

Moreover, China has been making great strides in Africa. China is Africa's number one trading partner, cooperative creditor, and a highly important place of infrastructure investment. Chinese companies make up for about 12.5% of Africa's industrial exports. Digital infrastructure that was created by the Chinese is vital to communication throughout Africa. Concerningly for the Americans, Africa's and China's political, military, and security interactions are growing closer. If one makes sense of China's dealings with Africa, one can make sense of Xi Jinping's international goals. China's relationship with Africa is incredibly important to understanding Xi's goals. Xi Jinping is trying to make Chinese-African ties in his personal image, giving his strategy a more significant role to the CCP's policies.<sup>205</sup> This once again shows how China's rise has been accelerated by Xi himself. If an outsider were to praise China's new relationship with Africa and claim they are just trying to help develop Africa, they would be wrong. For clarity,

It is nonsense to claim it is motivated by altruism. China is ruthlessly self-interested. Although its mix of credit and construction has boosted growth, it has also fostered corruption and often propped up autocracies. Some Chinese firms mistreat African workers and harm ecosystems. Its diplomats work to block critical coverage in the media and dangle aid in return for support at the UN.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2021, 21.

<sup>205</sup> The Economist, "China in Africa: The Chinese-African Relationship is Important to Both Sides, but Also Unbalanced," *The Economist*, May 20, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/05/20/the-chinese-african-relationship-is-important-to-both-sides-but-also-unbalanced>.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

To round out the discussion on the BRI, this plan relates straight back to the previously mentioned practice of the Chinese looking back to their history for modern day strategies. Just like the Zhou Dynasty created tributary systems, the CCP is creating economic tributaries. Their strategy is simply, “We do not have to attack you because we own you.” They are creating vassal states beyond just the Indo-Pacific. The US has a global influence currently, the BRI is a way for the Chinese to replace that global influence. The following is a great map showing the BRI in the eastern hemisphere:<sup>207</sup>



Sources: Mercator Institute for China Studies; HKTDC Research; *The Economist*  
The Economist

<sup>207</sup> The Economist, “China in Africa: The Chinese-African Relationship is Important to Both Sides, but Also Unbalanced.”

## The United States' Response

After much assessment of Chinese economic and research espionage, theft, and aggression, it is necessary to show the specific ways in which the United States has responded and moved their view of China to a more hostile place. Regarding their World Trade Organization status as a developing nation, the United States House of Representatives in March of 2023 voted 415-0 to try to remove that status.<sup>208</sup> If one knows anything about US politics, a unanimous vote is almost never an occurrence showing true bipartisan support against China.

For economic aggression and illegal trading tactics, the US has stated that they “have also continued to make clear that the United States will no longer tolerate economic aggression or unfair trading practices.”<sup>209</sup> They stated that “economic security is national security” and that “the United States will no longer turn a blind eye to violations, cheating, or economic aggression.” They continued by stating, “For decades, the United States has allowed unfair trading practices to grow. Other countries have used dumping, discriminatory non-tariff barriers, forced technology transfers, non-economic capacity, industrial subsidies, and other support from governments and state-owned enterprises to gain economic advantages.”<sup>210</sup> Additionally, the US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade was created in June 2022.<sup>211</sup>

Regarding the BRI, in June of 2022, the Americans and the rest of the G7 countries started the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). The goal of the PGII can be described as follows:

Through the PGII, the United States and like-minded partners will emphasize high-standards and quality investments in resilient infrastructure that will drive job creation, safeguard against corruption, guarantee respect for workers’

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<sup>208</sup> Mychael Schnell, “House Unanimously Passes Bill to Work to Remove China's ‘Developing Country’ Label,” The Hill, The Hill, March 28, 2023.

<sup>209</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, 2017, I.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>211</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Executive Summary and Recommendations of U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 28.



organizations and collective bargaining as allowed by national law or similar mechanisms, support inclusive economic recovery, address risks of environmental degradation, promote robust cybersecurity, promote skills transfer, and protect American economic prosperity and national security. The PGII will also advance values-driven infrastructure development that is carried out in a transparent and sustainable manner — financially, environmentally, and socially — to lead to better outcomes for recipient countries and communities... The PGII will mobilize public and private resources to meet key infrastructure needs, while enhancing American competitiveness in international infrastructure development and creating good jobs at home and abroad.

It is also a whole-of-government approach and includes the following people: The Assistant to the President of National Security Affairs (APNSA), the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, Transportation, the Secretary of Energy the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Chief Executive Office of MCC, the CEO of DFC, the President of EXIM, the Director of the Trade and Development Agency (TDA).<sup>212</sup>

For Africa, the US has created the Build Back Better World (B3W) and the European Union has started the Global Gateway, a similar program; both of these are to counter China.<sup>213</sup> This shows the support across the Western world against China. The Americans have stated that they will align with African nations and continue “investing in civil society and strengthening long-standing political, economic, and cultural connections.” They stated they will help with “with dynamic and fast-growing African economies, even as we provide assistance to countries suffering from poor governance, economic distress, health, and food insecurity exacerbated by the pandemic.” They also indirectly call out China by stating that they will “help African nations

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<sup>212</sup> White House, *Memorandum on the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment*, (Washington, DC: White House, June 26, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/06/26/memorandum-on-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment/>.

<sup>213</sup> The Economist, “China in Africa: The Chinese-African Relationship is Important to Both Sides, but Also Unbalanced.”

combat the threats posed by climate change and violent extremism, and support their economic and political independence in the face of undue foreign influence.”<sup>214</sup>

In closing, the sixth reason why the United States has moved away from benign rhetoric and practices toward China is because of economic coercion, research espionage, theft, and aggression. This has been shown by the numerous examples listed and the reaction on the American side was shown by the numerous rhetorical and practical examples. The Chinese have been partaking in illegal economic practices for years. Their tactics are highly sophisticated. The U.S. decided it had tolerated enough economic coercion tactics from China, which helped to influence the shift in its position on China.

Some might say that the Americans have shifted to the side of warmongers. They might continue to say that China and the US are so economically interdependent that they would never go to war with each other, which was the dominant view for many decades. A lesson from history proves otherwise. In 1914, Europe was economically interdependent and a war broke out that devastated the entire world. There, as could happen with the US and China, politics overwhelmed economics. Economics was secondary to nationalism and politics. Relating back to realism: security is more important than prosperity. There are some countries that can also go to war and not take a large economic hit. This is another reason why the theory of peace due to economic interdependence is not valid. A small-scale war could be started by China in the South China Sea because that would not hurt their economy in a meaningful way. Furthermore, an economic downturn can cause a war. Signs show that China’s economy is beginning to decline. Invading Taiwan could give China access to their microchip empire and help their economy. Put simply, “it is possible for a country to fight a war against a rival with which it is economically

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<sup>214</sup> White House, *The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, (Washington, DC: White House, March 2021), 11.

interdependent, and not threaten its own prosperity.”<sup>215</sup> The next section will be the seventh reason why the United States has shifted their view of China. This section is complicated, and those complications will be discussed as the focus shifts onto the US’ response to China’s human rights abuses.

### **China’s Human Rights Abuses**

To the uninformed American citizen, China’s human rights abuses might be what they would place as the first reason the United States altered their opinion about China. Yet, once again, one should look at America’s history to discover a few realities. First, America’s human rights record is not one to boast about. Their treatment of Native Americans, African slaves, and later African-American citizens, Irish immigrants, Chinese immigrants, and Japanese people during World War II are some of the examples that show they have not always been a great example of human rights. These human rights issues often stemmed from racism, xenophobia, and, going along with the thread of this entire thesis, the guarantee of their sovereignty against those they perceived as a threat. This latter point takes priority over all other issues for a state.

Continuing, the US has engaged in benign ways with countries that have poor human rights records, one of them being China itself. The US has partnered with Saudi Arabia for fuel and defense agreements. Additionally, in 2010, Barack Obama restarted military ties with Indonesia and their special forces which has an infamous human rights record.<sup>216</sup> Obama also decided to not include anything about human rights in the Strategic Economic Dialogue with

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<sup>215</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 408-410.

<sup>216</sup> Phil Stewart, “U.S. Ends Ban on Ties with Indonesian Special Forces,” Reuters, Thomson Reuters, July 22, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-us-defence/u-s-ends-ban-on-ties-with-indonesian-special-forces-idUSTRE66L0PK20100722>.

China.<sup>217</sup> Even after the atrocious massacre at Tiananmen Square, America continued to cooperate with China.

All these facts considered, human rights did support the American switch, just not in the way the other six reasons did. The way Americans use human rights on the international stage can be explained as this: if a state that has human rights abuses is acting hostilely and truly threatening to the US, they will call out those human rights to garner support to fight against that state. To fully understand the US change in attitude toward China's human rights abuses, it is necessary to explain what some of those are.

To begin, China is a member of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations. They utilize this to support the CCP's values; this allows other states to excuse their human rights abuses for the purpose of national goals.<sup>218</sup> At a European Union-China meeting in April of 2022, the EU president referenced Europe's dark past of human rights abuses and said that they obligated their leaders to call out human rights abuses which includes those in China. In response, President Xi cited that China has even worse memories of human rights abuses than the West. He cited the following events: intrusion of colonial powers, treaties that forced China's economy to open, treaties that gave land away in the 19th and 20th centuries, racist laws banning people from China and their dogs from parks in European-run districts, and the Nanjing Massacre in 1937. He claimed that these events have caused China to have "strong feelings about human rights...and about foreigners who employ double standards to criticise other countries." China wants to create a global environment where states do not have to agree on every

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<sup>217</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 221.

<sup>218</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 145.

international rule; they claim this idea of congruence is a Western design.<sup>219</sup> Unfortunately for the United States, what Xi cited are all true events and shed light on the dark past of Western-Chinese relations. However, it seems Xi is stuck in the past. The West has the ability to highlight its wrongdoings throughout history and also promote human rights today. Xi seems to not be able to do this. He continues to violate human rights abuses without apology. Specifically, Xi Jinping and his predecessors have committed human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. They have also suppressed freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the ability to vote, and increased censorship. They also have created a brainwashing tactic through the use of an app on phones and a system of social credit. One recent human rights violation from China which has been swept under the rug is the treatment of Uyghur Muslims. The problems in Xinjiang, where an ethnic minority of Muslims called the Uyghurs live, started in 2009 after an initially peaceful protest. As a result of the protest, hundreds of people were killed by the CCP. Since then, it has become a “second Tibet,” and now, the area is occupied by Chinese paramilitary police. The government is trying to eliminate the Muslim religion like they do with Christianity and Falun Gong. It seems that China is catalyzing ethnic and religious hatred to convince other countries its rule in the area is needed.<sup>220</sup> The CCP also claims it is trying to stop independence movements from gaining momentum in the area. These claims can be seen from documents like the *Defense Policy of the People’s Republic of China* of 2010, *China’s Military Strategy* of 2015, and *China’s National Defense in the New Era* of 2019.

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<sup>219</sup> The Economist, “A New Order: China Wants to Change, or Break, a World Order Set by Others,” *The Economist*, October 10, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/10/10/china-wants-to-change-or-break-a-world-order-set-by-others>.

<sup>220</sup> Rebiya Kadeer, “China’s Second Tibet,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 3, 2012, [https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx?page\\_driver=searchBuilder\\_Search#/?&\\_suid=167574061573607949845069104211](https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx?page_driver=searchBuilder_Search#/?&_suid=167574061573607949845069104211).

Reports of human rights abuses in Xinjiang started in 2017. In 2018, there was a significant increase of reports about the introduction of reeducation camps in the area.<sup>221</sup> By 2019, at least one million were in concentration camps.<sup>222</sup> Reports from victims in the camps are arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, forced labor, and other abuses. Some of the people that were interviewed said they had been detained since 2016. China is obligated to follow international human rights laws since they are a state party. Here are the relevant treaties they have signed: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Continually, “China is bound by human rights norms accepted as constituting customary international law, notably with respect to the right to life, the prohibition of discrimination based on race, religion or sex, and the right to freedom of religion.”<sup>223</sup> Meanwhile, China has further initiated abuses against Muslims, destroying mosques and jailing poets and textbook editors. China’s diplomatic efforts have caused them to seem like less of a disruptor on the international stage than Russia, but a more dividing one.<sup>224</sup>

Within the concentration camps, prisoners must begin the day with raising the CCP flag, singing Communist Party songs, praising the party and Xi, and studying the Chinese language, history, and law. Uyghur families are forced to house loyal CCP members so they can be

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<sup>221</sup> U.N. Office of the High Commissioner, *OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China* (Geneva, Switzerland: U.N. Office of the High Commissioner, August 31, 2022), 1-3, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>222</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 107.

<sup>223</sup> U.N. Office of the High Commissioner, *OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China*, 1-3.

<sup>224</sup> The Economist, “A New Order: China Wants to Change, or Break, a World Order Set by Others.”

monitored in the reeducation process. Ethnic Han have been forcefully resettled in Xinjiang to try and change the Uyghur peoples' culture. Leaked documents by a member of the CCP show that the party has ordered the demolishing of all minority opposition, to put over one million people in concentration camps, and to carry out systematic brainwashing and cultural control. The documents also show speeches from within the CCP where Xi has stated to show "absolutely no mercy." The CCP monitors every village and they oversee political education as well as every monastery and religious center.<sup>225</sup>

Meanwhile in Tibet, atrocities in the region have been recorded for quite some time. In 2009, the *New York Times* interviewed the exiled Dalai Lama. He claimed that, "Today, the religion, culture, language and identity, which successive generations of Tibetans have considered more precious than their lives, are nearing extinction." He continued by "that the Chinese Communist Party had transformed Tibet into a 'hell on earth' and that the Chinese authorities regarded Tibetans as 'criminals deserving to be put to death.'" The Dalai Lama re-emphasizes that autonomy had been granted to Tibet by Mao and other high ranking CCP officials in 1954 and 1955. Regardless of these promises, the Dalai Lama said brutal campaigns have taken place since then. Also, the CCP began what they labeled as "patriotic re-education" and "strike hard" efforts that took place after last year's (2008) protests. The Dalai Lama claimed these attempts caused Tibetans to undergo literal "hell on earth."<sup>226</sup> Now, the CCP has the right to approve the next Dalai Lama.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 107-108.

<sup>226</sup> Edward Wong, "Dalai Lama Says China Has Turned Tibet Into a 'Hell on Earth,'" *New York Times*, March 10, 2009, [https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx?page\\_driver=searchBuilder\\_Search#/?&\\_suid=167502950240909511757995888186](https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx?page_driver=searchBuilder_Search#/?&_suid=167502950240909511757995888186).

<sup>227</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 108.

The CCP does not just suppress religious freedom in Xinjiang and Tibet, nor just Islam or Tibetan Buddhism. Bob Fu, founder of ChinaAid, was interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* and talked about the efforts by the CCP to suppress Christianity. When Fu and his wife started an independent Bible school in a Beijing suburb, they were jailed for two months. CCP agents tried to capture people who tried to get the word out. Some are sent to prisons for what the CCP calls “leaking intelligence to overseas organizations.” If an escapee shows a picture of a destroyed church, that could mean a three-year sentence in jail. Bob Fu revealed to the *Wall Street Journal* a brutal story about forcing a pastor’s wife to get an abortion. There were 80 other women in the hospital for the same reason. He also talked about a time where Christians had taken in 30 homeless children in Tibet, and the CCP authorities arrested them and made the children go back to the streets. This shows the Chinese would rather the children be homeless than be taken care of by Christians. At the time of the interview, Fu had begged the Obama administration to help but had been ignored. The Bush administration had provided top Chinese human rights lawyers on three different occasions.<sup>228</sup> The Catholic and Protestant churches now pose a threat to Xi and the CCP. Xi has tried to control and intimidate the Church, but to no avail. Thus, Xi has brought back the Confucian moral code and increased advertisement of Daoism and Buddhism as “Chinese” alternatives to “foreign belief systems.”<sup>229</sup>

Moving to the more recent unfortunate events in Hong Kong, China has now practically taken control of their government. Protests were first over a law that would allow local authorities to take criminals from Hong Kong and try them on the mainland if they were wanted there.<sup>230</sup> The PRC had condemned democratic uprisings in the past, however, the scale of the

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<sup>228</sup> Mary Kissel, “The Weekend Interview with Bob Fu: The Pastor of China’s Underground Railroad,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 1, 2012, [https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx#!?&\\_suid=168090295968907719392754449119](https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx#!?&_suid=168090295968907719392754449119).

<sup>229</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 109.

<sup>230</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 108.



2019 Hong Kong protests was never seen before, even in comparison to the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong in 2014 or the Arab Spring protests in 2011.<sup>231</sup> Something that is more concerning to the United States is that the CCP has used a rallying tactic on the mainland to get the population to go against the people of Hong Kong. Amidst the protests, the CCP left their usual censorship tactics. It instead showcased the news and made it a part of public discussion. It tried to attract attention rather than cover up the reality.<sup>232</sup> State-run media used two tactics to help condemn Hong Kong publicly rather than censor the events. They can *demobilize* “the masses by showing off the state’s repressive capacity.” They can also *rally* “the masses by framing the protests as a foreign-backed threat to national sovereignty and social stability.” They have used these tactics before, however, this level of coverage by the Chinese media on pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong is unprecedented which has been under PRC rule since 1997. During the 2014 “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong, Chinese citizens had minimal access to sources about what was happening.<sup>233</sup> This new tactic can be tied back to Xi’s nationalist appeal to the populace which was discussed earlier.

Chinese people also have little to no freedom of speech. Mao Yushi is a great example of this. In 2012, he was named CATO Institute’s Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty. He is one of the most prominent advocates for individual rights and free markets. He supports an open and transparent political system and was a trailblazer for civil society and freedom. He faced severe punishment, exile, and almost starvation because of his statements that have been critical of a command-based economy and society. He and his family had all their property taken

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<sup>231</sup> Shiqi Ma and Jessica Chen Weiss, “Strong State or Vulnerable Homeland: How Chinese State Media Sought to Combat Democratic Diffusion during the 2019 Hong Kong Protests,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 139 (2023): 106, DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2022.2052442.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 106-107.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

during the Cultural Revolution. In 2011, he angered some Chinese people for his article titled “Returning Mao Zedong to Human Form.” This had a response where people called for his prosecution and execution. Because of this essay, there were 50,000 communist party members who signed a petition calling for his imprisonment because of treason. After the article was available for the public, his students had to surround him to protect him from zealots and the government did not stand up for him.<sup>234</sup> In 2017, as a result of his continued support for a free state, his think tank’s website was shut down.<sup>235</sup> Regarding the aforementioned daily app and social credit system, these are other forms of a violation of the freedom of speech. The app, whose name means “Study Strong Country” requires people to sign in with their cell phone number and actual name and read daily articles, comment daily, and take multiple-choice tests about the CCP’s “virtues and wise policies.” The social credit system is a point-based system that determines eligibility for almost all social services like loans, access to the internet, government employment, education, insurance, and transportation.<sup>236</sup>

The Chinese people also cannot vote in elections. This process to democracy began in the 1990’s at the local level. However, it did not move past that. This has hurt Chinese citizens in two ways. First, they cannot have a say in their government past the small local level. Second, it has given the appearance of change to the outside world.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, the judiciary is not independent of party control. The judiciary has not become independent and still remains under the control of the CCP.<sup>238</sup> Hu Jintao stated this in a speech in 2007 to the Central Party School—in addition to the entire Politburo Standing Committee, a very rare appearance—which is in

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<sup>234</sup> CATO Institute, *The Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty*, Washington, DC: CATO Institute, 2012, <https://www.cato.org/friedman-prize/mao-yushi>, Accessed January 29, 2023.

<sup>235</sup> Ian Vásquez, *China Shuts Down Website of Mao Yushi, Friedman Prize Winner*, Washington, DC: CATO Institute, January 24, 2017, <https://www.cato.org/blog/china-shuts-down-website-mao-yushi-friedman-prize-winner>.

<sup>236</sup> McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 106.

<sup>237</sup> Mann, *The China Fantasy*, 19.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

charge of the doctrine, strategy, and planning for the CCP: “We must uphold the party’s leadership, make the people the masters of the country, rule the country by law, and bring the three into organic harmony; and we must continue to push forward the self-improvement and self-development of our socialist political system.” Importantly, he said, “by law” not “under the law,” or that the CCP would follow the law. The CCP announced that judges and the court system were to not be independent and they were to remain under party control.<sup>239</sup> Around 2007, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee who was in charge of internal security and the judiciary, Luo Gan, stated in a speech, “There is no question about where legal departments should stand. The correct political stand is where the party stands.” He continued by saying, “All law enforcement activities should be led by the party.” He also stated, “All reform measures should be conducive to the socialist system and the strengthening of the party leadership.” “Luo warned that ‘enemy forces’ were seeking to use China’s courts and legal system to ‘divide our country.’”<sup>240</sup>

To round out the discussion of China’s human rights abuses, it is appropriate to discuss how the United States has made their switch in relation to these actions taken by China. The first action in regard to Xinjiang was the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020. This law “impose[d] sanctions on foreign individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses in China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region and requires various reports on the topic.”<sup>241</sup> This law was followed by another bill that would stop “imports from China’s Xinjiang region unless businesses can prove they were produced without forced labor.”<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, when the 2022

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 114-115.

<sup>241</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, S.3744, 116th Cong. § 2 (2020).

<sup>242</sup> Aamer Madhani, “U.S. Imposes Sanctions on China Over Human Rights Abuses of Uighurs,” PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, December 16, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/u-s-imposes-sanctions-on-china-over-human-rights-abuses-of-uighurs>.

Winter Olympics that were to be played in Beijing were approaching, the US announced a diplomatic boycott.<sup>243</sup>

As we consider the US' criticism of China's recent violations, laws, and announcements, it is clear that the US has only highlighted the human rights abuses of China *after* it had maligned China. If China had not shown increasing hostility toward the US, perhaps they would not have pointed them out. However, now that China has, the US has emphasized the human rights abuses that, in reality, have been happening for years. This supports the hypothesis that the US uses human rights abuses as a rallying tactic for their allies against China, giving a moral cause to previous economic, political, and national motivations.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explain why the United States of America had switched its view of the People's Republic of China from an economic partner to an international threat. The author hypothesized there were seven main reasons. These reasons were (1) the American capacity to make the switch, (2) the American realization that they must take a realist approach to international affairs in order to maintain hegemony, (3) the rise of Xi Jinping, (4) the China debate in the US, (5) national security concerns taking precedence over US business interests, (6) PRC economic and research espionage, theft, and aggression, and (7) human rights abuses. After much research, it is clear that these reasons have not only proven to be true, but to be highly complicated motivations behind both countries. It took the United States years to make a comprehensive governmental switch. The intelligence community switched in the mid-1990's,

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<sup>243</sup> Allie Malloy and Kate Sullivan, "White House Announces US Diplomatic Boycott of 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing," CNN, Cable News Network, December 6, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/06/politics/us-diplomatic-boycott-winter-olympics/index.html>.

the military around 2008, and the law makers around 2011. However, the switch finally occurred, and the relationship between the US and China has enormously changed. Now, the relationship between the two countries is at one of the worst points it has ever at. War between them does not seem impossible, and some may even say likely.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank a number of people that helped contribute to this thesis. First, my friend Corinne Kamien whose editing contributions were greatly appreciated. Secondly, to Scott Gilpatric, a professor at the University of Tennessee—Knoxville, who helped give me a better understanding of the economics side of China and the economic relationship between China and the US. Third, to Krista Wiegand, who is another professor at the University of Tennessee—Knoxville and was my advisor for this thesis. Finally, to the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy for giving me the chance to write a thesis.

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