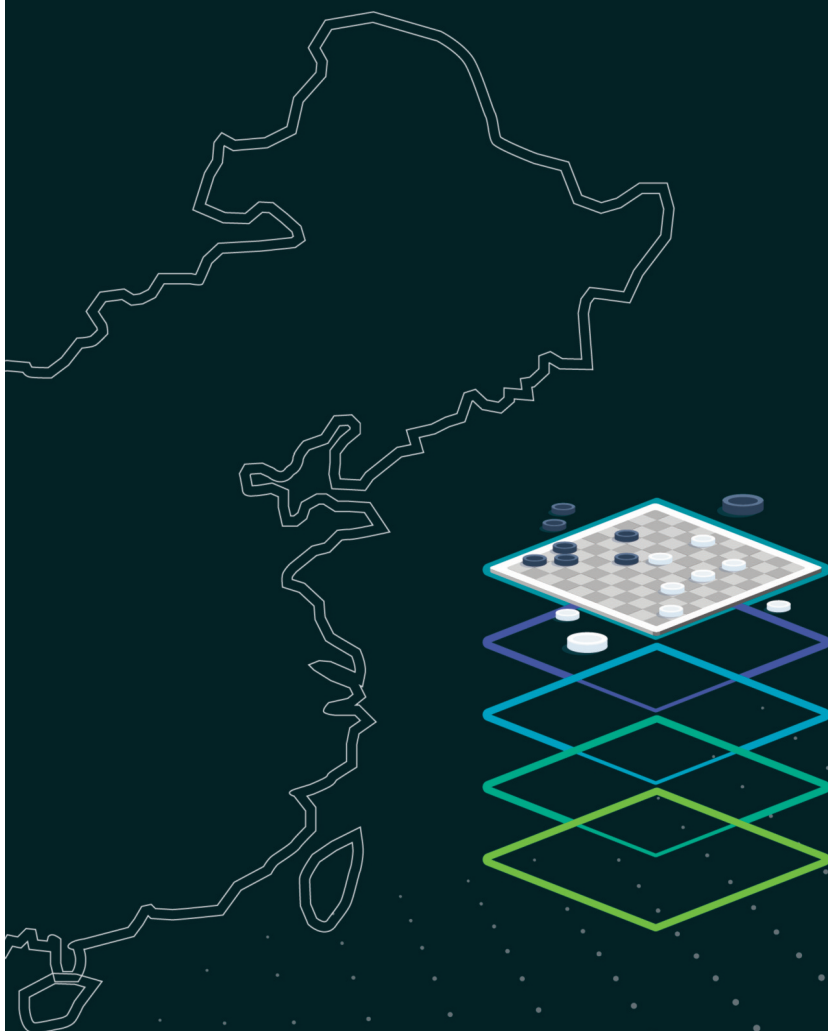


A HESITANT HEGEMON: LAYERS OF CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY SECURITY POLICY

Nenad Stekić





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**A HESITANT HEGEMON:
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SECURITY POLICY**

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*To my beloved Mila, Mirjana,
Marija, Milijana, and Zoran*

PREFACE

The beginning of the third decade of this century has been significantly impacted by the global pandemic caused by the coronavirus. The profound effects of this crisis have accelerated the course of world politics, leading to a transformed global landscape. Amidst these complex processes, China has emerged as a prominent player; aspiring to become a global superpower in the medium term. The collapse of unilateralism has further complicated global security, prompting a comprehensive analysis of its various components.

The monograph “A Hesitant Hegemon: Layers of China’s Contemporary Security Policy”, aims to systematise the new post-pandemic determinations of the People’s Republic of China in the field of security policy. This book offers a unique analysis of the layers of China’s security policy, providing insights into the contemporary challenges it faces. Situated within the domain of security sciences, this book comprises five thematic chapters that guide the reader through the post-pandemic landscape and complex challenges shaping China’s security policy.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Institute of International Politics and Economics for recognising the importance of this topic and for their support in publishing this book. I hold the view that it constitutes a significant addition to the academic portfolio of this institution, which stands as one of the oldest state scientific establishments dedicated to the study of international relations in this part of Europe. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge that this monograph was written and published within the research project “Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2023”, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia. I am indebted to my esteemed colleagues, Dr. Ivona Lađevac and Dr. Vladimir Trapara, for their invaluable assistance in refining the initial research idea and advising me on how to conduct the study with rigour and academic precision.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the reviewers of this manuscript, Prof. Dr. Branislav Đorđević, Director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics; Prof. Dr. Miroslav Mladenović, Full Professor, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Security Studies; and Prof. Dr. Toni Mileski, Full Professor, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute for Security, Defence and Peace, for their insightful feedback and guidance in improving the previous versions of the manuscript.

I am deeply grateful for the invaluable contributions and unwavering support of my esteemed colleagues from the Institute's Regional Centre "Belt and Road". I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Katarina Zakić, Head of the Centre; Dr. Aleksandar Mitić, Research Fellow; and Jovana Nikolić, Research Assistant. Our collaboration is instrumental, and I eagerly anticipate our future endeavours and the continued success of our joint initiatives.

It is my aspiration that this monograph will serve as a catalyst for fresh perspectives, the enlargement of current knowledge, and the enhancement of the scholarly foundation in the domains of Security Studies and Chinese Studies. I anticipate that it will facilitate readers' comprehension of contemporary China and the consequential role this nation is poised to play on the global stage in the impending future, ultimately benefiting humanity as a whole.

In Belgrade,
May 2023

Dr. Nenad Stekić
Research Fellow

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The book titled “A Hesitant Hegemon: Layers of China’s Contemporary Security Policy” delves into the intricate dynamics of China’s role in international relations, particularly its security policy in the post-pandemic era. It addresses three core questions: Is the People’s Republic of China (PRC) a hesitant hegemon in global affairs? What variables underlie this claim? Can the seemingly contradictory term “hesitant hegemon” aptly describe China’s pursuit of global influence?

Through a multidimensional analysis, the book explores China’s evolving security policy by examining its layers, which encompass spatial-hierarchical, functional, and institutional dimensions. This innovative approach reveals China’s complex decision-making process and the factors influencing its behaviour on the global stage. The book’s central thesis posits that China, despite its superpower status, remains hesitant to assert complete dominance across various domains. This hesitation is key to understanding China’s position within the evolving global security landscape. The analysis seeks to uncover the reasons behind China’s hesitancy and provide substantiated insights into its assertiveness, or lack thereof. Structured into five thematic chapters, the book offers a comprehensive study of China’s security policy.

Chapter I: Theoretical Foundations and Grand Strategy

The first chapter explores the theoretical underpinnings of China’s global ascent and its evolving security policy. It introduces the concept of sequencing China’s security policy layers, encompassing the hierarchical, functional, and institutional dimensions. The chapter examines China’s peaceful development as a response to global security challenges and places it within the context of grand strategy, using the Hegemonic Stability Theory. The role of historical Chinese political thought and its influence on current policy are also examined.

Chapter II: Evolution of China’s Grand Strategy

This chapter traces the evolution of China’s global agenda through its four main grand strategies. It discusses China’s philosophical foundations, emphasising Confucianism and Taoism and their impact on its worldview.

The chapter delves into each Grand Strategy period, from internal consolidation to economic reforms and proactive global engagement. It also anticipates the potential Fifth Grand Strategy in the post-pandemic era.

Chapter III: Layers of China's Security Policy

Chapter III dissects China's contemporary security policy through its layers, categorising them as spatial-hierarchical, functional, and institutional. Spatial layers involve China's regional security approaches, such as its East Asian Policy and the Belt and Road Initiative's security component. Functional layers examine China's responses to international crises, including the Indo-Pacific security context, its role in mediating conflicts, technological advancements, and the arms trade. Institutional layers delve into China's decision-making structure and its engagement in international organisations.

Chapter IV: The US Perspective on China's Security Policy

This chapter focuses on the Pentagon's perspective on China's security policy, highlighting areas of concern and potential conflict. It analyses the evolution of the US perception of China's global rise and its implications for international security. The chapter also explores China's perception of the United States, as evidenced by its published documents critiquing American foreign and security policies.

Chapter V: Scenarios for China's Future

The concluding chapter outlines three potential scenarios for China's future assertiveness: maintaining the status quo, evolving into a more assertive global power, or even becoming a unipolar power akin to the United States. It draws on insights from the previous chapters to develop these scenarios and provides a synthesised view of the likely trajectory of China's security policy.

Innovative in its approach, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of China's security policy, delving into various layers to understand its motivations and complexities. It offers valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and the general public seeking to comprehend China's evolving role in the global order. The book's rigorous research methodology, incorporation of primary sources, and emphasis on theoretical frameworks contribute to its significance in the fields of international relations and Chinese Studies.

摘要:

《犹豫的霸主：中国当代安全政策的层面》本书深入探讨了中国在国际关系中的复杂动态，尤其是其在后疫情时代的安全政策。该书探讨了三个核心问题：中华人民共和国在全球事务中是一个犹豫的霸主吗？这种主张的基础是什么？“犹豫的霸主”这个似乎矛盾的术语是否能够准确描述中国对全球影响力的追求？

本书通过多维分析，从三个层面（空间-层次、功能和制度层面）来探索中国不断演变的安全政策。这种创新性的方法揭示了中国复杂的决策过程以及影响其在全球舞台上行为的因素。本书的核心论点是：尽管中国拥有超级大国的地位，但其仍然犹豫是否在各个领域确立完全的主导地位。这种犹豫是理解中国在不断变化的全球安全格局中的位置的关键。本书力图揭示中国犹豫不决背后的原因，并，就其自信或缺乏自信提出切实的见解。本书分为五章，对中国安全政策进行了全面研究。

第一章：理论基础与大战略

本章探讨了中国全球崛起及其安全政策演变的理论基础，引入了中国安全政策层面排序的概念，包括层次、功能和制度层面。本章运用霸权稳定理论，探讨了在大战略背景下，作为对全球安全挑战回应的中国和平发展。还探讨了中国历史上政治思想的作用及其对当前政策的影响。

第二章：中国大战略的演变

本章通过中国的四个主要大战略，追溯了中国全球议程的演变。探讨了中国的哲学基础，强调儒家思想和道家思想，以及它们对中国世界观的影响。本章还从内部整合到经济改革和积极参与全球事务方面，深入探讨了每个时期的大战略。还预测了后疫情时代的潜在第五个大战略。

第三章：中国安全政策的层面

本章从层面上剖析了中国当代安全政策，将其分为空间-层次层面、功能层面和制度层面。空间层面涉及中国的区域安全策略，如东亚政策和一带一路倡议中有关安全的内容。功能层面考察了中国对国际危机的反应，包括在印度-太平洋安全问题中其调解冲突的作用、技术进步和军火贸易等。制度层面深入探讨了中国的决策结构以及其在国际组织中的参与情况。

第四章：美国对中国安全政策的看法

本章聚焦于五角大楼对中国安全政策的看法，特别强调了关注的领域和潜在冲突。分析了美国对中国全球崛起看法的演变以及对国际安全的影响。本章还探讨了美国对中国的看法，以其公开发表的批评美国外交和安全政策的文件佐证。

第五章：中国未来的情况

最后一章总结性地概述了中国未来自信的三种可能情况：维持现状，发展成为更自信的全球大国，或者甚至成为类似于美国的单极大国。本章结合前几章的观点，提出了这些设想，并对中国安全政策的可能轨迹提出了综合看法。本书方法新颖，对中国的安全政策进行了全面分析，从各个层面深入了解其动机和复杂性，为学者、决策者和公众理解中国在全球秩序中不断演变的角色提供了宝贵的见解。本书研究方法严谨，结合原始资料，并强调理论框架，使其在国际关系和中国研究领域具有重要意义。

РЕЗИМЕ

Књига “Хегемон који оклева: слојеви савремене безбедносне политике Кине” залази у домен комплексне и динамичне улоге Кине у међународним односима, посебно њене безбедносне политике у пост-пандемијској ери. Монографија пружа одговор на три суштинска питања: Да ли је Народна Република Кина хегемон који оклева у глобалним пословима? Који варијабле леже у основи ове тврдње? Да ли синтагма “хегемон који оклева” може адекватно да опише потрагу за глобалним утицајем Кине? Кроз вишедимензионалну анализу, књига истражује еволуцију безбедносне политике ове суперсиле у настанку кроз њене слојеве који обухватају просторно-хијерархијске, функционалне и институционалне димензије. Овакав иновативни приступ укључује и комплексан процес одлучивања унутар НР Кине, као и факторе који утичу на њено понашање на глобалној сцени.

Централна теза монографије претпоставља да Кина, упркос свом статусу суперсиле, још увек оклева у испољавању асертивности своје безбедносне и спољне политике. Таква „оклевајућа“ позиција кључна је за разумевање улоге Кине у променљивом глобалном безбедносном окружењу. Књига настоји да укаже на разлоге због којих Кина још увек оклева и обезбеђује образложене увиде у њену асертивност и одсуство исте. Организована у пет тематских поглавља, књига нуди свеобухватно проучавање безбедносне политике савремене Кине.

Поглавље I: Теоријске основе и Велика стратегија

Прво поглавље истражује теоријске основе глобалног успона Кине и њене све асертивније безбедносне политике. Оно уводи појам секвенцирања слојева безбедносне политике, који према становишту аутора монографије, у случају Кине обухвата просторно-хијерархијске, функционалне и институционалне димензије. Поглавље додатно истражује мирољубиви развој Кине као одговор на глобалне безбедносне изазове и ставља га у контекст Велике стратегије користећи теорију хегемонске стабилности. Улога историјске кинеске политичке мисли и њен утицај на текућу политику такође су предмет овог поглавља.

Поглавље II: Еволуција кинеске Велике стратегије

Ово поглавље прати еволуцију глобалног разбоја кинеске Велике стратегије кроз четири главне епохе. У поглављу се разматрају филозофске основе Велике стратегије, са акцентом на конфуцијанизам и таоизам, и њихов утицај на начин на који Кина третира систем међународних односа у модерном добу. Поглавље истражује четири периода Велике стратегије, од унутрашње свеукупне друштвене консолидације до економских реформи и проактивног глобалног учешћа Кине у глобалној политици. Такође предвиђа потенцијалну пету Велику стратегију у пост-пандемијској ери.

Поглавље III: Слојеви кинеске безбедносне политике

Треће поглавље разлаже савремену безбедносну политику Кине на слојеве, категоризујући их као просторно-хијерархијске, функционалне и институционалне. Просторни слојеви обухватају регионалне приступе безбедности које савремени Пекинг имплементира, као што су њена политика у источној Азији, кинеска арктичка политика, безбедносна политика Кине у региону Персијског Залива, као и безбедносна компонента Иницијативе „Појас и пут“. Функционални слојеви истражују реакције Кине на међународне кризе, укључујући безбедност Индо-Пацифика и њену улогу у пословима међународне медијације. Институционални слојеви укључују структурну анализу одлучивања НР Кине и њено учешће у међународним организацијама.

Поглавље IV: Перцепције САД о безбедносној политици Кине

Ово поглавље се фокусира на нивое перцепције Пентагона о безбедносној политици Кине, истичући области „забринутости“ и потенцијалног појачавања антагонизама између две државе. Оно анализира еволуцију америчке перцепције о глобалном расту Кинеске народноослободилачке армије, њене војне технологије и све израженије асертивности у војним пословима, као и њеним последицама за међународну безбедност. Поглавље такође истражује перцепцију Кине о месту САД у комплексној безбедносној архитектури савремених међународних односа, као што се види из објављених докумената који критикују многе политике усвојене од највиших органа власти САД.

Поглавље V: Сценарији за будућност Кине

Закључно поглавље ове монографије описује три потенцијална сценарија за будућу одлучност Кине: одржавање *statusa quo*, затим развијање ка снажнијој и одлучнијој светској сили или чак заузимање статуса униполарне силе сличне САД. Аутор укључује увиде из претходних поглавља како би развио ове сценарије и нуди синтетизован поглед на вероватну трајекторију развоја безбедносне политике Кине у наредној деценији.

Иновативна у свом приступу, ова књига пружа комплетну анализу савремене безбедносне политике Кине, истражујући различите слојеве зарад разумевања мотива, као и комплексног процеса који стоји иза њеног усвајања. Ова књига пружа вредне увиде за научнике, општу јавност, те креаторе политика који желе да унапреде своје знање о еволутивној размери и месту Кине у новом мултилатералном светском поретку. Ригорозна методологија истраживања, укључивање основних извора података у анализу, као и акценат на теоријском оквиру, доприносе њеном значају у области међународних односа и, уопште, кинеским студијама.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	– Asian Development Bank
ADIZ	– Air Defence Identification Zone
ASEAN	– Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BPD	– Barrels per day (energy measure)
BRI	– Belt and Road Initiative
CEE	– Central and Eastern Europe
CEEC	– Central and Eastern Europe Cooperation (mechanism with the PR China)
CIA	– Central Intelligence Agency (of the US)
CMC	– Central Military Commission (of both the PR China and the Communist Party)
CNP	– Comprehensive National Power
CNSC	– The National Security Commission (of the CCP)
COVID-19	– Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPC	– Communist Party of China
CPEC	– China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
EIA	– (US) Energy Information Administration
EU	– European Union
FP	– Foreign Policy
GCC	– Gulf Cooperation Council
GCI	– Global Civilizational Initiative
GDI	– Global Development Initiative
GS	– Grand Strategy (of China)
GSI	– Global Security Initiative
HST	– Hegemonic Stability Theory
IR	– International Relations
MENA	– Middle East and Northern Africa

MFA PRC	– Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China
MOD PRC	– Ministry of Defence of the People’s Republic of China
NPC	– National People’s Congress
NSR	– Northern Sea Route
NSS	– National Security Strategy (US)
OBOR	– One Belt, One Road (policy)
PLA	– People’s Liberation Army
PLAN	– People’s Liberation Army Navy
PRC	– People’s Republic of China
RMB	– Renminbi, PR China’s national currency
SCO	– Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
US	– United States of America
USSR	– Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	– Weapons of Mass Destruction

Notes on the transliteration of Chinese language characters, names, and terms

For Chinese, the Pinyin system with tone marks applies. To highlight certain concepts, ideas, or policies, such as “和平崛起-Hépíng juéqǐ” (policy of peaceful rise), the author will provide the Chinese characters in parentheses followed by the corresponding pinyin.

Chinese personal names will be presented in Chinese format, with the surname appearing before the given name. Except for Chinese classical thinkers such as Confucius (孔子) or Sun Tzu (孙子), whose names will be displayed in Chinese characters, other Chinese names and surnames will be transliterated into the Latin alphabet without tone diacritics, for instance “Hu Jintao”. The same logic applies for the names of Chinese cities, regions, and provinces: “Hangzhou”.

Institutional names such as the Communist Party of China, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Military Commission, and others will be referred to in English without citing the original Chinese names, as they are commonly used in global discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Is the People's Republic of China (the PR China or the PRC) a hesitant hegemon¹ in international relations, and if so, what variables lie behind such a claim? Can the antinomic phrase "hesitant hegemon" become logically correct in describing China's pursuit of the throne of the international system? To what extent can theoretical premises introduced several decades ago explain the current state of affairs related to Chinese Studies? The corpus of literature on China's foreign and security policies is vast. Suffice it to say that the number of think tanks, institutes, NGOs, consultancies, and news agents devoted to China's recent foreign policy moves is on the rise. Major international academic publishing companies are investing their efforts in advancing their series with monographs that address pressing issues related to China's behaviour within the contemporary international system.

The rapid growth of China in various domains of social life serves as an inspiration to numerous academic authors and the global political community. Typically, their interests lie in China's economic policies both domestically and abroad, its foreign policy initiatives, technological advancements, the nature and effectiveness of the political system, the role and influence of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the contemporary world, the future of the Yuan in international trade, and some domestic political challenges, including the Taiwan issue, while, of course, most attempts to analyse contemporary China's security domain refer to the ongoing process that involves resolving its dispute with Taiwan. Rapid changes occurring in international politics in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the academic scrutiny of various issues concerning China, particularly its security agenda in a potentially new world order, which is being analysed on a larger scale than ever before.

¹ When applied to China's security policy, understanding its aspirations provides valuable insights into its foreign policy motivations and strategic behaviour. China's rise as a potential regional or global hegemon prompts scholars to examine its actions and policies through the lens of hegemonic theory, enabling a more nuanced analysis of its foreign policy objectives. Therefore, using the term "hegemon" or "hegemonic" in this context is a scholarly endeavour to enhance comprehension and does not presuppose a negative or pejorative evaluation of China's security policies.

The book *A Hesitant Hegemon: Layers of China's Contemporary Security Policy* aims to address the three questions posed earlier in this text, reflecting the author's efforts to offer a valid academic analysis of the security policy of the PR China in the post-pandemic period. The monograph's central premise asserts the thesis that a rising superpower, China, still hesitates (2023) to assert hegemony across all domains of power. This book's title highlights hesitance as a crucial factor for comprehending China's present-day status in the intricate structure of changing global security and the new roles China takes within it. The monograph questions why China is a *hesitant* hegemon and what factors influence its reluctance to express a more assertive security policy. It aims to provide substantiated and scientifically grounded answers to these questions, as it offers a range of explanations and arguments to investigate China's position in global competition and understand the components of China's hesitancy through a thorough analysis of its contemporary security policy across various domains.

Hence, the book deals with the topic of international relations, with a particular focus on the political level of the emerging superpower's security policy. In this sense, the thematic area of the monograph is situated in the discipline of international relations, more specifically in Security Studies. Studying the layers of China's security policy, the monograph proposes a novel approach to policy analysis through the sequencing of China's security policy layers for the sake of a more adequate understanding of the patterns of foreign policy action of this state in the future. Furthermore, it represents the outcome of a multi-year scientific study that delves into the organisation and structure of the decision-making system in the PR China.

Additionally, the study examines the country's foreign policy preferences in relation to various objects on the international political agenda. While primarily intended for academic purposes, the monograph can also serve as a guide for the general reading public, providing them with a unique Sino-centric perspective on understanding the world order. This perspective offers valuable insights into China's future role in the world, making it an important resource beyond academic circles.

The manuscript is organised into five thematic chapters, aiming to unravel the complexities of modern China's security policy in a world undergoing rapid change. The structure of the international system, which is experiencing its own decoupling in the year 2023, serves as the independent variable for this research, situated at the cross-section of the current situation. In addition to this introduction, the book proceeds with

five main chapters, as stated, that analyse the various aspects of China's foreign policy preferences and their global implementation.

Chapter I commences with a theoretical debate on the changing strategic narrative of China's global political rise and its significant role in the politics and security spheres following its economic dominance. It introduces the novel idea of sequencing contemporary China's security policy through layers and examines which layer of security policy is most susceptible to assertiveness at the international level. The initial argument posits that China is becoming more prone, yet still hesitant, to assertiveness in foreign policy as a response to politico-security actions taken by the United States, which aim to contain China's growth. The chapter explores the analytical revival of China's peaceful growth as a new relevant variable in the domain of international security.

Furthermore, this chapter outlines fundamental variables and factors that will be employed in the analytical segment of the monograph, recognising the means by which China has promoted peaceful development from the inception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the year 2023.

In addition, this chapter situates the theoretical research framework within the analytical sphere of the notion of the Grand Strategy (GS). It examines the distinct characteristics of the Grand Strategy concept and scrutinises several periods that have necessitated the formulation of China's latest, the Fifth Grand Strategy, which the author posits is currently being developed in the post-pandemic era. It also introduces the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) as a valid conceptual and theoretical foundation for examining Chinese expansion within the context of the present-day contest for global dominance, in conjunction with the discourse on the nexus between security policy and the concept of the Grand Strategy.

To enhance the theoretical framework of the study, the author incorporates some of the perspectives from the Chinese School of Political Thought and International Relations, drawing from both contemporary times and historical traditions passed down by thinkers such as Confucius, Lao Ze, or China's most prominent new-age political leaders: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. This chapter also seeks to answer the question of whether Sino-centric foreign and security policies are one and the same. It explores the relationship between security policy and the Grand Strategy, between national and international security, as well as concepts such as *otherness* in international relations, decoupling, and the new focal point of global security, *locus*. In addition, the chapter

describes the main methods used throughout the book, as well as the spatial and temporal domains, while acknowledging the issue of data accuracy. The central part of the methodology component of this chapter focuses on the sequencing of China's security policy and proposes three groups of layers and sublayers that will be taken into analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of some epistemological limitations of this monograph.

Chapter II focuses on the evolution of the Chinese Global Agenda, exploring its philosophical foundations and examining the four GS that have shaped China's role in the modern world. It also delves into the different periods of China's GS evolution and concludes with a discussion on the potential Fifth Grand Strategy in the post-pandemic era. The chapter begins by digging into the philosophical foundations of China's global agenda. It highlights the importance of two tails of traditional Chinese philosophy, Confucianism and Taoism, in shaping the country's worldview and approach to international relations. These philosophical principles, with their emphasis on harmony, balance, and stability, have significantly influenced China's Grand Strategies throughout history.

The chapter then proceeds into the four Grand Strategies that have characterised China's Global Agenda. It explores how China, as the “*hé*” (*hé*) or harmonious power, aims to promote a world order based on cooperation, inclusivity, and mutual benefit. The first period of China's GS, from 1949 to 1976, was marked by China's focus on internal consolidation and ideological confrontation with the West. The second GS period, spanning from 1978 to 1989, witnessed China's shift towards economic reforms and opening up to the global market. During this period, China pursued a strategy of peaceful development and sought to enhance its economic power while maintaining a low-profile presence in international affairs. The third GS period, from 1990 to 2003, saw China adopt a more active and assertive role in global affairs. It sought to strengthen its regional influence and actively engage in international organisations. China's rise as an economic powerhouse and its growing assertiveness in territorial disputes were prominent features of this period.

The fourth GS period, spanning from 2003 to 2020, witnessed China's pursuit of a more comprehensive and proactive global agenda. It aimed to enhance its soft power, expand its economic influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, and promote a greater role in shaping global governance. Towards the end of the chapter, the book looks ahead to the potential fifth GS period for China in the post-pandemic era. It examines the

challenges and opportunities that arise as China seeks to navigate a changing global landscape and respond to emerging global issues. The chapter, thus, provides insights into how China's Grand Strategy may evolve in response to the ongoing shifts in global dynamics, technological advancements, and geopolitical considerations.

The central part of the book is Chapter III, which presents the specifics of China's contemporary security policy layers. The author makes an analytical distinction between three subgroups of such layers: *spatial-hierarchical*, *functional*, and *institutional*, each aiming to understand the macro level of Chinese assertiveness in response to a crisis. First, the chapter depicts the *spatial-hierarchical* layers, which stand for two sub-levels of China's security policy: hierarchical, which involves global China's agenda, its national security concerns, and human security, each of which contributes to its externalisation of its security policy. Such a decision was made to follow the vertical levels of security and the distinction between individual and national security—an analytical approach as suggested by the most notable scholars in this area (Buzan, 1983).

A *spatial* group of sub-layers presents regionally tailored approaches of China's security policy, namely its East Asian Policy, the security component of the BRI, its newest mediation efforts in the Persian Gulf, the recent evolution of its Arctic policy, China's Space Programme, as well as the specifics of other regions, namely East Africa and Oceania. It casts an argument that the regionally tailored foreign policy of China differs from the usually accepted practice of "aligning policy tools" to achieve immediate or short-term goals. This section of the chapter shows how regional security and even economic events impact China's overall security preferences, as well as what China's main security interests are in significant regions throughout the world in the post-pandemic political setting.

The chapter further proceeds with the second group of layers of China's security policy: *functional*. It most directly tests China's readiness and efficiency of its activities in the most neuralgic points of the world, such as its containment activities, including its responses to the Indo-Pacific *locus* of global security, its role in mediating the ongoing (April 2023) Ukraine's conflict, its involvement in the Afghan security vacuum after the US military withdrawal, its soft power projections, its focus on tech, AI, and semiconductors, and its arms trade and foreign aid policies. A starting point is that China's response to the Indo-Pacific *locus* will play a crucial role in the evolution of global security in the coming years. As the Indo-Pacific

region has emerged as a key geopolitical theatre in recent years, with China seeking to expand its influence in the area, countries like the United States, Japan, South Korea, and India have formed strategic partnerships to counter China's influence in the region. Further, this group of layers explores China's role in mediating the conflict in Ukraine as another important and relatively new component of its security policy. While China has largely remained neutral in the conflict, it has worked to maintain stable relations with both Ukraine and Russia, both of which partially recognise its mediating role. China's involvement in the conflict has been limited, but its actions could have a significant impact on the outcome of the conflict and its implications for regional stability. For the first time in its modern history, China could potentially fill the Afghan security vacuum. As the United States withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in 2021, China has become increasingly concerned about the potential for instability in the region and has taken steps to build relationships with Afghanistan's government. It has also been involved in talks with the Taliban. The security situation in Afghanistan is closely linked to China's broader security interests in the region, and China's response will be a key component of its security policy going forward.

Apart from its hard components of power, China's soft power projections are another important element of its security policy and will be analysed within the scope of a functional group of layers. As China's economic and political influence grows, it has become increasingly focused on projecting its soft power through initiatives like the BRI, the Confucius Institutes, and many other initiatives that contribute to its overall image across the globe. China's soft power efforts are closely tied to its security policy, as they are seen as a way to build positive relationships with other countries and increase China's influence in key regions. This part of the chapter will also address China's focus on high-tech, AI, and semiconductors, especially in the area of military industry and weaponry production. China sees these industries as key drivers of economic growth and technological innovation, and it has invested heavily in them in recent years. However, these industries are also seen as critical to China's national security, as they are linked to key technologies like 5G networks and military applications. Lastly, China's increasing arms trade and foreign aid policies are important elements of its security policy. China is a major arms exporter, and its foreign aid policy is closely tied to its broader security interests. China's arms trade and foreign aid policies are often used as a way to build relationships with other countries and increase its influence in key regions. All of these phenomena contribute to the functionality of China's security policy in the years to come,

making it an increasingly important component of its broader global agenda.

The examination will consist of an analytical approach to China's MFA's daily briefs, official statements, bilateral visits, and multilateral plan activities to determine how China responds to the various challenges that impact its global leadership. Through an analysis of these sources, the study aims to gain insight into China's strategy for addressing the increasing complexities of its global role.

The last group of layers observes China's security policy through *institutions* both domestically and internationally. The author analyses how ideas and ideologies that have shaped Chinese society have influenced its modern policies. The role of the Communist Party of China and the state apparatus in the decision-making process is also explored, particularly in relation to institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA PRC) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD PRC). This segment further presents the CPC bodies, forums, and consultative processes that contribute to its overall security agenda. The organisation of the People's Liberation Army/Navy (PLA/N) and its coordination mechanisms with the Party and the State are also addressed. Additionally, this institutional layer of China's security policy explores its notable activities and membership within international fora and organisations in the post-pandemic period.

The fourth chapter explores how *hawks* — the United States in this case — perceive these various layers of China's contemporary security policy with the aim of identifying the challenges it poses to the American hegemonic position. The introduction will provide context for the discussion and emphasise the significance of understanding the relationship between these two global powers and its implications for international security. The chapter will then focus on the Pentagon's perspective on China's security policy, examining areas of concern and potential sources of conflict. Through this analysis, readers will gain insight into the complex dynamics between the US and China and the potential impact on global stability. The author employs qualitative content analysis to determine the US perception of China's political rise as a primary global challenger. More than 20 annual reports from the Pentagon on China's security affairs were analysed and integrated into the matrix of otherness in international relations.

The chapter then proceeds to analyse the perception of Chinese security policy through three layers: spatial-hierarchical, functional, and institutional. It specifically focuses on the Pentagon's annual reports

published after the COVID-19 pandemic onset in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Additionally, this chapter explores the Chinese state's perspective on the United States, particularly in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. China has recently published several ground-breaking documents that offer a comprehensive analysis of the political landscape within the United States and a critique of its foreign policy strategies as well as security policies worldwide. Notably, these documents include "Reality Check: Falsehoods in the US Perceptions of China", which was published in June 2022; "Drug Abuse in the United States", released in February 2023; "US Hegemony and its Perils", also published in February 2023; and "Gun Violence in the United States: Truth and Facts". These documents serve as essential sources for understanding China's perspective on the United States and shed light on their evaluation of American policies. By analysing the political situation within the United States, China offers unique insights into the complex dynamics shaping international relations. Furthermore, the documents delve into China's foreign policy strategies and provide critical assessments of US security policies on a global scale.

The concluding Chapter V develops three scenarios of China's differentiated assertiveness in global politics, based on the intersected insights obtained through the previous case studies. The author posits that China's security policy might lead from the *status quo* (Scenario 1) to a more assertive China and the evolution of a new Chinese security policy (Scenario 2), or even China as the US-likewise unipol in the international system (Scenario 3). Drawing on the analysis of various layers and the Pentagon's changing perceptions of China's security policy, the author identifies key premises that help to determine the likelihood of specific scenarios or their components. While these scenarios are not mutually exclusive, the author concludes that Scenario II, which involves the development of a new security paradigm with a mix of elements from the other two scenarios, is the most probable. The monograph concludes with a summary of the key findings and contributions of the study, as well as suggestions for further research and innovative approaches to studying China's security policy in the challenging years ahead for the global order.

The book distinguishes itself through several notable features. Firstly, it offers a comprehensive analysis of Chinese security policy, meticulously examining its various aspects and intricacies. A significant aspect of this analysis is the incorporation of China's own published documents, providing primary sources that enrich the understanding of China's perspective on security matters. Moreover, the book's emphasis on the post-pandemic era

adds to its academic significance, especially for the contemporary occurrences that are analysed. It recognises the evolving dynamics and contextualises China's security policy within the unique challenges and opportunities that have emerged in the aftermath of the global health crisis. Furthermore, the book sets itself apart by advocating for further research and innovative approaches in the field. It encourages scholars and policymakers to delve deeper into the subject matter, exploring uncharted territories and employing novel methodologies. This call for exploration and innovation is vital for advancing our understanding of China's security policy in a rapidly changing global landscape.

One of the key components that distinguishes this book from similar works is its endeavour to systematise the roots and layers of China's contemporary security policy through the lens of its Grand Strategy evolution. This systematic approach aims to identify the drivers, processes, and actions that underpin decision-making processes within this vast and complex polity. To date, there has been a lack of monographs in the English language that exclusively focus on China's security policy as the main analytical framework for its global position. Typically, studies delve into Sino-American strategic competition based on narratives that observe pure geopolitical *raison d'être*, neglecting the importance of understanding holistic approaches and internal processes that are also influencing decision-making routines. While there are an abundance of studies on the relationship between US national security and the spillover of US national interests to areas around the world, the same cannot be said for China. Therefore, this monograph attempts to include security policy comprehensiveness in the research agenda for China's foreign policy to gain a deeper understanding of its future foreign policy behaviour.

Furthermore, while this book is primarily intended for the scholarly community, it can also serve as an informative handout for the wider public to get acquainted with an understanding of the fundamental principles involved in creating, deploying, implementing, and advocating the security policy of a previously unknown emerging superpower. On the other hand, it is important for readers not to expect this book to reveal "exclusive" information that is only available behind closed doors or gain insight into the decision-making process of China's security policy, which is difficult to uncover even in the most transparent societies.

This book does not aim to uncover "insider" information about the adoption, formulation, and objectives of China's security policy, nor does

it intend to offer a definitive prediction of China's future foreign policy behaviour. Instead, it is rather an attempt to shed light on certain neglected aspects of a scientifically based analysis of what is observable: it examines China's security policy through systematically proposed layers, it analyses its foreign policy steps and activities, and it provides possible analytical reviews of future scenarios and China's position in the international system. Additionally, this book is not meant to be a political or ideological statement but rather a rigorous scholarly work based on empirical research and analysis.

The adoption of numerous white papers, declarations, acts, proposed policies, and diplomatic initiatives by China in the final months of 2022 and the early months of 2023 have significantly enhanced the author's monograph by offering valuable and up-to-date insights into Beijing's official positions on crucial security matters. These developments have not only provided a sense of relief but have also elevated the analytical depth of this research, enabling a more comprehensive examination of globally significant security phenomena.

It has already been emphasised several times that this book deals with contemporary layers of security policy. Although it seems that its scope covers an extremely wide and heterogenous range of issues, its research focus is quite oriented towards the hesitancy of China as a possible new hegemon of the system of international relations. In this domain, readers should keep in mind that the analysis of individual layers of security policy is limited by the book's goals of providing thorough and comprehensive answers to the scenarios of China's development in its quest to potentially become a dominant global power in the near future.

CHAPTER I

UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S NEW GLOBAL AGENDA: THEORY AND METHOD

CHALLENGING A NEW (OLD) VARIABLE: CHINA'S PEACEFUL GROWTH AS A COMPONENT OF ITS GRAND STRATEGY

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical foundation and analytical methods that underpin the book. It first introduces the theoretical phenomena that are the subject of analysis, including peaceful Chinese growth, China's military strength, relations between great powers, and hegemony in the international relations system. It also discusses the ways in which the Theory of Hegemonic Stability can be developed to enhance analytical credibility, taking into account the ongoing debate about the nature of the international relations system and its potential transformation, particularly in the context of China's rapid political and military development.

Furthermore, the chapter highlights the differences between foreign and security policies and outlines the arguments for their shared sources and goals in the Chinese case. The next section of the chapter focuses on the concept of the Grand Strategy, providing an overview of the evolutionary path of the Chinese GS, with a particular emphasis on the role of security policy as its dominant toolkit. Another important aspect of this chapter is the identification of the main actors involved in foreign policy creation, as well as the postulates of the Hegemonic Stability Theory that align with the research interests of this study. The theoretical part of the chapter concludes with a discussion of some of the key measures of Chinese security policy that are analytically valuable, such as the concept of Comprehensive National Power (CNP), which was introduced by Chinese scholars in the early 1990s and later embraced by China's leader Jiang Zemin.

Beyond the theoretical framework, several key concepts that are critical to this book's argument are introduced, including the idea of decoupling in the international relations system, the perception of *otherness* in international relations as a scientific discipline (the concept of otherness), and the novel idea of the global security *locus* earlier introduced in academic papers by this author. The chapter goes on to develop challenging theses about realism's theoretical influence as academic support for the argument

about gaining power and dominance through foreign policy and security agendas. The most important outcomes of Chinese academic authors' debates on the development of China's security and foreign policy will be examined in this section. The final section provides an overview of the methods deployed for this monograph's purpose, focusing on the most commonly used qualitative research design and identifying potential limitations, particularly given the subject matter, which involves difficult-to-reach and unexplored domains such as the CPC decision-making and analysis of acts and doctrines that are only available in the Chinese language. The chapter concludes by outlining the temporal and spatial scope of the book, highlighting its gnoseological limits, and providing a detailed elaboration of the layers of contemporary China's security policy that correspond to the structure of the book.

China's peaceful growth (or rise) is a variable that constitutes a recurring theme within this monograph. It is a question of both the thesis that has recently been linked to China's growth within the academic discourse and the thesis as a political-ideological concept that has recently and continuously been advocated by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Although the economic sphere may be considered first, IR scholars have crystallised the belief that China's military and political potential is significantly measurable and thus suitable for analytical analysis of regional and international security situations.² Several preliminary assumptions about "China's peaceful growth" on a global scale will be presented first in this section of the chapter.

Adam Araszkiwicz (2021) argues that the theory of "China's peaceful rise" was developed internally in China as a response to Western concerns arising from the remarkable growth of the Chinese economy since 1978. He claims the term was propagated by China to effectively address the perceived issue of a "China threat" both in the United States and Southeast Asia (Araszkiwicz, 2021). According to the theory, unlike historical emerging powers such as Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, or the Soviet Union (which would be considered peer competitors to the United States), China does not seek to achieve its development through

² As stated in the text, China's economic growth is a research topic that is likely to be the most important in the corpus of Chinese Studies. Although there are numerous scientific papers and monographs on this topic, the most widely cited monographs analysing China's economic system in light of its international political position are: Wu, 2004; Pekkanen, 2006; Song and Wing, 2008.

violent confrontation with the existing world order or by revising the *status quo* (2021: 300).

While it may not appear evident initially, the principle of peaceful rise has been a consistent element of China's foreign and security policy in recent decades. This policy, which will be further explored later in this chapter, enables China to maintain a cautious approach on the international stage. It serves as one of the key components of China's GS. Building upon the concept of strategic culture, several scholars establish its theoretical linkage to the Grand Strategy. Mohamad Rosyidin (2019) compiles an understanding that strategic culture can be defined as...

... a system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors), which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious (Johnston, 1995, p. 46, 1996, p. 223; According to: Rosyidin, 2019).

The provided definition highlights several constitutive elements of strategic culture and its influence on shaping strategic preferences within interstate political affairs. It underscores the role of symbols, argumentation structures, languages, analogies, and metaphors as constituent components of strategic culture. These elements collectively serve to establish pervasive and enduring strategic preferences. Strategic culture operates by formulating concepts and perceptions regarding the role and effectiveness of military force in interstate politics. It plays a crucial role in shaping a society's understanding and interpretation of how military power can be employed to achieve desired outcomes (Rosyidin, 2019).

Strategic culture imbues these conceptions with a sense of factuality, giving them an aura of perceived realism and efficacy. The utilisation of symbols, argumentation structures, languages, analogies, and metaphors is instrumental in communicating and reinforcing strategic preferences. Next, argumentation structures provide frameworks for presenting justifications and reasoning behind strategic choices (Rosyidin, 2019). While languages serve as mediums for expressing and disseminating strategic narratives and ideas, analogies and metaphors facilitate the comprehension of complex strategic concepts by drawing parallels with familiar or relatable contexts. The cumulative effect of these elements is to establish a distinctive strategic culture that

permeates a society's decision-making processes and informs its approaches to international relations. By endowing strategic preferences with an aura of factuality, strategic culture shapes perceptions of what is deemed realistic and efficacious in achieving national security and foreign policy objectives. This, in turn, influences the formulation and implementation of a Grand Strategy.

In the context of China, the concept of peaceful rise undoubtedly aligns with its strategic culture, acting as a mediating variable between China's strategic culture and its Grand Strategy. The evolving trajectory of China's rise has shaped its approach to various aspects, including the deployment of its armed forces, the steady influence of its economy, and its involvement in global security affairs. Additionally, the peaceful rise has played a significant role in shaping China's diplomatic positioning in international forums, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has laid the groundwork for more assertive actions. China's peaceful rise has influenced the establishment of red lines regarding the deployment of its armed forces. This approach reflects a cautious and measured stance, aimed at projecting stability and avoiding unnecessary escalations. Simultaneously, China's expanding economic influence has become a cornerstone of its peaceful rise strategy, contributing to its comprehensive national power and enabling it to enhance its standing on the global stage. By intertwining its economic prowess with global security affairs, China has sought to solidify its position as a major player in international relations. Furthermore, the peaceful rise has played a crucial role in shaping China's diplomatic positioning across various international settings. By adhering to the principles of peaceful rise, China has presented itself as a responsible and cooperative global actor. This diplomatic strategy has helped China cultivate relationships, build trust, and enhance its soft power. Moreover, the peaceful rise has served as a preparatory phase for China, providing a foundation for more assertive actions when deemed necessary. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated China's willingness to assert itself in global affairs, further highlighting the evolution of its approach.

Avery Goldstein (2020a) introduces the Grand Strategy concept as the "combination of political-diplomatic, economic, and military means that a state embraces to ensure its vital interests and pursue its goals—at minimum, its survival—in a potentially dangerous world" (Goldstein, 2020a: 166). The Grand Strategy is, then, distinguished in part by its broad scope as an overarching vision about a regime's top priorities and how they

can be met by drawing on the various policy instruments at its disposal. He excludes the collection of preferred policies from the term “strategy”. Instead, according to what he believes, “it is a vision informed by the recognition that the state’s policies must be implemented in an international context of interdependent choice, a setting where each state must anticipate the likely responses of others whose reactions can thwart or facilitate its efforts” (2020a: 166).

According to Barry Buzan (2014: 385), the Grand Strategy encompasses several essential functions in the formulation and evaluation of foreign and security policy. First, it serves several critical functions in the formulation and evaluation of foreign and security policy. It establishes the criteria that guide policy decisions, ensuring coherence and providing a framework for evaluation (Buzan, 2014: 385). Furthermore, by creating a stable overarching framework, the GS aligns various policy areas, promotes consistency in strategic decision-making, and plays a crucial role in politically legitimising foreign and security policy. Through broad explanations of policy choices, it enhances public understanding and acceptance, especially when dealing with difficult decisions. Buzan claims that each Grand Strategy necessarily contributes to shaping and projecting a country’s image to the international community (2014: 385). According to his argument, it defines the “nation’s identity, values, and interests, influencing how it is perceived and engaged with by other nations” (2014: 385). It serves as a vital guiding framework for nations to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes and pursue their foreign and security policy objectives.

Despite some polemics about whether China does or does not have its own successful GS (see more in Goldstein, 2020), this book’s portfolio posits that Chinese security policy at the strategic level of all other (super)powers in the IR system is among the most comprehensive ones. Barry Buzan, in his examination of the concept of China’s peaceful rise as a component of its GS, highlights the underlying logic and contradictions. According to Buzan (2014), China’s strategic policy is remarkably intricate and comprehensive. He thus suggests that this policy provides China with the flexibility to adopt either a “Cold Peaceful Rise” or a “Warm Peaceful Rise” strategy, depending on the security dynamics within the international relations system. This choice will ultimately determine the assertiveness level reflected in China’s future foreign strategy (Buzan, 2014: 404-409). Furthermore, Buzan (2014) acknowledges the possibility of a “Hot Peaceful Rise” as a potential alternative to China’s GS in the future. However, he assigns it relatively low significance, considering that numerous changes

would need to occur before Asia could evolve into a security community—and this applies not only to China (Buzan, 2014: 416).³

It is noteworthy to clarify that this monograph does not claim the existence of an all-encompassing GS of China throughout various historical epochs. Instead, Chapter II of this book focuses on analysing the evolution of China's foreign and security policy within specific time periods identified as the Grand Strategy eras. During the early 2000s, several authors raised doubts about the existence of a coherent Grand Strategy in China (Yinhong, 2001; Buzan, 2010; Liqun, 2012; Westad, 2012). Barry Buzan (2010) asserts that China's strategic vision of its position in international society lacks coherence, as it struggles to effectively align its goals with the means it employs. Despite espousing rhetoric centred around peaceful development and harmonious relations, China simultaneously engages in numerous militarised border disputes with neighbouring countries. This inconsistency is compounded by the presence of hard realist rhetoric and strained political relationships bordering on enmity with Japan, Vietnam, and India (Buzan, 2010).

Three Inquiries on the Nexus between Security Policy and the Grand Strategy in China's Case

How do we distinguish security policy from each of these concepts? Such a question is not a novelty in the area of Chinese Studies. From the most general point of view, Chinese Studies is the widest discipline among the scholarly literature. In this sense, what distinguishes security policy from foreign policy, or the Grand Strategy, is the means of its implementation. It does not necessarily reflect what a single state does in its military affairs, which would trigger a quite narrower defence policy analysis.

According to Rush Doshi (2021), a more effective approach for understanding the GS is to perceive it as an "integrated security theory", preserving its distinctiveness as a concept. In this context, security is defined as encompassing sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity, and power position. The attainment of the latter is considered essential for achieving the first three objectives. He defines the GS as a "state's theory of how it can

³ The concepts of "Cold Peaceful Rise", "Warm Peaceful Rise", and "Hot Peaceful Rise" will play a significant role in the exploration of China's security policy and its Grand Strategy. These scenarios will be further examined and elaborated upon in Chapter V of this monograph.

achieve these security-related ends for itself that is intentional, coordinated, and implemented across multiple means of statecraft, such as military, economic, and political instruments” (Doshi, 2021: 16). It involves the utilisation of various instruments of statecraft, including military, economic, and political means. This definition is rooted in the historical development of the term over the past two centuries.

As strategists and scholars observed the emergence of modern industrial states and their expanding range of capabilities and instruments, starting from the Napoleonic era through the age of steamships and into the total wars of the twentieth century, they gradually broadened their understanding of the means encompassed by the GS. This evolution led them to acknowledge the significance of non-military tools alongside the military ones while still recognising security as the ultimate foundation of Grand Strategy. Consequently, Doshi (2021) concludes that the definition presented here aligns closely with this historical trajectory.

An important distinction between the two policies concerns their hierarchy not only at the conceptual level but also in the case of concrete implementation. In this sense, the security policy represents an operationalization and a more concrete cornerstone of a state's formulation. This is why I suggest three inquiries to have in mind in resolving the complex puzzle and a nexus between the GS and security policy in China's case:

1. First, why does China not distinguish between its foreign and security policies?

It is important to recognise that, in terms of this book, security and foreign policy objectives are inherently intertwined in China's approach. The pursuit of national security is a fundamental goal that guides China's foreign policy decisions. China's rising global influence and its complex security challenges necessitate an integrated approach that accounts for both domestic and international factors. This requires a comprehensive understanding of how China's foreign policy actions contribute to its security objectives, and vice versa. Also, the boundaries between security and foreign policy have become increasingly blurred due to evolving global dynamics. Contemporary challenges such as transnational terrorism, cyber security threats, climate change, and regional conflicts have forced states, including China, to adopt a holistic and integrated approach to address these complex issues. Lastly, traditional distinctions between internal and external security concerns have become less relevant, as threats often transcend borders and require a comprehensive response. In this manner, a very

complex and intertwined network of organs and bodies of the Chinese state as well as of the CPC constitutes China's security and foreign policy under the very same policy. It is why I argue that Sino-centric foreign and security policies refer to the same thing.⁴

2. Second, how do we assess and analyse China's security policy in the most comprehensive possible manner?

In his seminal work "On China", Henry Kissinger elucidated a series of arguments that explicate the Chinese approach to security policy. In this notable publication, Kissinger delves into the historical tradition of China's development, highlighting a distinctive framework that encompasses both the formulation and execution of policies. Notably, he draws attention to the contrasting perspective of Sun Tzu, an influential Chinese strategist, who places greater emphasis on psychological and political factors rather than purely military considerations, diverging from Western authors (Kissinger, 2020: 35). While Western strategists often prioritise means to achieve supremacy during crucial strategic moments, Sun Tzu focuses on employing methods that establish a psychological-political advantage over adversaries (Kissinger, 2020: 36).

"The best military leaders attack the enemy's strategy. The best next choice is to separate the enemy from his allies. The third best choice is to strike at the enemy's army. Therefore, the victorious army first wins and then goes to battle; the defeated army first fights and then tries to win" (Sun Tzu, 2002).

According to Henry Kissinger, the strategic behaviour of Chinese rulers, characterised by their infrequent engagement in direct, open conflicts, is not a matter of coincidence. He observes a significant divergence in strategic thinking, exemplified by the contrast between Western chess and the Chinese game of *Wéiqí* (围棋).⁵ In the Western tradition, strategic success often hinges on a decisive and outright victory on the battlefield. In contrast, the Chinese "ideal" strategy emphasises subtlety, indirect action, and patient waiting for opportune moments that offer relative advantages (Kissinger, 2020: 32). These disparities can also be observed in the comparison between chess and *Wéiqí*. Chess primarily aims for the elimination of the opponent's forces,

⁴ In this book, the terms "foreign policy" and "security policy" that relate to China's case will be used interchangeably due to the analytical convergence discussed earlier.

⁵ This game is known in the Western world as "Go".

whereas *Wéiqí* instructs individuals in the art of strategic encirclement (Kissinger, 2020: 34). While chess emphasises a single-minded approach, *Wéiqí* cultivates strategic flexibility (Kissinger, 2020: 34). Such an understanding of the strategy facilitates the scientific-analytical framework for researching the security policy and the intentions of the conflicting parties. In this book, I offer an integrative and novel approach to the assessment of China's security policy through the sequencing of its layers. This is both comprehensive and, at the same time, the most rational way to observe the state of the art of current China's security policy and its global agenda after the COVID-19 pandemic onset. Such methodologic decisions will be elaborated on in detail in the next section of this chapter.

3. Third and last inquiry: how do we assess the features of the current Chinese Grand Strategy?

Rush Doshi (2021), one of the most influential scholars in Chinese Studies, proposes three criteria for evaluating China's Grand Strategy:

- a) Grand Strategic Concepts: States should possess a coherent framework encompassing the alignment of ends, ways, and means within their strategy. This entails a comprehensive understanding of how various elements of strategy interrelate and contribute to the achievement of national objectives (Doshi, 2021: 16).
- b) Grand Strategic Capabilities: Effective national security institutions should possess the necessary capabilities to coordinate and integrate diverse instruments of statecraft. These capabilities enable the pursuit of national interests, prioritising them over parochial concerns. This coordination ensures a cohesive and effective approach to implementing the Grand Strategy (Doshi, 2021: 16).
- c) Grand Strategic Conduct: A state's actions and behaviours must ultimately align with its strategic concepts. Consistency between the articulated strategy and actual conduct is crucial for the successful implementation of a grand strategy. It ensures that decisions and actions remain in harmony with the underlying strategic framework (Doshi, 2021: 16).

Basically, these three distinctives are translated into texts—documents, acts, and white papers; into institutional capacity—the state and the CPC; and into China's contemporary foreign and security policy actions. Doshi (2021) acknowledges that he deploys books, papers, and strategies adopted by the national institutions as well as by the Politburo Standing Committee, the Leading Small Groups (many now called Central Commissions), and the Central Military Commission (2021: 17). When it comes to the last one, the policy and

action analysis, Doshi highlights the observation made by Eyre Crowe that great powers engage in diverse activities across various domains. Differentiating between strategic motivations and non-strategic noise can be challenging. To address this challenge, a social-scientific approach proves valuable. Scholars can examine military, economic, and political behaviours to determine if puzzling actions align with grand strategic logic (2021: 17). They can also identify synchronised shifts across different policy domains as evidence of coordination. Consulting Party texts aids in understanding the underlying reasons behind China's actions. By employing these efforts, a clearer understanding of China's grand strategic conduct emerges (Doshi, 2021: 17).

Chinese Scholarly Thought on China's Foreign Policy Preferences: In Search of China's IR Theory

The postulates of the Hegemonic Stability Theory are based on assumptions that reflect a Western-centric perspective on international relations. The methodological foundation and monopoly of international relations as a science have been established based on the Western perspective, with Western civilization at the centre and the "geographical periphery" at the margins (Qin, 2007). According to Qin, there was a partial discontinuity from 1949 to 1979, during which the Chinese IR community was not actively engaging with Western theories. However, since 1979, when China's IR entered its learning stage and sought to establish itself as an independent discipline, the process of learning from the West resumed, and it has become a major driver of the Chinese IR community (Qin, 2007: 322). In other words, the absence of a distinct Chinese theory of international relations can be attributed to the fact that the development of IR as a discipline has been shaped by a Western-centric perspective, which has dominated the field and monopolised the discourse. China, as a latecomer to the discipline, has had to engage with and learn from the existing Western theories, which has hindered the development of a unique Chinese IR theory. Nonetheless, Chinese scholars have made efforts to adapt and integrate Western theories with Chinese perspectives, as evidenced by the emergence of Chinese Schools of thought in IR, such as the Beijing School and the Shanghai School.⁶

⁶ The Shanghai School is mostly associated with scholars from Fudan University in Shanghai and emphasises the importance of economic globalisation and regional integration in shaping international relations. It also stresses the need for non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, to be taken into account in analysing international relations.

There are a few different perspectives on why there is no distinct Chinese international relations theory. One perspective is that China has historically been more focused on practicing diplomacy and maintaining its position in the international system than developing theoretical frameworks for understanding international relations. Additionally, some scholars argue that China's historical experience and cultural values differ significantly from those of the West, which has traditionally dominated the study of international relations. This has made it challenging for Chinese scholars to fully adopt and integrate Western theories into their own scholarship. Another perspective is that China's approach to international relations is shaped more by pragmatic concerns than by theoretical principles.

For instance, China's foreign policy has been influenced by its emphasis on stability and economic growth, as well as its focus on non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. These practical considerations may be seen as more important than theoretical debates about the nature of international relations. Furthermore, some scholars argue that there are in fact Chinese theories of international relations, but that they may not be recognised or understood by Western scholars due to linguistic and cultural barriers. Chinese scholars may draw on traditional Chinese concepts and ideas that are not easily translatable into English or Western theoretical frameworks. Wang Jiangli and Barry Buzan argue that there have been numerous attempts to establish a "Chinese IR theory" under various names, including "IR theory with Chinese characteristics", "Chinese localization or nativization of IR theory", "China's exploration of international political theory", "Chinese view of international relations or international politics", and "The Chinese School" (Wang and Buzan, 2014).

In 2011, Yan Xuetong, arguably the leading and the most influential Chinese political scientist, raised a fundamental question in one of the appendices of his book, querying the absence of a Chinese theory of

The Beijing School, on the other hand, is associated with scholars from Tsinghua University in Beijing and emphasises the importance of traditional concepts such as sovereignty, nationalism, and balance of power in international relations. It also places greater emphasis on China's history and cultural traditions in shaping its foreign policy. However, Yan Xuetong believes that the diversity of ideas and thought in Beijing (in which Tsinghua University plays a key role) makes it challenging for the Tsinghua School to be exclusively identified as the "Beijing School" (Yan, 2011: 263). Nevertheless, it is believed that both schools have contributed to the development of Chinese international relations theory and have influenced the country's foreign policy.

international relations. He notes that Huan Xiang, the foreign affairs secretary in Zhou Enlai's government, first addressed this issue in 1987. Yan Xuetong outlined five possible reasons for the non-existence of a "Chinese School" in international relations theory. Firstly, he cited the naming convention for theories, which are usually attributed to their creators, but as there are no theories named after Chinese political scientists in contemporary Chinese discourse or history, Yan argues that the lack of a "Chinese School" is not unexpected.

Secondly, he contends that states are rarely included in the names of theories, making it challenging to envisage the existence of a "Chinese School" (Yan, 2011). As the schools of thought are mostly named after cities or universities (with the minor exception of the English School, which Yan disputes, by the way), it would be illusory that in the modern scientific mode of thinking there is a theory that would be exclusively "Chinese" (2011: 261). The third reason Yan posits is that China's diversity is too extensive to be encapsulated in a single, focused theory. The vast array of Chinese perspectives is such that it would be impossible for any single school of thought or theory to encompass the entirety of Chinese thinking. Finally, Yan notes that the lack of a "Chinese School" may result from China's late arrival in the field of international relations (2011: 262). Chinese international relations only began to emerge as an independent academic discipline in the late 1970s. As such, the Chinese IR community has had to learn from the West, which has become a significant driving force for its development.

Further, Yan Xuetong identified a complex combination of three circumstances as the fourth cause for the non-existence of the Chinese theory of international relations (2011: 263-264). Firstly, Chinese scholars lack basic methodological training and have yet to develop systematic explanations for international phenomena (Yan, 2011). Secondly, Chinese IR scholars, in some cases, lack training in traditional Chinese political thought, rendering them unable to master Western or Chinese political theories as Western scholars do with their own traditional political thought, and thirdly, Yan notes that there are too few theoretical debates among Chinese scholars, which hinders the improvement of theories by learning from critiques (2011: 264). Lastly, the concepts of "Tianxia" by Zhao Tingyang and "Peaceful Rise" by Zheng Bijian are analysed in the remaining sections of the book, and Yan Xuetong argues that they are not associated with the group promoting a "Chinese School" of international relations (2011: 264).

In this regard, Yan advocates for a revolutionary approach rather than a mere modification of the existing IR agenda among Chinese scholars. He suggests that Chinese scholars should adopt a Lakatosian methodology of scientific research, which aims to develop a new research programme consisting of a series of theories with a shared hard core, as proposed by Lakatos's MSRP (2011: 266).

ASSESSING CHINA'S PEACEFUL RISE THROUGH THE LENSES OF THE HEGEMONIC STABILITY THEORY

Is hegemonic stability an adequate model for assessing China's global dominance and its proclaimed peaceful rise? This question has yet to be extensively debated within the scholarly community, as not all prerequisites have been met thus far. The theory was chosen because it encompasses both liberal and realistic components, allowing for a comprehensive analysis that incorporates the analytical levels of this book, providing insights into the positioning of China's security policy in the contemporary international system. However, it is important to note that within this domain, the Hegemonic Stability Theory should not be regarded as the ultimate "truth" or a definitive judgement of reality. Instead, it serves as a framework to consider both aspects of China's growth and to explain potential patterns of assertiveness in its security policy in the future.

The theory argues that a hegemon is necessary for each existing IR system to provide global public goods, regulate trade, and enforce international norms and laws. The founder of the concept, American economist Charles P. Kindleberger, defined hegemonic stability as a characteristic of a system where a state assumes the role of a dominant hegemon. Kindleberger (1973) emphasises the gradual process involved in the "construction" of a state to become a hegemon while outlining the prerequisites that great powers must meet. These prerequisites include possessing a strong and expanding economy with advanced technology, having political-military influence and both soft and hard power, and being prepared and committed to assuming a leading role in the international system. Kindleberger (1973) further argued that the successful establishment of a hegemon requires a general consensus among other states in the international system, with those states perceiving the leading state as their leader. The idea of the HST has been applied to the study of modern China's security and foreign policy. One of the main applications of

the HST to modern China is the concept of China as a potential challenger to the United States as the world's hegemonic power. According to the HST, as the current global hegemon, the United States has a responsibility to maintain global order and stability.

However, as China's economic and military power grows, there is a risk that it may challenge the US's hegemonic status and disrupt the existing global order. This potential shift in power dynamics has important implications for China's security and foreign policy. Another application of the HST to modern China is the study of China's behaviour in regional and international institutions. The HST suggests that the presence of a hegemon can provide stability to international institutions by ensuring compliance with rules and regulations. In the absence of a hegemon, weaker states may be more likely to act in their own self-interest, potentially leading to conflict and instability.

In the case of China, its growing power and influence in regional and global institutions may have important implications for the stability and effectiveness of these institutions.

Furthermore, the HST can be applied to the study of China's relations with its neighbours and other major powers. As China's power grows, it may become more assertive in its foreign policy, potentially leading to conflict with other states. The HST suggests that a hegemon can provide stability to international relations by deterring aggression and ensuring that conflicts are resolved peacefully. However, the absence of a hegemon may lead to increased competition and conflict between states. Therefore, the potential shift in power dynamics between the United States and China may have significant implications for the stability of regional and global security. In order to apply the HST to the study of modern China, researchers often use qualitative methods such as case studies, process tracing, and historical analysis. These methods allow researchers to identify and analyse key variables that may impact the stability of the international system, such as changes in economic or military power, shifts in the balance of power, and changes in the global distribution of resources.

Moreover, the scenario development method can be a valuable tool for researchers to explore potential future developments in China's security policy using the HST. By constructing hypothetical scenarios based on different assumptions about China's position in the international system, researchers can explore the potential implications of different policy decisions and identify potential challenges and opportunities for China's

security policy in the coming decades. However, the HST has been criticised for oversimplifying the complex nature of international relations and for neglecting the role of non-state actors in shaping global events. Critics argue that the theory assumes a stable and unchanging international system, which does not reflect the dynamic and constantly changing nature of international relations. Some even argue that the theory neglects the agency of smaller states and non-state actors in shaping global events.

Defining Hesitancy

China's rise as a global power and actor in international politics has generated significant attention and speculation about its ambitions for regional and global dominance. Klinger and Muldavin (2019) outline several factors that currently influence China's global integration. The first set of factors pertains to the complex network of actors involved in global integration processes. These actors are engaged in diverse initiatives aimed at attracting, implementing, and supporting China's activities within the international system. Another set of factors involves re-evaluating conventional notions of the "core" and periphery, particularly concerning the origins, flows, and destinations of capital, power, and Chinese exports. This perspective is not uncommon, considering that the concepts of centre, semi-periphery, and periphery have been ideologically influenced by European political thought. Reassessing the centre-periphery relationship is significantly influenced by geographical factors and the shifting of "centres" that may not be in physical proximity, such as in the case of Europe (Klinger and Muldavin, 2019). The third set of factors pertains to the shifting interests of the state, capital, and elites, which shape the key ideas transforming policies into new development geographies. China's openness has led to deepened cooperation with diverse actors in global politics, including more targeted collaborations with the European Union, the United States, and the Russian Federation. More recently, the characteristics of China's foreign policy have manifested in the consolidation of Xi Jinping's leadership through personnel changes, institutional and organisational reforms, and anti-corruption campaigns.

In May 2018, President Xi chaired the newly established Central Commission for Foreign Policy of PR China, emphasising the significance of centralising and unifying foreign policy under the Central Committee of the CPC, with the Central Commission for Foreign Policy serving as its focal body (Klinger and Muldavin, 2019). Despite its growing economic and military

power, China has remained hesitant in the arena of international security and politics. Potentially three main factors lie behind this, including its historical experience, its domestic challenges, and its strategic approach to international relations. China's historical experience informs its cautious approach to hegemony. China has a long-standing tradition of emphasising harmony and avoiding conflict, which has been a core principle of its foreign policy. In his 2007 book, Edward Slingerland examined the concept of *wú wéi* within mainstream Chinese thought, including Confucius, Laozi, Mencius, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi. He translated *wú wéi* as "effortless action" towards an external subject, referring to China's foreign affairs strategies. He illustrates how the ideal of *wú wéi* (无为) embodies a paradoxical tension, which he terms the "paradox of *wú wéi*", and how this tension serves as a driving force in the historical development of Chinese thought (Slingerland, 2007).

In his book *On China*, Henry Kissinger asserts that throughout its historical political tradition, China embodied a sense of superior benevolence (Kissinger, 2014: 30). Kissinger argues that the Chinese employed tactics such as bribing the barbarians and leveraging the ethnic supremacy of the Han ethnic group to undermine their adversaries, leading to their eventual submission to Chinese influence, which was of the highest level of assertiveness towards "the others" (2014: 30). Additionally, China's experience with colonialism and imperialism has left a deep-seated mistrust of Western powers and their intentions towards China. Secondly, China's domestic challenges, including economic and social issues, limit its ability to project power and influence beyond its borders. Its leadership has recognised the need for "stability and development at home" many times throughout the last decades, which has been a top priority for the government. Moreover, China's political system, which is highly centralised and authoritarian, has limited its ability to build broad-based alliances and partnerships with other countries. Lastly, China's approach to international relations is characterised by a preference for multilateralism and cooperation rather than unilateralism and dominance. China has been a vocal advocate for global governance and has sought to build new institutions and initiatives that emphasise mutual benefit and shared development, such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Both major schools of thought within the fields of international relations, realists and liberals, engage in the manipulation of ethical arguments, albeit in distinct ways influenced by their epistemological perspectives (Stekić and Korać, 2022). When discussing the natural anarchic state of international

relations, a concept often drawn from Hobbesian thinking, the “other” is perceived as inherently different, potentially posing a constant challenge necessitating a swift response by nation-states. In contrast to (neo)realists, proponents of liberal ideology, particularly in their interpretation of Kantian deontological ethics, assert that moral reasoning and action are domains exclusively accessed by self-aware, rational individuals (Stekić and Korać, 2022: 597). It is why this book adopts the Hegemonic Stability Theory as a fundamental theoretical framework for its research at a meta level. However, at an epistemological level, it is essential to examine how the field of Security Studies approaches the analysis of security policy, particularly considering the central variable of China's peaceful rise.

Comprehensive National Power, *Locus*, and Decoupling

Within the context of this book, several key concepts hold substantial analytical significance. These include the Comprehensive National Power (CNP) measure, the *locus* of global security, and the process of decoupling the international relations system's structure. The term CNP was initially introduced by Jiang Zemin in the 1990s as a means to assess China's progress across various spheres of societal existence. It serves as a comprehensive indicator encompassing diverse dimensions of national development. The *locus* of global security, proposed by the author of this book, represents an innovative thesis that reflects a shifting emphasis on the strategic actions and operational scope of superpowers and major powers within the international relations system. Specifically, it delineates a transition from a broader European-focused security domain to the Indo-Pacific region-construct. This term assumes significance due to its alignment with the geopolitical reality surrounding the PR China and the containment efforts undertaken by the United States and Western powers, reminiscent of strategies employed during the Cold War era against the Soviet Union. Subsequent to this section of the chapter, the theoretical underpinnings of the aforementioned concepts will be expounded upon, highlighting their substantial relevance and significance within the context of this research.

Comprehensive National Power (CNP) is a quantifiable measure that assesses the overall capacity of a single state at a specific moment. Some scholars propose a methodology for measuring CNP by considering eight categories comprising a total of 23 indicators. These categories encompass economic resources, human capital, natural resources, capital resources, technology, governance, military resources, and international (human)

resources (Bajwa, 2008). Does the CNP measure fit into the modern vision of China's security policy? While the CNP measure is relevant to China's modern security policy, some challenges and considerations should be acknowledged. First, there is an ongoing debate on how to accurately measure and compare CNP among countries, given the complex and multidimensional nature of power. Đorđević and Stekić (2022) highlight the inherent nature of the concept within Chinese political thought (Wang and Wong, 1998; Yan, 2008; Liao et al., 2015). Wang and Wong noted that the term CNP was originally introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, while its official incorporation into Chinese policy occurred during the Fourteenth CPC Congress in 1992 (Wang and Wong, 1998: 192). President Xi Jinping subsequently revitalised the CNP concept, emphasising its continuous expansion in 2019, with the aim of constructing a socialist system surpassing capitalism and positioning the PRC in a dominant position (Xi, 2013). Striking a balance between military strength and soft power elements, such as economic influence and cultural diplomacy, remains a challenge for China. Effective coordination and integration across different dimensions of power are vital to ensuring a comprehensive and coherent security policy.

One notable aspect of the post-pandemic international system is the relocation of the centre of global security and the strategic focus of dominant powers, including the United States, to Southeast Asia. For centuries, the wider area of the Euro-Mediterranean, including North Africa but also the Middle East, represented a hub of world security where the interests of the superpowers intersected in global competition. The thesis about the *locus* of global security is relatively unexplored in the field of Security Studies, at least in such a terminological domain. The *locus* of global security refers to a specific geographically oriented space in which the security dynamics is intertwined among the leading global superpowers at each moment of the historical continuum of mankind. Derived from a Latin word, *locus* is usually defined by some vocabularies as a "central or main place where something happens or is found" (Britannica, 2023). Merriam-Webster's definition goes a bit beyond and adds that *locus* represents "a centre of activity, attention, or concentration" (Merriam-Webster, 2023).

The recent relocation of the core of global security and strategic focus to Southeast Asia is underpinned by the relatively new notion of the "Asianisation of security", which has emerged in academic discourse alongside the promotion of the Indo-Pacific region by the US and other Western powers over the last couple of years. The thesis was initially

proposed by Felix Heiduk, a political scientist from Germany. Asianisation of security as a concept has given rise to the formation of a global security *locus* in the broader China-centric Indo-Pacific region. It is home to four billion people and several of the world's wealthiest countries, with a burgeoning economy. However, it is also marked by escalating security tensions and a military build-up. From a theoretical perspective, the constituents of this locus are multifaceted, and the existence of this ordered system of international relations is assumed. Here I do not mean orderliness in the sense of the absence of anarchy or orderliness in the sense of the absence of war, but the polar organisation of the system with clearly defined states that are poles as well as less weak states that are not. Both neorealists and neoliberals, in their own conceptions of the international system, treat the question of polarity, which is particularly manifested in the theoretical corpus of the HST. In the case of the first, the system of international relations is dominated by one superpower that maintains the regime through physical coercion, while in the liberal point of view, hegemony is treated as a necessary variable for the survival of the liberal world, and the guarantor of that survival is a superpower that can use force when it believes it is necessary. For the concept of the *locus* of global security, the superpower (or more, if there are any in the system) does not necessarily have to be geographically positioned at the centre of global security. Although the number of poles and the type of polarity of the system are not essential to the geographical arrangement of the locus of global security, an abrupt change in the number of poles may consequently lead to a displacement of the *locus* of global security.

Lađevac and Stekić (2023) identify five key characteristics of the concept of locus in relation to global security. Firstly, it aligns with the neo-realist view of the international relations system, acknowledging that one or more dominant superpowers, regardless of their geographical position, hold sway over the system's structure at any given time. Secondly, the concept of locus necessitates a precise definition of global security. It is understood as anything that contributes to the maintenance or disruption of the focal point, process, or dimension on which global stability depends (Lađevac and Stekić (2023: 15). If security is defined as the absence of threats, then global security entails a state where most international actors are at peace and threats capable of disrupting this order are absent. Thirdly, geographic exclusivity characterises the locus of security. It represents the central point in the cyclical flow of world history and the dichotomy of security disruption and creation (Lađevac and Stekić, 2023:

15). As such, the locus is inherently singular and cannot be polycentric in the geographic domain. However, the complexity of global security allows for minor deviations and parallel security processes that, while not directly aimed at the locus, do not impede its existence. Fourthly, the locus of global security exhibits multidimensionality. Throughout history, there have been only two shifts in the locus, both concentrated in specific geographic areas. However, advancements in technology have facilitated the possibility of a future locus existing within the virtual realm, such as an online virtual network. Finally, the focal point of global security is often not narrowly defined. Instead, it typically encompasses a wide geographical space that corresponds to what Security Studies theorists have termed regional security complexes (Lađevac and Stekić, 2023: 15). Thus, the locus of global security is one of the most important variables and occurrences not to be omitted from the analytical perspective of China's security policy creation in the near future.

This publication utilises a qualitative content analysis tool to explore the institutional-level perceptions of the United States regarding China's security policy and military growth. To fulfil this goal, a systematic analysis of the annual reports that the Pentagon has been submitting to the US Congress since 2001 will be conducted. This will be done through the use of *nVivo* software. Given this time frame, the study particularly focuses on the last three reports (2020, 2021, and 2022), while also taking into account any structural differences in institutional perceptions before and after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Realism-oriented scholars assert that states are driven by self-interest and the pursuit of power. Applying this theory to the Pentagon's perception of China's security policy, it is likely to view China's rising military capabilities and territorial ambitions with concern. The security dilemma, characterised by a cycle of mistrust and arms races, could exacerbate tensions between the two powers. The concept of the balance of power comes into play when analysing the Pentagon's perspective on China. As a preeminent military power, the United States seeks to maintain its position of influence. China's economic and military growth is seen as a challenge to this balance, potentially leading to strategic competition and the need for the Pentagon to bolster its military capabilities. In parallel, institutional mistrust between the Pentagon and China's security apparatus can be attributed to historical factors, divergent political systems, and competing interests. This mistrust fuels strategic competition, with both sides engaging in military modernization efforts,

intelligence gathering, and regional influence projection to safeguard their respective interests.

The last theoretical notion relevant to this book is decoupling. In the international system, it refers to the process of reducing or severing interdependencies and linkages between countries, particularly in economic and technological aspects, often driven by political or strategic motivations. In the context of China, decoupling typically refers to efforts by certain countries or actors to reduce their economic and technological reliance on China or to limit China's access to their markets, supply chains, or critical technologies. Decoupling from China has gained prominence in recent years due to various factors, including concerns over national security, intellectual property theft, human rights issues, geopolitical tensions, and trade imbalances. These concerns have prompted some countries to re-evaluate their economic and technological relationships with China and explore strategies to diversify their supply chains, reduce dependence on Chinese markets, or restrict the transfer of sensitive technologies. Decoupling can take different forms and impact various sectors, such as trade, investment, technology, and finance. It may involve measures such as imposing tariffs or trade restrictions, limiting foreign direct investment, enhancing export controls, tightening regulations on technology transfers, or diversifying sourcing and manufacturing away from China. Proponents of decoupling argue that it is necessary to safeguard national security, protect domestic industries, address unfair trade practices, and reduce vulnerabilities associated with overreliance on a single country. Critics, on the other hand, argue that decoupling can disrupt global supply chains, hinder economic growth, and lead to increased costs for businesses and consumers.

This chapter has thus far explored the concept of China's peaceful growth as a crucial component of its Grand Strategy. It has delved into three inquiries that examine the relationship between security policy and the Grand Strategy in the Chinese context while also exploring Chinese scholarly perspectives on China's foreign policy preferences as part of the search for China's own IR theory. Additionally, the chapter has evaluated China's growth from the perspective of the Hegemonic Stability Theory and has provided valuable insights for analysing contemporary China's security policy, incorporating relevant notions such as global security *locus*, CNP, decoupling, and institutional perception.

Following these questions raised throughout the previous parts of this chapter, this book's main aim is to provide a scientific explication of how contemporary China's security policy strikes a delicate balance between its hesitancy to become a more assertive hegemon and the evolving global dynamics in the post-pandemic era. The central research question that drives this book is to explore how the different layers of China's security policy align with the significant events and transformations occurring worldwide. These occurrences manifest themselves at both the systemic level and the level of individual units. At the systemic level, the book challenges conventional understandings of China's role and behaviour by analysing its responses to global shifts, emerging power dynamics, and evolving international norms and institutions. Meanwhile, at the level of the units, the book delves into the specific policies, strategies, and actions of China's security apparatus, examining how they adapt to and shape the changing global landscape through its bilateral relations with specific countries of its interest. By addressing these research questions, the book aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of contemporary China's security policy and its implications for regional and global dynamics in the post-pandemic era. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Hegemonic Stability Theory operates under the assumption of a unified and coherent international relations system. In its near history, the system has never been physically divided or decoupled. Even during the period of bipolarity and the Iron Curtain, both sides maintained a certain level of communication, and the interactions have never stopped. However, when examining the interplay between China's foreign policy and the ongoing developments in the modern system, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it raises questions about the sustainability of China's peaceful growth as a variable. Many attempts the modern world is witnessing, such as the strengthening of the BRICS, the de-dollarization of global trade, and even attempts to form new financial institutions and a financial system independent from the Western-led global one, confirm that the world has entered into an uncertain era of decoupling with distinctive features hard to predict.

METHODOLOGY

This book primarily deploys qualitative methods, such as content analysis of relevant documents, strategies, and doctrines, as well as descriptive statistics that are also used to support the analysis. The author

adopts a unique method of sequencing China's security policy layers, which involves analysing the evolution of China's security policy over time while putting an emphasis on the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. Some aspects of network analysis are used in this research to explore the relationships between various actors involved in China's security policy-making process. The final chapter of the book utilises scenario development as a method to examine potential future developments in China's security policy. The process involves constructing hypothetical scenarios based on various assumptions about China's position in the international system over the coming decades and analysing the potential implications of each scenario using the Grand Strategy elements. The objective of this method is to identify possible challenges and opportunities for China's security policy and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how it may evolve under different circumstances. The scenario development approach offers an exploratory approach to understanding potential future developments that goes beyond simple extrapolation from past trends. Combined with the other traditional research methods used in the book, this method provides a holistic understanding of China's security policy, its challenges, and potential future trajectories.

This book offers a comprehensive explanation of how modern China's foreign and security policy choices are formulated. The adjective "modern" has been intentionally repeated several times in the text thus far. It is important to note that the post-pandemic policy of China should be understood within the context of modern times. Without entering into debates about the relationship between modernity and contemporaneity in the sociological and philosophical sense, throughout the book, the *modern* period corresponds to the interval between the major eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 and the National People's Congress's (NPC) election of Xi's third presidential mandate on March 10, 2023. To ensure a comprehensive examination of the evolutionary component of individual policies, the study extends over a period spanning several decades. Nonetheless, the majority of chapters and sub-chapters primarily concentrate on a narrower temporal scope spanning several years for the purpose of conducting a more focused analytical investigation. To narrow the research focus on the post-COVID-19 period, the author has focused on academic articles published between 2019 and 2023. Specifically, the author has looked for articles that analyse the layers of China's security policy and its evolving foreign policy goals. By examining the analytical discourse in the scientific community during this time period, the author aims to

enhance understanding of China's Fifth GS. While the term "post-pandemic period" is used in this manuscript, it specifically refers to the research period from 2019 to 2023. This means that the analysis presented in this book pertains to events that occurred just prior to the onset of the pandemic in 2019 and lasted until March 10, 2023.

Academic research on China's political processes is often quite hard and not feasible. Instead of comprehensive and in-depth analyses, the academic (and wider) community remains under the radar. It is why some of the academics from China will be interviewed. In addition to that, data qualitative insights will be used from social media accounts, especially those of top-ranking Chinese officials or Chinese embassies abroad. There is no precise spatial domain of this research, as this book is focused on China's layers of security policy across different levels of its global security approach, regionally tailored policies, and its surrounding areas, including the East China Sea, East Asia, Taiwan, and the South China Sea. By analysing China's security policies in these different spatial contexts, the book/research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how China's security concerns are shaped by its regional and global environment. Through this spatial lens, readers can gain insights into the complex interplay between China's domestic politics, regional dynamics, and global ambitions, as well as the challenges and opportunities that arise from China's evolving security posture. The spatial dimension of this book primarily relies on the sub-layers within the spatial-hierarchical framework. The research focuses on key geographical regions, including the Eurasian area encompassed by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Persian Gulf, the Chinese maritime geographical environment, the Arctic, and East Africa. These specific spatial layers are pertinent to understanding China's security policy, as they are associated with distinct strategic considerations and geopolitical dynamics. By examining these regions, the analysis aims to illuminate the spatial dimensions that shape China's security policy and its interactions within these particular areas.

Data collection and guarantees for their validity are particularly evident in the social sciences, with a diversity of sources, numerous misleading portals and sources of information on the Internet, and intentionally hidden accurate data by certain governments or non-governmental organisations, leaving a lot of room for speculation in the field of international relations science (Stekić, 2020a). This field represents a specific area of studying reality, with findings not based on methodologically structured experiments but often on clearly repeatable methods. Therefore, the care and explanation

of data accuracy should be at the top of the ethical agenda for researchers. An additional problem is the subject of this monograph, which refers to the collection of data whose reliability can only be triangulated by possessing knowledge of the Chinese language. For example, data on the foreign policy activities of officials of the People's Republic of China are available exclusively on the Chinese-language version of the websites of Chinese institutions. Regarding metrics and the use of data such as the budget and the amount of military equipment and weapons, this book will only show data that has been triangulated, meaning that it could be determined from at least two credible sources to be in agreement. If it is not possible to establish triangulation but, due to research reasons, the publication of the data would be of great importance, this will be especially emphasised throughout the manuscript.

To provide as accurate data as possible, China's MFA's daily briefs, official statements, bilateral visits, and multilateral plan activities to determine how China responds to the various challenges that impact its global leadership will be observed. Such sources might be fruitful in assessing the domains and goals of the policies, which are not visible at first sight.

Furthermore, the monograph incorporates data from diverse databases that are maintained by reputable academic centres and think tanks. To illustrate, in examining the Chinese arms trade and its associated industry, the author relies on information sourced from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), specifically the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database. Many useful insights will be used from the *China Power Project* by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Sequencing the Layers of China's Security Policy

The layers of China's contemporary security policy are at the core of this monograph. They represent a novel aspiration to innovate an academic analytical framework and approach to Chinese security policy, but they also help to dissect the complex trajectory of China's position in the conditions of global competition with the US along with its bilateral relations with other important states. Furthermore, it involves changes in the system of international relations, cooperation, and activities within international organisations and fora, as well as certain internal political and social factors that significantly determine the direction of China's security policy in the current circumstances. While there are several ways to approach China's

security policy, this book offers a comprehensive proposal that aims to cover, to the best of its scope, all the components of China's efforts to establish a complete security policy. Following such logic, at the first analytical level, it splits China's contemporary security policy into three areas that serve as its main layers.

The spatial-hierarchical layer compounds two groups of China's foreign policy layers: hierarchical and geographical. The hierarchical group consists of three sub-level layers: its global agenda, compounding regionally tailored approaches based on geographical criteria; its national security agenda, whose factors influence the formulation of its foreign preferences; and the human security perspectives of Chinese politics.

The global agenda has brought to the fore China's efforts to promote its "Fifth Grand Strategy", as explored in the subsequent chapter. China's emergence as a global superpower has spurred significant interest in its regional security policies. This layer of Chinese security policy involves specific, regionally tailored policies for different parts of the world. Against this backdrop, this chapter delves into China's strategic security policies with a particular focus on East Asia, the Persian Gulf region, and Africa, including its security position in the Arctic region, which has gained greater salience due to global warming and the strategic importance of transit routes that connect China to Europe.

The chapter examines China's approach to Saudi Arabia and Iran and their regional security dynamics. It also considers opposition to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative among the European Union Member States and the specifics of the security arrangements it has recently implemented. In addition, the chapter discusses China's foray into space policy and its efforts to develop dominant systems to rival the United States, Russia, and other countries with significant space programs. The final section of this chapter briefly outlines China's security position in Africa, including its sole overseas military base in Djibouti, its possible expansion of military presence beyond its borders, and the specific security arrangements concluded in the Solomon Islands, with a focus on potential plans for greater security arrangements in the region of Oceania.

The second group of layers of China's security policy, the **functional layer**, focuses on key areas that test China's readiness and efficiency in addressing global challenges. These areas serve as critical touchpoints where China's actions and engagement are closely observed. This research comprises several specific focal points within this functional layer, shedding

light on China's approach and strategies in each area. One area of examination is China's response to containment activities. This entails analysing how China navigates and responds to efforts aimed at limiting its influence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The book explores China's interactions with regional powers, its maritime disputes, and its broader efforts to assert influence and protect its interests in this important geopolitical area. Another crucial aspect is China's approach to the Indo-Pacific region as a whole. The book also captures China's foreign policy strategies in this strategic theatre, encompassing initiatives like the BRI, regional diplomacy, and the pursuit of economic and security interests.

It explores China's involvement in mediating the conflict in Ukraine. By examining China's stance, diplomatic efforts, and participation in international negotiations, it seeks to understand China's role in mitigating tensions and promoting stability in the region. In light of the security vacuum in Afghanistan, the book analyses China's response to this pressing issue. It examines China's concerns about terrorism, regional stability, and economic interests, as well as its efforts to contribute to the resolution of the Afghan conflict through diplomacy, investments, and regional cooperation. China's projection of soft power on the global stage is another focal point.

Lastly, China's cultural diplomacy, international media presence, academic exchanges, and public diplomacy initiatives aimed at enhancing its global image and influence are explored as a part of the wider functional layer of China's new security agenda. Additionally, the book delves into China's foreign policy approach regarding technology, artificial intelligence, and the semiconductor industry. It examines China's strategies for technological development, international cooperation, market access, and influence in these critical sectors. The arms trade and foreign aid policies of China are also scrutinised. The book evaluates China's objectives, motivations, and approaches in these domains, including the implications for regional security dynamics as China emerges as a major arms exporter and provider of development assistance.

The third group, *institutional layers*, captures entities that shape China's decision-making process, encompassing the role of the Communist Party of China, state and national administration, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA(N)), as well as China's participation in international organisations and other international forums. Understanding these institutional dynamics is crucial for comprehending China's Grand Strategy. The CPC plays a central role in China's governance structure and decision-

making. As the ruling party, it exercises significant influence over policy formulation and implementation. The book examines the CCP's role in shaping China's grand strategic concepts and its impact on the country's foreign and security policies. By analysing Party documents, internal debates, and decision-making processes within the Party, a deeper understanding of China's strategic thinking and objectives can be gained.

Furthermore, the state and national administration, including governmental agencies and institutions, also contribute to China's Grand Strategy. These entities are responsible for implementing policies and translating strategic concepts into actionable plans. The book explores the mechanisms through which state and national administration institutions coordinate various instruments of statecraft, such as diplomacy, economics, and the military, to pursue China's national interests. The PLA(N), as a branch of China's armed forces, plays a critical role in China's security policy. It has a specific focus on maritime affairs and the protection of China's territorial integrity, including its maritime interests. The book investigates the PLA(N)'s influence on China's grand strategic conduct, exploring its capabilities, deployments, and operational concepts. Understanding the PLA(N)'s role provides insights into China's security priorities and how they intersect with its broader foreign policy objectives. Additionally, the book examines China's involvement in international organisations and other international fora. China's membership in these institutions offers a platform for engagement, cooperation, and exerting influence on the global stage. Analysing China's role within these multilateral frameworks helps to elucidate its strategic intentions and its efforts to shape international norms and governance structures.

Table 1. Organisation of the book's central chapter: layers and sub-layers of China's contemporary security policy

LAYERS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA'S SECURITY POLICY		
Spatial-hierarchical	Functional	Institutional
Hierarchy domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indo-Pacific Locus Response • Mediating Ukraine's Conflict • Afghan Security Vacuum • Soft Power Projections • Tech/AI/Semiconductors • Arms Trade & Foreign Aid Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Party • The State • The PLA(N) • PRC in IOs
Spatial domain	Regionally tailored approaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Asian China's Policy • BRI Sino-scepticism • China's Gulf Policy • China's Arctic Policy • China's Space Programme • Specifics of other regions (Africa and Oceania) 	

Source: Author

This sequencing of Chinese security policy into specific layers enables not only a deeper understanding of China's general agenda in the security domain but also the building and updating of layers in future editions of this monograph in a systematic and unique way. This will enable the longitudinal monitoring of all layers of security policy through the same prism and will serve as adequate comparative material for verifying and reassessing the scenarios presented in Chapter V of this monograph.

This monograph, like many others in the field of international relations, is subject to some epistemological limitations. Firstly, it was developed amidst a constantly changing and complex global political landscape, which was often unpredictably changing on a weekly basis. Some events, such as the armed

conflict in Ukraine, China's involvement in its mediation efforts, and its increased international confrontation with the US, have been evolving quickly during 2022 and in the first half of 2023. Secondly, the timeframe in which China's contemporary security policy is situated is confined to the period spanning from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to the session of the National People's Congress in early March 2023.⁷ This timeframe includes the formulation of China's foreign policy preferences, the execution of specific military activities, and other bilateral engagements. As a result, this book does not purport to provide an all-encompassing answer to the question of China's security policy; rather, it offers a systematic analysis of a specific period of its manifestation and functioning.

The book faces the third gnoseological limitation, specifically pertaining to the distinction between China's formally proclaimed objectives *de lege lata* and the underlying intentions that inform its specific policies or domains. As a result, this research adopts an approach that delineates both the explicit manifestations and the pertinent aspects deemed significant for addressing the research question. This approach draws upon a range of sources, including policies, official documents, strategies, acts, and scholarly analyses, to elucidate the visible dimensions while also exploring potential underlying motivations that may shape China's desired foreign and security policy outcomes. By considering these sources in tandem, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of China's stated positions as well as the potential implications and broader objectives that may underlie its policy actions. In the upcoming chapter, the evolutionary path of China's GS will be presented in detail as a prelude to the central chapter, where the layers of security policy in the modern world will be thoroughly analysed.

⁷ While the majority of the text in this book predominantly focuses on events within the specified period, there are specific sections, notably Chapter II discussing the evolution of China's Grand Strategy, and Chapter IV delving into the analysis of the US's perception of China's security policy in the preceding decade, where the temporal scope will be expanded. These chapters provide a broader context and delve into developments that transcend the immediate timeframe covered in the book. By extending the time domain in these sections, a more comprehensive understanding of China's Grand Strategy and the US's perspective on China's security policy can be achieved, encompassing a wider temporal framework that is crucial for a nuanced analysis.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE GLOBAL AGENDA

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CHINA'S GLOBAL AGENDA

Modern Chinese diplomacy and security policy are characterised by a strategic way of thinking that is inspired by numerous philosophical principles developed within the roots of Eastern philosophy, particularly those of Chinese origin. Thus, the examination of China's contemporary decisions and activities requires a deeper understanding of how certain philosophical concepts and trajectories developed within Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have influenced its approach. Additionally, this analysis will explore concepts such as peaceful growth, *tiān xià* (天下) (All under Heaven), and others that are central to China's foreign policy.

A key driving source that is immanent both to evolutionary components as well as to modern Chinese security policy is the painful historical heritage China experienced throughout its modern period of development. Going back into the past, Hegel claimed that Chinese civilization was the oldest known to the modern world, as with the Chinese Empire, "history goes hand-in-hand because it is the oldest empire, as far as history informs us" (Hegel, 1951). According to his stance, the Chinese have a uniquely extensive and consistent tradition of historical writing. He acknowledged that other Asian nations have ancient traditions, but they lack the same historical depth, while the Vedas of India, for instance, are not considered history, and the traditions of the Arabs, while ancient, do not focus on the state and its development. In contrast, Hegel believed that China's long history was intertwined with the development of its state, which is reflected in its rich historiography, and that its tradition of historical writing can be traced back at least 3,000 years before the birth of Christ (Hegel, 1951). China's long and rich history boasted numerous significant philosophers whose influence extended beyond China and resonated globally.

Hegel described the specifics of how Chinese emperors were ruling. The portrayal of the emperor's rule in Chinese history is characterised as simple, natural, noble, and reasonable, without any trace of vain pride, reluctance to speak plainly, or false pretences of refinement. The emperor lives with a strong sense of dignity and responsibility instilled since his youth (Hegel,

1951). Further, he claims that in China, there is no separate distinguished class or nobility except for princes of the imperial house and the sons of ministers who have certain advantages due to their position rather than their birth. Everyone else is considered equal, and only those with the necessary skills are given a role in the administration (1951: 124). The Chinese state was therefore often regarded as an ideal and even a model for others to follow; such emphasis on meritocracy, as opposed to inherited status, has been a hallmark of Chinese governance for millennia (1951: 124). Hegel specifically analysed the internal political system of ancient China as a precondition for understanding its foreign policy actions.

“One cannot talk about a constitution, because that would mean that individuals have independent rights, partly in terms of their special interests, partly in terms of the entire state. That moment must be missing here, so we can only talk about managing the empire. In China, there is an empire of absolute equality, and all the differences that exist are only possible with the help of state administration and the dignity that everyone gives themselves in order to achieve a high level in that administration. Since equality reigns in China, but not freedom, that is why despotism is a necessary way of ruling there. In our country (in the western world), people are equal only before the law, and in that respect, they have some property; apart from that, they have many other interests and many special things, which must be guaranteed if there is to be freedom for us. In the Chinese empire, on the other hand, special interests are not justified by themselves; the rule comes only from the emperor, who exercises it as a hierarchy of dignitaries or mandarins” (Hegel, 1951: 124-125).

Confucianism has had a profound impact on the history, culture, and governance of China, and its influence on modern Chinese foreign policy cannot be overstated. This philosophy, which has been prominent in China for over two thousand years, emphasises the importance of moral values, social harmony, and responsible governance. The philosophical tradition attributed to Confucius (孔子) emerged during the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE. Notably, his teachings gained official recognition as the state philosophy rather than a religious doctrine, as noted by Henry Kissinger (2020) in his observations of the Han Dynasty’s transition from the old era to the new era (Kissinger, 2020: 24).

One of the key principles of Confucianism is the concept of *rén* (仁)–humaneness, which stresses the importance of compassion, respect, and

benevolence in human relationships. This principle is reflected in China's emphasis on diplomacy, as it seeks to maintain peaceful and mutually beneficial relationships with other nations. Another important aspect of Confucianism is the idea of propriety-*lǐ* (礼), which emphasises the importance of social norms and proper behaviour. This principle is reflected in China's emphasis on stability and order in its foreign policy, as it seeks to uphold international norms and prevent conflict. Additionally, Confucianism places great emphasis on education, which is viewed as a means of achieving moral and intellectual enlightenment. This is reflected in China's emphasis on promoting cultural exchange and educational cooperation in its foreign policy. Moreover, Confucianism stresses the importance of harmonious relationships between individuals, society, and nature. Despite the widespread belief that Confucianism has played a significant role in shaping China's modern foreign and security policies through its promotion of pacifism, there exist counterarguments to this perspective. Feng Zhang (2015) argues that Confucian pacifism is a myth when viewed through a historical lens (2015: 200). Zhang suggests that, despite its century-long popularity, Confucianism's claim to pacifism is inconsistent with many historical facts. A brief historical overview reveals that imperial Chinese foreign policies were not solely focused on maintaining peace. As a great power, it was necessary for China to deal with issues of war, conflict, competition, cooperation, and accommodation (2015: 200). Therefore, it would be difficult for any great power's foreign policy to be entirely defensive and peaceful.

While some scholars may argue that Confucianism promotes pacifism, others maintain that the ideology instead promotes a form of hierarchical order and obedience to authority. In recent times, the CPC has incorporated certain aspects of Confucianism into its political ideology, including the idea of a meritocracy, respect for authority, and social harmony. Chong (2014) presented a counterargument to the narrative that portrays China as a historically benevolent actor, highlighting the war-prone evolution of this polity. Chong noted that during the periods of Han and Tang primacy from the 2nd to 1st centuries BCE and 7th to 8th centuries, respectively, and the Ming and Qing dynasties, China's foreign policy tended towards more coercive measures rather than peaceful ones (2014: 954). In particular, China's engagement with inner Asian regimes has been marked by violent actions and armed conflicts throughout its history (Cheng, 2014: 953). Chong's argument highlights the complexity of China's foreign policy history and challenges the simplistic view of China as a peaceful power. Understanding

this historical context is crucial for analysing and evaluating China's contemporary foreign policy actions.

Similarly, Confucianism's emphasis on hierarchical order and authority, as well as its focus on promoting social harmony, have influenced China's preference for multilateralism and non-intervention in the affairs of other nations. However, this has not prevented China from using military force to pursue its national interests in certain situations, particularly in the context of territorial disputes. For instance, recent tensions in the South China Sea are all but peaceful, or even more tangible: the loss of dozens of soldiers in a fire exchange on the Sino-Indian border during the melee between the PLA and Indian Armed Forces in 2020 and 2021, in which more than 40 soldiers were killed (India Times, 2020).

The historical record indicates that China has not always maintained peaceful relations with its neighbours, and one possible explanation for this pattern can be found in a related philosophical tradition, Taoism. It is an ancient Chinese philosophy that emphasises the natural order of things and living in harmony with the *Tao*, which is the underlying force that governs the universe. Its principles have greatly influenced Chinese culture, including its foreign policy. One of the key tenets of Taoism is non-action (无为– *wúwéi*), or effortless action, which emphasises that one should not force things to happen but rather allow them to unfold naturally. The Analects contain contradictory metaphors, with the *wúwéi* family of metaphors coexisting alongside those that imply the importance of hard work, extreme effort, and even going against the natural tendencies of a material. According to Edward Slingerland (2007), the most well-known example of *wúwéi* in the Analects is the account of Confucius, where it is described as being able to “follow his heart's desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety”. This exemplifies the first hallmark of *wúwéi*, where the subject (Confucius) surrenders control and follows the promptings of the self (the desires of his heart) without exertion. However, the Analects more commonly express the idea of lack of exertion through the “at ease” family of metaphors, often combined with metaphors for the second hallmark of *wúwéi*, unself-consciousness (Slingerland, 2007: 43).

The principle of abstention from action, or effortless action, is reflected in China's contemporary foreign policy, as it declaratively seeks to avoid direct confrontation and instead emphasises the importance of dialogue and negotiation in resolving disputes. Another important principle of Taoism is the concept of Yin and Yang, which represents the complementary

forces of light and darkness, positive and negative, and masculine and feminine. This principle is reflected in China's approach to international relations, as it seeks to balance its own interests with the interests of other nations. In addition, Taoism also emphasises the importance of humility, simplicity, and self-restraint. These values have influenced China's approach to global leadership, as it seeks to avoid overt displays of power and instead promote a more collaborative approach to addressing global challenges. The dualistic nature of Taoist philosophy leads China to believe that a coercive approach is meaningless without a cooperative one. China views military force as necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving its interests. As such, China seeks to persuade others through its narrative of a "peaceful rise" in the region.

One of the intangible memories that has heavily influenced China's decision-making process is commonly referred to as the "Century of Humiliation". This term typically refers to the period between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries when China experienced a series of military defeats, political upheaval, and economic instability at the hands of foreign powers. Some scholars, such as Scott (2008) and Kaufman (2010), argue that the century of humiliation began with the First Opium War in 1839. This war resulted in China ceding Hong Kong to the British Empire and opening several ports to foreign trade.

The Japanese invasion of China in 1937, which resulted in the deaths of millions of Chinese soldiers and civilians, marked the peak of the humiliation period. In addition to ending foreign occupation and control of China, the end of World War II in 1945 also ushered in a period of internal strife and civil war between the Communist Party of China and the Nationalist Party. China's century of humiliation placed it in interaction with Western powers but also with important countries in the region, including Japan. Such interactions still shape historical memory today and are etched into some of Beijing's foreign policy activities.

The document "China's Peaceful Development Road", published in 2005, offers insights into China's historical and cultural drivers of its foreign relations. It posits that China's pursuit of peaceful development is an "inevitable choice" based on its cultural traditions (China's Peaceful Development Road, 2005). The Chinese culture is pacifistic, and the Chinese people have always longed for peace and harmony. The document further states that:

“Six hundred years ago, Zheng He (1371-1435), the famous navigator of the Ming Dynasty, led the then largest fleet in the world and made seven voyages to the “Western Seas”, reaching more than 30 countries and regions in Asia and Africa. What he took to the places he visited tea, chinaware, silk, and technology, but he did not occupy an inch of any other land. What he brought to the outside world was peace and civilization, which fully reflect the good faith of the ancient Chinese people in strengthening exchanges with relevant countries and their peoples” (2005: 1a).

The document therefore strived to provide an explanation of why 1.3 billion Chinese people at that time were enjoying fruitful outcomes of the PRC development, which, needless to say, required a harmonious world in terms of global security standards. In addition to that, in November 2021, the CPC Central Committee adopted the Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on the *Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century*. The resolution places the Party at the centre of Chinese politics and historical development, not only since the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949 but also earlier, since the beginning of the CPC’s existence in 1921.⁸

All these historical events have paved the path for China’s “response” after the Civil War ended in 1949. Right after the Kuomintang party was exiled to Taiwan, the Mao Zedong premise arose that “China has to stand up”. It represented a prelude to a specific reaction by China whose foreign policy and security doctrine represent the next segment of the realisation of the “Chinese Dream” that continues to this day.

The “All-Under-Heaven” (*tiān xià*; 天下) concept emphasises a hierarchical worldview, with China positioned at the centre. This perception of a natural order places China as the central power, responsible for maintaining harmony and stability within its sphere of influence. This worldview influences China’s security policy by reinforcing the pursuit of regional primacy and the preservation of national unity. Zhao Tingyang (2009) argues that harmony serves as an essential ontological prerequisite

⁸ The CPC Central Committee has adopted such a similar resolution twice before, in 1945 and in 1981. The 6th Central Committee has adopted the *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party*, while in 1981, the 11th Central Committee adopted the *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China*.

for the existence and advancement of diverse entities. It is commonly understood as a state of reciprocal dependence, reciprocal improvement, or the perfect alignment among distinct elements, contrasting with the notion of uniformity or sameness. However, he believes that while in China's case, harmony, in comparison to sameness, involves complexity, it essentially pertains to the concept of multiplicity rather than unity, and the origin of this definition of harmony can be traced back to a significant debate that transpired around the year 530 BC (Tingyang, 2009: 221).

China's actions, such as territorial disputes and claims in the South China Sea, can be understood within this context of preserving the hierarchical order and safeguarding its perceived position within "All-Under-Heaven". This concept also carries significant cultural and identity connotations, shaping China's security policy in the contemporary era. The concept embodies China's historical and cultural pride, highlighting a sense of exceptionalism and a unique civilizational heritage. China's security policy is influenced by the desire to protect and promote its cultural identity, contributing to its emphasis on national sovereignty, non-interference, and resistance to perceived external pressures. This cultural lens informs China's stance on issues such as human rights, territorial integrity, and historical narratives, reflecting the importance of cultural identity in its security considerations. Moreover, the concept of "All-Under-Heaven" encompasses the idea of harmony and order, which influences China's approach to security policy. China seeks to establish a stable and harmonious regional and global environment, aligning with its historical belief in the balance of power and the management of relationships. This pursuit of harmony manifests in China's emphasis on multilateralism, economic interdependence, and non-confrontational diplomacy. Through initiatives like the BRI, China aims to promote regional connectivity and cooperation, facilitating a more harmonious global order that aligns with the principles of this concept.

The historical developments that China underwent during the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as its philosophical principles on internal and external state governance, contributed to the formulation of pre-existing principles that shape China's security policy and its new Sino-centric order. The Chinese Civil War resulted in the Communist Party assuming control of the Chinese state, and this led to the amalgamation of Marxist-Leninist ideology with the various factors that had previously influenced policy formation. Rosyidin (2019) provides a vast amount of arguments that Confucianism, Legalism, and Taoism are three traditional thoughts that shape most Chinese modern politics. These developments created the necessary

conditions for the emergence of a coherent Chinese Grand Strategy, which has undergone four distinct stages of development in the latter half of the 20th century and in the first two decades of the 21st century. The following sections of this chapter will explore each of these stages in detail.

FOUR GRAND STRATEGIES: CHINA AS THE “和” (hé) OF THE MODERN WORLD

The recent surge in interest in the Grand Strategy has led to an overwhelming amount of literature on the topic, especially in the context of China’s foreign and security policy analysis. This book takes a different approach by examining how specific events and processes within the current international order have influenced China’s foreign policy preferences. Such a perspective provides a valuable addition to the study of Chinese GS texts and offers a unique insight into the evolution of China’s position in the global arena. Hence, the book argues that an analysis of China’s Grand Strategy evolution can be traced and divided into four major historical periods. A similar stance was recently identified in a study by Andrew Scobell and associates (2020), according to whom the first phase of China’s GS, known as the “revolutionary” phase, began in 1949 and lasted until 1977. During this time, the primary focus was on revolution and the establishment of a socialist state. The second phase, which lasted from 1977 to 1989, was characterised by a shift towards a more politico-military and superpower-centric approach as China sought to protect itself from external threats.

Scobell and associates (2020) argue that the third phase, which began in 1990, was focused on strengthening China’s “Comprehensive National Power” (CNP), particularly its economic and military power. This phase lasted until 2003, when the current, fourth phase of China’s GS, “rejuvenation”, was introduced. The rejuvenation phase, according to Scobell and associates (2020), is concentrated on China’s objective of becoming a great power, both militarily and economically, and reasserting its influence on the international scene. The authors contend that this fourth stage of China’s Grand Strategy will still apply to the entire world in 2020 (Scobell et al., 2020).

However, in the conditions after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical processes have been significantly accelerated, and it seems that the hidden strategic competition between China and the US has surfaced

after 2020 with the threat of turning into an open conflict, which challenges the claim of “prolonged” and “unchanged” China’s fourth GS. Numerous activities that the official Beijing has undertaken in terms of international politics since the pandemic began—filling in the security *vacuum* in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal, mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, steps in mediating the war in Ukraine, but also increasingly assertive military responses to the newly emerging *locus* of global security in the Indo-Pacific—confirm a significant change in the course and level of China’s foreign policy activities. Hence, it is reasonable to investigate whether the current phase of China’s GS, which has been marked by a relatively restrained approach to international affairs, has now ended and if a new strategic doctrine has been formulated for the future.

The first four stages of China’s Grand Strategy evolution brought the issue of China as a promoter of a harmonious world to the forefront. Through this approach, China not only positioned itself as a peaceful partner but also contributed to overall harmony in terms of economic and political cooperation within the international system. This has led some to see China as the “harmonious” (和-*hé*) force of the modern world. According to Zhao Tingyang (2009), such harmony represents a robust principle that encompasses the ideas of coexistence and mutual improvement. This perspective on harmony goes beyond mere cooperation, as the strategy of harmony seeks to foster harmonious play rather than merely fair play. In situations where no alternative options exist, fair play may be regarded as the most desirable outcome within a game (Tingyang, 2009: 15). On the example of modern China, he explains his theory in a dyadic sense: (1) When considering any two players, X and Y, harmony represents a reciprocal equilibrium where X and Y mutually share their fortunes to the extent that X benefits if Y benefits and suffers if Y suffers; (2) X achieves fulfilment when Y achieves fulfilment to such an extent that promoting Y’s fulfilment becomes X’s dominant strategy, thereby advancing his own fulfilment, and vice versa (Tingyang, 2009: 15). In essence, a harmony-focused strategy establishes a game of interdependence and essential mutual accomplishment, which also contributes to understanding modern Chinese external policies.

The analytical periods of the Grand Strategy evolution discussed in this book align with the practical rules of the heads of the Chinese state. For instance, the end of the first period coincides with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, while the second period ended with the conclusion of Deng Xiaoping’s mandate in 1989. Similarly, the end of the third period coincided

with the end of Jiang Zemin's tenure in 2003 and the ascent of Hu Jintao to power. The beginning of the Fourth Grand Strategy also follows the leader's mandate, with the minor difference that this time it "spills over" for the first time into the period of Xi Jinping's rule. As this part of the chapter provides an argument about the existence of a new, Fifth Grand Strategy of China that is being developed after the pandemic in 2020, Xi Jinping could become the first Chinese leader during whose tenure there were two different grand strategies.

Before delving into the analytical segment, it is crucial to clarify the specific nature of China's Grand Strategy.

Unlike the Grand Strategy of the US, which has arguably remained unchanged for several decades,⁹ China's Grand Strategy is different and subject to change depending on the foreign political context and the current leader's ideological and strategic vision of the world. While the essential features of China's Grand Strategy have undergone transformations, it would be inaccurate to characterise it as four or five distinct Grand Strategies. Instead, it is more appropriate to view it as a series of periods of evolution that can be analysed to gain a deeper understanding of its origins and evolution up to the present day. Therefore, this text proceeds in the direction of the chronological presentation of the most important determinants of each of the four Grand Strategies, with a special emphasis on indicating the most significant determinants of a possible Fifth Grand Strategy of China.

⁹ Richard Hooker argues that the United States' Grand Strategy has an enduring character over successive decades, highlighting its applicability in addressing global challenges while adapting to evolving geopolitical dynamics. He posits that a comprehensive grand strategy ought to transcend these delineations by aligning with inherent American strengths and vested interests. This alignment is intended to effectively address contemporaneous global challenges through a holistic framework interweaving diplomacy, economic prowess, military supremacy, and global leadership (Hooker, 2014). Presidents are constrained, according to the author, from adopting isolationist postures, disregarding alliance commitments, eschewing diplomatic engagements, or neglecting pivotal international regions. Though a particular presidential administration may prioritise specific agendas, such as the Rebalance to Asia, the inherently dynamic nature of international affairs dictates that emergent crises, such as those within the Arabian Gulf or incidents involving weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), can promptly recalibrate these priorities. Such crises subsequently demand immediate attention and persist as imperatives until satisfactory resolutions are achieved (Hooker, 2014).

The First Grand Strategy Period, 1949–1976

After World War II ended, China strived to regain its position over defeated Japan, assert its national borders, and establish deeper relations with the states in its nearest surroundings as well as across the globe. China underwent radical political changes as it embraced socialism, and the revolutionary momentum that had built up during the pre-World War II period under the leadership of the Communist Party of China persisted after its victory in the Civil War over the Guomindang and the latter's subsequent exile to Taiwan. The very first phase of China's Grand Strategy evolution occurred between the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and Mao's death in 1976.

In the first era of the GS's development, a key role was played by China's foreign policy positioning towards the two blocs of the Cold War, particularly its relations towards the US and the then USSR, as well as internal self-awareness of its own strengths, development modalities, and principles of development of its own foreign policy agenda. During Mao Zedong's leadership, China pursued a foreign policy that was focused on achieving political and economic independence from foreign powers, promoting socialist ideology, and supporting anti-colonial movements around the world. This foreign policy was shaped by Mao's Marxist-Leninist beliefs, his desire to build a strong and independent China, and his vision of global revolution. At the beginning of his leadership, Mao saw the United States as the main imperialist power that needed to be challenged. He believed that the United States was the primary threat to China's security and sovereignty, and he saw the Soviet Union as a potential ally in the struggle against American imperialism. Mao believed that China needed to forge close ties with other socialist countries and promote the spread of socialism around the world. In the early years of Mao's leadership, China focused on rebuilding its economy and consolidating its political power. Mao's foreign policy was primarily aimed at securing China's borders and asserting its sovereignty.

Mao Zedong formulated his distinct approach to foreign policy, which, as rightfully observed by Cheng and Zhang (1999), oscillated thematically between the US and the USSR. During the 1950s, China pursued the so-called "leaning-to-one-side strategy" *yī biān dǎo* (一边倒) towards one of these superpowers, the Soviet Union. Sino-USSR cooperation was motivated by pure ideological views of the international system based on socialist ideology and continuous confrontation with the west led by the US, which official Beijing considered to be imperialistic. During a visit to the Soviet Union in the winter of 1949, Mao Zedong suggested to Stalin that a new

treaty be signed to replace the outdated one signed by the old Chinese authorities in 1945.

Led by Premier Zhou Enlai, the Chinese government negotiated the terms of the new agreement, and on February 14, 1950, the two sides signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. It consisted of only six articles, with the first one devoted to the issue of a threat coming from the potential military revival of Japan. This Treaty was actually a sort of soft military alliance, more precisely a consultative military alliance, as it envisioned that none of the parties could join any other alliance “directed against the other party, or participate in any coalition or in any action or measures directed against the other party” (Sino-Soviet Treaty, 1950, Art. 2). Interestingly, the Treaty envisioned in one of its articles a mutual respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of the other party (1950, Art. 6), which were preludes to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence Policy that China adopted several years later. According to the current China’s MFA stance, the Treaty has provided the Far East with peace and security in post-World War II times, promoting the “cause of social construction of the two countries” during that historical period (MFA PRC, 2023a).

Cheng and Zhang (1999: 96) recognised that the *leaning-to-one-side* strategy was a survival tactic meant to safeguard China’s security, sovereignty, and independence because it lacked the capability to deter the US on its own. These authors attributed the leaning-to-one-side as a security-oriented strategy that provided China with its independence in the international arena (1999, 96), while emphasising that the Sino-Soviet relationship was based on equality and not on China as a Soviet satellite country (Mao, 1956; According to: Cheng and Zhang, 1999: 96). During an interview conducted by Anna Louise Strong in August 1946, Mao Zedong put forth an intriguing proposition, denounced as the “intermediate zone” thesis (Jian, 2008), that the United States and the Soviet Union were separated by a vast region comprising several capitalist, colonial, and semi-colonial countries across Europe, Asia, and Africa. Mao believed that “until the United States had subdued these nations, any aggression against the Soviet Union would be improbable” (Strong, 1946). Jian (2008) argued that China viewed the emerging Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States from a Sino-centric perspective, perceiving itself as a passive player in the conflict.

The foreign policy of the newly established PRC was, however, far from being purely inert and defensive. One of the key aspects of Mao's foreign policy was his support for revolutionary movements around the world. Mao believed that socialism was the way forward for all nations and that revolutionary movements could be powerful tools for achieving this goal. China provided military, financial, and ideological support to various revolutionary movements, including the Viet Cong in Vietnam and the African National Congress in South Africa. As noted by Qiang Zhai (2000), China aimed to maintain a high level of neutrality in its surrounding countries, particularly Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, in an effort to undermine the US policy of isolating China.¹⁰ In Vietnam, China played a significant role in the reorganisation of its army, providing advisory support from PLA officers. As noted by Zhai, China recommended that the People's Army of Vietnam conduct an educational campaign on Marxist-Leninist principles, which was implemented for 3000 middle- and high-ranking officers (Zhai, 2000: 73). Mao also sought to build close ties with other socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union. During the ceremony of the Sino-Soviet Treaty signing, Mao claimed that China had defeated its own reactionary enemy, the Guomindang, at home (Yibo and Qiang, 1992). He further asserted that

“...we have driven the international reactionary forces out of China. But there are still reactionaries in the world, that is, imperialists outside China. Internally, we still face difficulties. Under these conditions, we need friends. We should solidify our relations and our friendship with the Soviet Union in a legal manner, that is, through a treaty. To solidify the friendship between the Soviet Union and China and to establish an alliance relationship. If imperialists prepare to attack us, we already have help” (Yibo and Qiang, 1992: 57).

Other scholars have also noted the “revolutionary” character of Chinese foreign policy during the 1950s. Specifically, the internationalisation of China and the Communist Party during 1954 and 1955 has been highlighted by various authors. This period was marked by three significant events: the Geneva Conference in 1954, a meeting between Zhou Enlai, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, and the Bandung Conference (Jian, 2008). Beijing's performance at Geneva and reconciling tone in the

¹⁰ For a more comprehensive explanation of China's foreign policy involvement in African affairs during Mao, see Karl, 2010.

Bandung Conference reflected the CCP leadership's evolving perception of "revolutionariness" in foreign policy as they sought to translate foreign policy challenges into sustained domestic mobilisation and expand China's influence in the non-Western world (Jian, 2008: 209). As a means of resolving the dispute with India, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai issued two joint statements on June 28 and 29, 1954, with India and Myanmar, respectively. These statements affirmed their commitment to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. This gave rise to a doctrine about the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that has underpinned China's security policy and remains relevant to this day, as will be further explored in the section of the chapter on the Fifth Grand Strategy.

Terrestrial security tensions and disputes during the 1950s were not the only challenges ahead of Mao and Zhou. As a consequence of the Civil War, in 1954 the first Taiwan Strait crisis occurred, which prompted the US Congress to adopt a Joint Resolution concerning the deployment of US military forces abroad on January 29, 1955. This resolution, commonly referred to as the Formosa Resolution, granted the US President the authority to use the US Armed Forces to safeguard and defend Formosa and the Pescadores against any hostile acts. The US President was also authorised to take any other measures that he deemed necessary or appropriate to ensure the defence of Formosa and the Pescadores next to Taiwan (US Congress, 1955). The Formosa Resolution had far-reaching implications for China's security and foreign policy. China saw the US's intervention in the Taiwan Strait Crisis as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The US's continued support for Taiwan also contributed to the PRC's perception of the US as a hostile and aggressive power. This perception has had a lasting impact on China's foreign policy, as seen in its efforts to build up its military capabilities to counter the US's presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, ideological differences, "leftist-deviationists" as described by Cheng and Zhang (1999, 97), emerged between the leaders of the Communist Party of China and the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong believed that the Soviet Union was betraying the principles of Marxism-Leninism and straying from the path of revolution. He saw the Soviet Union as being too focused on peaceful coexistence with the capitalist West and not doing enough to support communist revolutions around the

world. On the other hand, Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, saw Mao's ideas as overly militant and believed that China should focus on economic development rather than revolution. The split had a significant impact on global politics and led to a realignment of communist powers around the world. The relationship between the two leaders was often strained due to ideological differences and even personal animosity (Lüthi, 2010). Mao feared that the Soviet Union was becoming too powerful and could pose a threat to China's independence (Lüthi, 2010). According to his allegations, the Soviet Union's ideological stance was "friendly towards (American) imperialism, courteous towards reactionaries, and supportive of revisionism, ultimately providing little assistance to the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, amounting to the revisionist path" (Lüthi, 2010).

Such circumstances have led to the deployment of the strategy of simultaneously fighting with both fists (*liǎng gè quán tóu dǎ rén*-两个拳头打人), depicting China's fight against both the US and the USSR, which positioned China as the rare state, if not the only one, that ever confronted both superpowers during the Cold War. Cheng and Zhang (1999) argue that Moscow retaliated against China's view of the Soviet Union as a "deviant socialist state" by withdrawing Soviet structures from China, cancelling agreements and treaties, and creating artificial conflicts with national minorities along the shared border (1999, 97). Meanwhile, China maintained strained relations with the other superpower and used its "second fist" against it. In the eyes of the US administrations under John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson during the 1960s, China was merely an ordinary country that served as part of the strategy to contain the Soviet Union and could not be seen as a potential partner.

Bad Sino-American relations have been lasting since the WW2 period (and even beyond in history), especially with the US's heavy support for the Guomindang. During the Chinese Civil War, the United States provided significant military aid to Chiang Kai-shek's government. The aid included the equipment of 45 divisions, the training of 150,000 military personnel, and the transportation of 14 corps and 8 regiments of the communications police corps (Strong, 1946). The US also stationed 90,000 marines in important Chinese cities to guard the lines of communication for the Kuomintang in northern China. The total value of various kinds of US aid given to the Chiang Kai-shek government was over 4.5 million dollars by 1948. The US White Paper admitted that this aid was equivalent to "more than 50 percent of the monetary expenditures" of the Chiang Kai-shek government (Marxists, 2023).

Finally, from the early 1970s onwards, China embraced the *yī tiáo xiàn* (一条线) strategy of rapprochement with the US (Cheng & Zhang, 1999: 95). In 1971, the United States recognised the PR China and established formal diplomatic relations. This was a significant milestone in China's foreign policy, as it marked a shift towards a more pragmatic approach. Mao had long seen the United States as a primary enemy, but he recognised that China needed to engage with the outside world in order to achieve its goals. The rapprochement with the United States was also driven by China's desire to counter the Soviet Union's influence and assert its own leadership within the socialist bloc. Mao Zedong's foreign policy had a profound impact on China and the world. His emphasis on socialist ideology and anti-imperialism shaped China's relationships with other countries.

The consequences of the Sino-American Rapprochement were numerous, as it arguably shook the bipolar world order and potentially signalled China was ready to emerge internationally as a respective major power. Sino-Soviet tensions have heavily influenced the rapprochement pace, as they have significant implications for the global balance of power. By forging closer ties with the United States, China was able to reduce its dependence on the Soviet Union, which had been its main ally during the Cold War. This move helped to isolate the Soviet Union diplomatically and strategically.

In 1960, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward, an ambitious programme aimed at modernising China's economy and society. However, the programme was a failure, and it led to widespread famine and economic hardship (Ross, 2009). Mao's focus on revolutionary struggles and his emphasis on self-reliance had weakened China's economy and made it more vulnerable to external pressures. Despite these challenges, Mao remained committed to his vision of a strong and independent China. He continued to promote socialist ideology and support revolutionary movements around the world. In 1966, he launched the Cultural Revolution, a massive political campaign aimed at purging capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society and promoting Maoist thought. During this time, China's foreign policy became more confrontational. Mao believed that the United States was becoming more aggressive and that China needed to assert its independence and challenge American hegemony. On October 16, 1964, China conducted its first nuclear test at Lop Nor in Xinjiang province. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons assesses that China has conducted 23 atmospheric tests and 22 underground tests at the site (ICAN, 2023). This was a clear signal of its determination to become a major

world power. China also supported anti-American movements in Asia, including the Viet Cong in Vietnam.

During the final years of Mao's leadership, he developed a unique perspective on the world, specifically in terms of its division into three worlds. Mao's view held that the first world comprised the US and the former Soviet Union, while the second world included Japan, Canada, and Europe. The remaining countries, mainly located in Asia, Africa, and South America, comprised the third world. This perspective, referred to as the Three Worlds Theory in political theory (Yee, 1983), prescribed that China, as a third-world country, should never become a global superpower. Mao believed that the existence of only two superpowers led to worldwide turmoil and accused the US and USSR of practicing hegemonism, power politics, and bullying small states. In line with this belief, incoming President Deng Xiaoping stated that China was not and would never become a superpower in the future (Deng, 1974).

Interestingly, in contrast to today's and especially the post-pandemic context in which China calls for the suspension of alliances through Xi's newly introduced Global Security Initiative (GSI), at the end of the first and second periods of the evolution of its GS, the case was reversed, bearing in mind that Beijing supported the creation of every kind of economic and political, but also security allies against "aggressive opponents".

The quest for its own security agenda and independence in security affairs in the international arena was the main feature of China's GS in the fifties. Furthermore, the promotion of its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was the highlight of its first GS. Lastly, Mao was also focused on promoting a vision of Chinese identity that emphasised the country's historical greatness and cultural superiority.

The Second Grand Strategy Period, 1978-1989

After Mao Zedong's death, it was time to develop a new course for the Chinese external agenda. Herbert Yee (1983) contends that there were three main distinctive such policies in the post-Mao era: first, asserting Mao's revolutionary line in foreign policy; second, uniting all anti-Soviet forces, including the United States; and third, emphasising a self-reliance strategy. The author suggests that while there is no clear boundary between these three phases, the first phase lasted from 1974 to 1978, the second phase

continued for a year after the first phase ended, and the third phase began to take shape in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1983, 242).

Andrew Scobel and his associates (2020) described the second period of China's GS evolution as "state-centric". It lasted from the very beginning of 1978 to 1989. The key figure of this phase was Deng Xiaoping, thanks to whom the PR China later grew into a real-world superpower at the beginning of the 21st century. The focus of security policy was oriented towards external threats of an economic and political nature coming from other great powers. This arose as a consequence of the great opening and increased interaction with other countries in the system of international relations, not only in the economic and cultural domain but also in the military. In addition to renewing its membership in international organisations, China gradually began to accept US-imposed rules on the "functioning of the global economic order" during this period (Dumbaugh, 2008). The importance of the Party's internal organisation in this phase of security policy evolution was confirmed by Deng Xiaoping in a 1990 speech in which he described the Political Bureau and the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau as two "crucial bodies for China and the CCP" (Deng, 1990). Deng linked the stability of these two organs to the strength that the People's Republic of China had at that time at the international level (Deng, 1990).

Overall, Deng Xiaoping's foreign and security policy can be traced into three main phases (Karl, 2010). The first one began in the late 1970s and was focused on improving relations with the United States and other Western powers. Deng saw the United States as a crucial partner in China's modernization efforts, and he believed that China needed access to Western technology and investment to achieve its economic goals. Deng's efforts to normalise relations with the United States coincided with the earlier historic visit of President Richard Nixon to China in 1972. This visit paved the way for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1979. The second phase of Deng's foreign and security policy was marked by a more assertive and proactive approach to China's regional and global interests. Deng believed that China needed to establish itself as a major power in order to safeguard its security and promote its interests abroad. This led to China's more active participation in international organisations, such as the United Nations, and the development of closer ties with countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Karl, 2010). In addition, Deng sought to modernise China's military and develop a nuclear deterrent, which he believed was essential for China's security in a world

dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. The third and final phase of Deng's foreign and security policy was marked by a more pragmatic and cautious approach to China's international affairs. Deng recognised that China's rapid economic growth had brought with it new challenges and risks, and he believed that China needed to avoid provoking unnecessary conflicts or risks. Consequently, China developed a specific approach towards its internal territorial disputes, such as those with Taiwan and the South China Sea, and a greater emphasis on diplomacy and economic engagement as tools of foreign policy. Ronald Keith (2018) argues that the foreign policy preferences of Deng Xiaoping were rather pragmatic and independent. He believes that this particular synthesis of "self-reliance and the open door" has informed the "substance of China's foreign policy" (2018: 209).

Deng Xiaoping's leadership in post-Mao China marked a pivotal turning point in the nation's history. Central to his vision were the Four Modernizations, a set of comprehensive reforms aimed at modernising China's agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defence capabilities. These reforms, initiated in 1978, not only facilitated China's transition from a largely agrarian society to an economic powerhouse but also laid the foundation for its global prominence in the 21st century. Agricultural modernization would allow China to become self-sufficient in food production, a critical accomplishment for a nation previously plagued by chronic food shortages. Industrial modernization, the second pillar, focused on revitalising China's manufacturing sector. Deng promoted the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), where foreign investment and market-oriented principles were embraced.¹¹ This initiative spurred technological transfer, increased exports, and facilitated the emergence of China as the "world's factory". Rapid industrialization bolstered urbanisation and raised living standards for millions while also generating challenges related to environmental degradation and social inequalities. Science and technological modernization, the third facet, emphasised innovation and research to propel China into the forefront of global technological advancements. Deng recognised the significance of scientific progress for economic development, prompting investments in research and education. This commitment yielded notable breakthroughs in fields such as space exploration, telecommunications, and information technology,

¹¹ For more on Deng's SEZs, see Keith, 2018.

subsequently fostering China's transition from a follower to a driver of innovation. The fourth modernization, defence modernization, aimed to enhance China's military capabilities to safeguard national sovereignty and security interests. Deng's approach involved the acquisition of advanced weaponry and the modernization of military infrastructure. While this modernization was comparatively less emphasised in public discourse (Keith, 2018), it played an essential role in consolidating China's position as a regional and global player, contributing to its diplomatic influence and strategic significance.

In October 1980, the CIA issued a classified intelligence report titled "Defence Modernization in China", which was initially kept under a shroud of secrecy and only made accessible to the public in 2000. This report sheds light on Deng Xiaoping's comprehensive modernization strategy, comprising two key facets. Firstly, the strategy aimed at enhancing the capability of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) while maintaining restrained defence expenditures. Secondly, it involved substantial investments in the advancement of the defence industry (CIA, 1980). The report, once confidential, projected that this modernization drive sought to ensure the PLA's self-reliance through the acquisition of new weaponry and advanced equipment. The report underscored that China's success in achieving this modernization goal hinged on several critical factors. Primarily, the nation needed to maintain political stability until the turn of the millennium. Additionally, it relied on securing adequate foreign capital to fuel its modernization endeavours (CIA, 1980: 1).¹² A significant premise for achieving these objectives rested on avoiding large-scale armed conflicts on Chinese soil or within its sphere of influence across the globe. Furthermore, the report highlighted the necessity of modernising China's agricultural and scientific-technological sectors to achieve comprehensive progress (CIA, 1980: 1).

One of the key themes of Deng's foreign and security policy was the concept of "peaceful coexistence" with other nations (Zhang, 2019). Deng believed that China needed to develop mutually beneficial relationships with other countries based on respect for sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. This was a departure from Mao's more revolutionary approach to foreign policy, which had emphasised support for revolutionary

¹² For more detailed analysis on the PLA evolution and development, see "The PLA(N)" sub-chapter of this book.

movements around the world and opposition to the West. Another important aspect of Deng's foreign and security policy was his emphasis on economic development as a means of promoting China's global influence. Deng believed that China's economic success would be a source of soft power that would attract other countries to China's orbit and increase China's international influence. This led to the development of China's "going out" policy (走出去 – *zǒu chū qù*, which encouraged Chinese businesses to invest and operate abroad and to seek out new markets and opportunities. Deng's foreign and security policy was not without its critics, both inside and outside of China. Some critics argued that Deng's emphasis on economic development came at the expense of China's security interests and that China's rapid economic growth had made it vulnerable to external pressures and threats (Zhang, 2013). Others criticised Deng's more pragmatic approach to foreign policy as lacking in strategic vision and ambition (Goodman, 2002). Due to the distinctive mindsets that contributed to China's modernization, coupled with the infusion of communist ideology and Mao Zedong's perspectives, certain scholars contend that the complete political statecraft of Deng Xiaoping's tenure could be categorised as the era of "Dengism" (Zhang, 2013).

The Third Grand Strategy Period, 1990-2003

The third period of Grand Strategy of China evolution coincided with Jiang Zemin's mandate in the period between 1990 and 2003, nominally when Hu Jintao came to power.¹³ These are the years that correspond to the turning points in world history—the fall of the Berlin Wall and the global economic crisis that gripped the world at the very end of the first decade of this century. In addition, China's "opening" and promotion to the outside culminated with the magnificent Olympic Games that were held in Beijing several years later (2008), which additionally emphasised the soft component of power and the announcement of China's development in the years to come. The development of China's third period of the Grand Strategy has had several segments and cannot be analysed separately from the events in the system of international relations. Unipolarity led by the US

¹³ In 2002, Hu Jintao assumed the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, and in 2003, he became the President of the People's Republic of China. As a result, there has been some confusion about the exact timing of his ascent to power in academic literature.

during the nineties of the last century conditioned the formulation of a specific view of the world by China and the preparation of a “great response”, as Jiang Zemin put it.

According to the literature, the third phase of China’s security policy, spanning from 1990 to 2003, was marked by a focus on enhancing the nation’s “Comprehensive National Power” (CNP). CNP is a metric that assesses a country’s potential at a given time, often taking into account factors such as economic and natural resources, military capabilities, technological advancement, and human resources. The concept of CNP is deeply ingrained in Chinese political thought, with scholars such as Wang and Wong (1998) and Yan (2008) attributing its popularity to Deng Xiaoping. The XI Congress of the CPC formally recognised CNP as a component of China’s official foreign and security policy in 1992. The speech of Jiang Zemin, in which he emphasised the importance of the national power and capacity of the PRC in “opening to the outside”, was accompanied by intensified activity regarding the development of security policy. In the mid-1990s, China codified its own security policy for the first time with the adoption of the first White Paper on Defence in 1995. China’s “new security concept”, as described by Kerry Dumbaugh, should have convinced other countries that economic and military growth do not pose a threat to international security (2008, 5). In several published White Papers, China has defined the post-Cold War global environment as an area that requires a “more pragmatic security policy based on mutual equality, cooperation, and trust” (White Paper on Defence, 1998). Jiang is, perhaps, the first Chinese CP official to try to publicly define the central government’s relationship with the Party in foreign and security policy. Speaking about the need to preserve national security and state sovereignty in “outside” relations, Jiang pointed out that the Party, with its acts, doctrine, and thought of Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong, represents a policy-making entity, while the role of the central government is to represent to the state those policies (Jiang, 2002).

During the third period of GS evolution, China adopted four White Papers on Defence in 1995, 1998, 2000, and 2002, respectively.¹⁴ All of these papers presented the initiation of normative strategic thought by the official Beijing, which additionally formulated its external policy at the strategic

¹⁴ In total, between 1995 and 2023, there were eleven such papers adopted; beside the four enumerated, China adopted White Papers on Defence in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015, and in 2019.

level. There were two key components of the White Paper adopted in 1995: the promotion of peace and development on a global scale and issues tackling military personnel numbers within the PLA. The paper rejected the possibility of a global war at that time after the end of the bipolar era in the world, and therefore the position is advocated that China will turn to the development of economic capacities and focus on the development strategy of the economic base (China White Paper, 1995). Referring to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the Paper from 1995 emphasised that China's defence policy is essentially defensive in nature, with the aim of consolidating defences, deterring external aggression, preserving maritime and air sovereignty, as well as preserving national security and unity (1995: 2). In military terms, the Paper emphasised the tactics of people's war, rejected any regional or global hegemony of China, and claimed that China did not and would not have military bases or troops outside its own territory (1995: 3).

The second objective of China's defence policy in the nineties was to reduce the number of active People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers by one million. This was first announced in 1985 and was subsequently implemented through a series of measures outlined in the 1995 White Paper on Defence. However, the actual reduction occurred earlier than planned, with the number of PLA members being reduced from 4.2 million to 3.2 million by 1987 and further down to 3.1 million by 1990 (China White Paper, 1995: 4).¹⁵ This marked a significant departure from China's previous military strategy and signalled the establishment of a civilian system within the PLA, whereby existing officers were engaged in scientific research, education, and engineering jobs. As part of this opening-up process, over 100 military airports and 29 naval ports were opened for civilian or dual purposes (1995: 5). Concurrent with the reduction in the number of active soldiers, the PLA also decommissioned a substantial amount of weaponry, including 10,000 artillery pieces, over 1,100 tanks, 2,500 aircraft, and about 600 ships between 1995 and 1996 (China White Paper, 1995: 5). These moves were in response to the changing global security landscape following the end of the Cold War and Beijing's efforts to establish a new role in the international security system.

¹⁵ According to the White Paper (2002), there were about 2.5 million active members of the PLA in 2001.

In the mid-1990s, one of the key elements of China's defence policy was to maintain a low level of military expenditures. According to the White Paper on Defence (1995), China's military budget for 1994 was only 6.3 billion USD, which amounted to about 2.3% of the US military budget at that time, and only 5.3 USD per capita in China (1995: 7). Not only did the paper emphasise the importance of maintaining such low spending levels, but also the need for their rationalisation. It analysed the distribution of costs in the Chinese military budget and found that approximately one-third of the costs in 1994 were spent on soldiers' salaries, food, and uniforms, another third on training and military infrastructure, and the last third on equipping the army, transport, research, and development (China White Paper, 1995: 6). The White Paper further concluded that the low spending was "a consequence of the absence of threats to China's national security" and that as long as this situation remains unchanged, "China will not increase its spending substantially or by a large margin as it will never threaten or invade any other country" (1995: 6). The White Paper adopted in 1998 claimed that from 1979 to 1994, defence spending in China increased by an average of 6.22 percent annually in absolute terms, but in real terms, it decreased by 1.08 percent when compared to the general retail price index of commodities, which increased by 7.3 percent annually in the same period. In the years 1995-1997, China's annual defence expenditure was RMB 63.672 billion, RMB 72.006 billion, and RMB 81.257 billion, respectively. The majority of the increase in defence spending during this period was allocated towards improving the living standards of military personnel and aligning them with the per capita income increase of urban and rural residents. The White Paper (2000) claimed that China's defence expenditures increased annually from RMB 93.47 billion in 1998 to RMB 107.67 billion in 1999 and RMB 121.29 billion in 2000. The majority of the annual increase was used to cover routine military operations, retirement pensions for officers, pay and subsidy raises for military personnel to maintain their standard of living, and the cost of maintaining a garrison in Macao (China White Paper, 2000).

The focus of defence policy during the second era of China's GS development was the consideration of the use of military industrial technologies for peaceful civilian purposes. The White Paper of Defence stated that such a process of technology transfer from the military to the civilian sphere began rudimentarily in the late 1970s with the aim of promoting national economic development (China White Paper, 1995). Somewhat more concrete steps were taken in 1989 when the central

government established the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defence (1995: 7) with the task of coordinating technology transfer at the national, provincial, and corporate levels. As a consequence, the White Paper states that in 1995, China was in a position to produce about 15,000 products for civilian use in over 50 categories, and the Yun-5 and Yun-12 civil aircraft stood out as the most significant, as did the opening of the Qinshan Nuclear Power Station in Zhejiang Province (1995: 7).

The second period of the development of China's Grand Strategy was also marked by the accelerated development of space technology. Between 1984 and 1994, China launched as many as 11 satellites into space for civilian purposes, but which were produced by the military industry (1995: 7). The culmination of efforts to transfer technologies from the military to the civilian sphere was the establishment of the Centre for National Defence Technology Applications, which issued licences and looked at ways in which the military industry could help the overall progress of the Chinese nation during the last decade of the last century.

The third Taiwan crisis during the mid-20th century, under Jiang Zemin, served as a significant test for Beijing's foreign and security policy towards the United States. Henry Kissinger argues that Beijing was further "irritated" by the liberalisation efforts in Taiwan during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These measures included the complete liberalisation of the economy, the removal of media restrictions, and the allowance of political opponents to participate in elections, which ran counter to Beijing's stance on the "One China" policy (Kissinger, 2020: 429). Kissinger characterises the diplomatic activities of Li Teng-hui, who held the position of president of Taiwan at that time, as "vacation diplomacy" in the early 1990s (2020: 430). Li purposely embarked on unofficial visits with his delegation to various international centres, carefully avoiding official diplomatic recognition, despite strong US support for the "One China" policy. However, Kissinger critically observes that the US administration attempted to distance itself from Li and exhibit restraint, even though Li made several official visits to Washington (2020: 431).

In 1997, Jiang Zemin proposed a "three-step" strategy for national defence and military modernization. The first step, to be completed by 2010, aimed to fulfil the military strategic guidelines for the new period and lay a solid foundation for national defence. The second step, to be carried out in the second decade of the 21st century, aimed to accelerate the development

of high-tech weaponry and increase military quality, with corresponding growth in economic power. The final step was to be achieved by the middle of the 21st century. The success of the first step was deemed critical, with a focus on utilising peaceful development, revolution, scientific and technological innovation, informatization, and domestic and international strategic resources. The goal was to maintain a fast pace of development, reduce the gap in military modernization between China and developed nations, and build a solid foundation for national defence and military informatization (China White Paper, 2006: 60-61).

At the international level, the mid-1990s were challenging for China's foreign policy. In 1997, Beijing and Washington made efforts to improve communication and establish the official US policy of engagement, following confrontations in 1995 and 1996. These efforts led to a summit between Bill Clinton and Jiang Zemin in October 1997, where several agreements were made, including clarifying China's commitment to not transfer nuclear technology to third parties. They also agreed to improve communications between their militaries in East Asia and to increase cooperation in developing China's domestic legal institutions, fighting international crime, and transferring US environmental protection technology to China. During his visit to the US, Jiang outlined five guidelines for developing China-US relations during a luncheon in Washington. These guidelines include taking a strategic and long-term perspective, seeking a convergence of interests, abiding by the three China-US joint communiqués, handling differences through consultation on an equal footing with mutual respect, and properly addressing the Taiwan question (MFA PRC, 2023k).

Despite disagreements over human rights, the issue of Taiwan did not cause much controversy at the summit, as the presidents restated their official positions. Jiang adhered to the Party's unapologetic line on human rights, and it remained unclear whether Wei Jingsheng's release from prison was a genuine attempt at post-Tiananmen reconciliation with the Chinese people. Jiang was able to achieve what he wanted from his trip to the United States and cultivate ties with the American business community. Avery Goldstein characterised 1997 as a "year of transitions" in China's foreign policy, attributing it to factors such as internal issues like the status of Hong Kong, developments at the 15th Party Congress, and economic growth. Goldstein also identified Sino-American relations, cross-strait relations, and the adoption of "multifront diplomacy" as key elements of this transition (Goldstein, 1998). Goldstein (1998) argued that China was compelled to engage in multifront diplomacy, involving both the United States and

Europe. As part of this approach, China sought to improve its relationship with France, with a particular emphasis on halting French arms sales to Taiwan and preventing a resolution against China in the European Union. However, it turned out that such a relaxation of Beijing-Paris relations provided France's Airbus with the opportunity to conclude a 1.5-billion-dollar worth agreement with China (1998: 49).

Alongside these efforts, China also sought to develop partnerships with Russia, indicating its desire to expand its influence on multiple fronts. The two sides signed a Joint Declaration on the Multi-Polar World and Forming a New World Order, which held significant military and strategic implications. The declaration criticised hegemonism, NATO's expansion towards Eastern Europe, and Beijing's suspicions that the US was attempting to contain China geopolitically in the 21st century (Goldstein, 1998, p. 50). China faced challenges in managing its relationships with various countries, including Japan, and dealing with issues related to the Korean Peninsula and Southeast Asia. According to Goldstein, it is unclear whether China's assertiveness in this region, where there is a lack of multilateral security governance, will continue to be a concern in the future (1998: 50).

In 1998, the Chinese government published a significantly more comprehensive White Paper that systematically assessed the situation regarding international security, marking the first time such an assessment had been made, while also addressing China's national defence system, its capabilities and construction, cooperation in regional and global security affairs, and disarmament and arms control. The paper identified changes in the relations between the great powers and the general global economic growth that necessitated an increase in the level of security. According to the White Paper, while the era of "big wars" had passed, regional wars remained commonplace (China White Paper, 1998: 2). In addition, the White Paper emphasised that economic security is a component of national security not only for China but also in other countries. It referenced the economic crisis that occurred in Asia at the end of the 1990s and assessed the political stability in the Pacific and Oceania region as stable (1998: 2). The White Paper from 1998 continued the condemnation of hegemony, which had been a part of Chinese policy for decades. It identified "power politics" as the main front for world peace and stability and saw the alignment of some countries with military strength as a threat to direct military aggression (1998: 3). The paper offered the Chinese vision of ensuring global security through three activities: promoting the Five

Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, strengthening mutual economic cooperation to eliminate inequality at the national and international level, and promoting mutual understanding through dialogue and cooperation (1998: 4).

The 1998 document delineated the strategic priorities of China's defence policy for the Asia-Pacific region, which were threefold: the first priority was to ensure China's security; the second priority was to promote peace in the region; and the third priority was to engage in dialogue with all Asia-Pacific countries (China White Paper, 1998: 4). The White Paper presented China's comprehensive and systematic defence policy based on the principle of defence. The document expressed the view that long-term international peace is necessary for China's development, even on its geographical periphery, and highlighted the historical, cultural, and civilizational characteristics of China as a peaceful nation. The document articulated China's defence policy through a set of five principles. The first principle is the consolidation of national defence for the purpose of resisting aggression and defending state sovereignty and security (China White Paper, 1998). The second principle is to subordinate all national defence capacities and results to China's economic development and progress. The document acknowledges that this is a longer-term goal, and China will accept "the best profound changes in the world's military sphere for defensive combat where high technology prevails" (China White Paper, 1998: 7).

Next, at the dawn of the 20th century, China planned to implement a military strategy of so-called "active defence" (1998: 7). This strategy entails that China will engage in offensive military operations only in response to a decisive "mastery strike" (1998: 7), which is in contrast to the pre-emptive attack strategy proposed by former US President Bill Clinton during the same period. The latter strategy proposed the possibility and justification of pre-emptive attacks aimed at neutralising the opposing state's motives and thwarting its potential attack on American values, regardless of whether such an attack was already planned or had begun. Adaptation of the Chinese army "to the Chinese way" was the fourth specific that the 1998 White Paper introduced as a part of China's defence policy. It envisaged reducing the quantity and alignment of science and technology in defensive endeavours (1998: 8). The very last principle on which China's defence policy was laid aligns again with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, through which China was opposing armament, stationing of its troops abroad, and opposing the military blocs (1998: 8).

The assessment of the global security situation was not omitted in the 2000 White Paper on Defence. It was stated that a new world war “will not break out for a fairly long time to come”, while the Asia-Pacific region was considered stable in principle (China White Paper, 2000). China appeared to have a certain degree of security optimism regarding the world situation, as the document claimed that China’s cooperation with the ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea was fully developing economic prosperity, while the situation on the Korean Peninsula was “steadily easing off”, relations with neighbouring Vietnam on the issue of state borders were improved by an intergovernmental agreement, and the situation in the South China Sea was generally stable (2000: 2).

Global security situation assessment was not omitted even in the White Paper of Defence published in 2000. It stated that a new world war “will not break out for a fairly long time to come”, while the Asia-Pacific region was generally considered stable (China White Paper, 2000). It seemed that China had a kind of security optimism regarding the situation in the world since this act claimed that China’s cooperation with the ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea is fully developing economic well-being, while the situation on the Korean Peninsula is “steadily easing off”, referring to neighbouring Vietnam in terms of state borders that have been improved by an interstate agreement, and the situation in the South China Sea is generally stable (2000: 2). This document was largely based on the one from 1998, with differences on the budgetary spending of funds but also on several important security issues that the new era brought for China. First, it concerned border defence, bearing in mind that China decided to systematise the defence of its territory like never before. According to the provisions of this act, this was done by signing agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Laos, and China established about 200 checkpoints along its 22,000-kilometre-long border. Another issue concerned the establishment of a Macao Garrison directly under the command of the Central Military Commission. As China regained sovereignty over Macau in 1999, it was necessary to establish a military contingent that, according to the White Paper, “will serve the purpose of preserving state sovereignty” (2000: 14).

Furthermore, the 2000 White Paper declared some regional military initiatives China participated in. Those were the Asia-Pacific Region Forum (ARF), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD). The ARF is currently the only official multilateral security dialogue and

cooperation forum in the Asia-Pacific region. China's representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Defence have attended all ARF meetings, as well as meetings on various security topics. In the past two years, China has hosted several ARF seminars and meetings, including on tropical hygiene and prevention of infectious diseases, security policy, and defence conversion cooperation. China believed that the ARF should continue to focus on confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy while exploring new security concepts and methods (China White Paper, 2000). China has actively participated in the CICA since its initiation by Kazakhstan, believing it to be generally consistent with its security goals in Asia. China has also joined the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) and established the CSCAP China Committee. Furthermore, China has attended all NEACD meetings since 1993 and hosted two of them in Beijing. China has worked with other NEACD member states to reach an agreement on guiding principles for cooperation between northeast Asian countries (China White Paper, 2000).

Lastly, this White Paper (2000) pointed out China's participation in UN peacekeeping efforts. As of 2000, China has sent a total of 522 military observers, liaison officers or advisers, and 800 engineering unit personnel in two batches to various (in)active UN peacekeeping missions such as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO), the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) (China White Paper, 2000). Also, in 2000, China sent 15 civilian policemen to the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor, marking the first time that China had contributed civilian police personnel to a UN peacekeeping operation (2000: 28-29).

The 2002 White Paper was the last strategic document adopted under Jiang Zemin as President of the PR China. He relied on the three previous ones in the domain of content that related to the assessment of the security situation in the world, with a minor exception that emphasised terrorism as one of the most important threats to humanity (China White Paper, 2002). This was, of course, more than expected considering the 2001 terrorist attacks on the US. However, even though this document did specify some modalities of China's fight against terrorism, it did not identify it as a threat to its national

security. Interestingly, the Paper included “stopping armed subversion and safeguarding social stability” as a component of its defence policy in the fight against terrorism. The Chinese armed forces viewed the maintenance of public order and social stability as a crucial responsibility and aimed to take decisive action against all forms of terrorist activity, eliminate infiltration and sabotage by hostile forces, and clamp down on criminal activities that posed a threat to public order with the aim of promoting greater social stability and harmony (China White Paper, 2002: 5).

Somewhat more attention in the assessment of the security situation compared to the previous white papers was given to Taiwan, more precisely to the Taiwanese separatist forces that were identified as “the greatest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits” (2002: 3). In the realm of defence policy, China maintained its longstanding principles at the outset of the 2000s, with one notable alteration being its emphasis on putting an end to separatism and promoting the “complete reunification of the homeland”, as stated in the 2002 China White Paper. Further, it stated a novel aspect compared to earlier similar documents, which was its detailed explanation of the “strategy of active defence”. The document forecasted that this defence strategy would involve achieving decisive victory in local conflicts fought under high-tech conditions, placing further pressure on the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to develop weaponry and equipment technology and to provide personnel training based on scientific knowledge (China White Paper, 2002: 6).

Lastly, further normative and institutional building of a national defence system has been a crucial priority for China at the very end of Jiang Zemin’s mandate. According to the 2002 China White Paper, the Chinese government has issued three decisions, 56 statutes, and 420 regulations pertaining to laws and law-related issues regarding national defence and armed forces building. The National Defence Education Law of the PRC, enacted by the Standing Committee of the NPC, has provided a legal basis for national defence education, while the newly revised Law of the PRC on Officers in Active Service has further refined the military service system pertaining to PLA officers. Jointly formulated by the State Council and the CMC, the Implementation Measures for the Law of the PRC on Protecting Military Facilities expressly stipulate the organisational leading system for protecting military facilities as well as specific protection and penalty measures (China White Paper, 2002). The newly revised Routine Service Regulations of the PLA and Discipline Regulations of the PLA provide robust

legal guarantees for the effective and lawful management of the armed forces in contemporary contexts.

Jiang Zemin's final major security policy decision on the international level was the joint establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The SCO was founded in June 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, building on the foundation of the "Shanghai Five" Organisation. As a regional multilateral cooperation body, the SCO has signed several key agreements, including the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism, joint communiqués of defence ministers and prime ministers, a statement from leaders of law enforcement and security departments, and a joint statement from foreign ministers. At the SCO St. Petersburg Summit in June 2002, the heads of state of the six member countries signed three significant legal and political documents: the Charter of the SCO, the Agreement on a Regional Anti-Terrorist Agency, and the Declaration of the Heads of State of the SCO Member Countries.

In his November 2002 speech, Jiang Zemin discussed the relationship between the CPC and the PLA. He emphasised the importance of the Party's absolute leadership over the army and the need for the army to prioritise ideological and political development, stating that it represents the eternal soul of the army (Jiang, 2002). Jiang believed that the army should actively support state-building, while all levels of the Party and government should support the construction and modernization of the army and national defence system (Jiang, 2002). The XVI Party Congress in 2002 marked the end of the third stage in China's security policy development, characterised by a focus on strengthening "comprehensive national power" and opening up to the outside world. This was intended to serve as a foundation for the fourth phase, which aimed to establish China as a global leader in security policy implementation (Jiang, 2002; Dumbaugh, 2008).

China's third period in its Grand Strategy evolution has also been characterised by significant changes in several areas. The Chinese government has implemented a series of measures to reduce the number of PLA members and control military budgets, signalling a shift in priorities away from traditional military build-up. At the same time, the Taiwan issue has been securitized, resulting in a greater emphasis on national security and territorial integrity. The normative framework of China's defence system has also seen improvements with the implementation of new laws and regulations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and lawful

management of the armed forces. The rudimentary development of a comprehensive security policy under the name “new security concept of China” was another outcome of Jiang’s presidential mandates.

The concept meant China’s greater involvement in world politics: with the US regarding the prevention of the proliferation of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal, with the Russian Federation regarding security cooperation in the Eurasian area, and with the simultaneous inclusion of multilateral regional security cooperation frameworks, the ASEAN and the SCO. This position enabled the further development of China’s Grand Strategy at the beginning of the 21st century, based on its own vision of the world order, which will begin to take the shape of Beijing’s somewhat more assertive action on the international stage. Finally, this period was also marked by the first systematic analyses of international security at the level of institutions, which contrasted with previous eras where such doctrines were developed at the level of individual leaders.

The Fourth Grand Strategy Period, 2003-2020

The final phase of China’s security policy and Grand Strategy began with the rise of Hu Jintao as the leader of the PRC in 2003. Kissinger identified the ascendance of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao as the leaders of what he referred to as the “new fourth generation of Chinese leaders” (Kissinger, 2020: 443). This phase is commonly known as the “new” Grand Strategy of China, characterised by the rejuvenation and empowerment of the nation to ensure its “new leadership” in the global arena (Stekić, 2021). In a speech to the 18th Party Congress, President Hu Jintao acknowledged the Party’s contribution to China’s economic and political growth since its opening in 1978. He credited the Party for strengthening China’s role and political significance in international relations and creating favourable conditions for further global reforms (Hu, 2012). Comprehensive national power, as characterised by Hu Jintao, and China’s international competitiveness were at their peak at the time, publicly confirming the assumption of “China’s final readiness” to take a leading but not hegemonic role in international relations. It was also the first time that one of the highest officials of the Party publicly confirmed that the third phase of “strengthening comprehensive national power” was over. However, as China took a more assertive position in the international system, its foreign policy resources accompanied its economic development and efforts to promote and preserve national interests. The central part of this fourth phase was focused on establishing a global environment that would

support China's strong economic growth worldwide (Dumbaugh, 2008). According to Dumbaugh, China's main foreign policy objectives were to narrow Taiwan's international interactions, preserve regional stability, and increase its international prestige in the competition for supremacy with the United States through bilateral and multilateral formats of cooperation and soft power (Dumbaugh, 2008: 9-14). Similarly, Henry Kissinger described that at the early stages of their tenure, the foreign policy pursued by these Chinese leaders was characterised by a cautious and incremental approach. Their doctrine prioritised the acquisition of resources to facilitate the advancement of a "harmonious" society while deliberately avoiding any sudden or drastic measures (Kissinger, 2020: 445).

Several important components gave rise to the beginning of the fourth period of evolution of China's Grand Strategy and security policy created by Hu Jintao in the period between 2003 and 2012. The first one is Hu Jintao's upgrade of the "peaceful development" idea policy. Zheng Bijian, a high-ranking CPC official, introduced the term in 2003 to explain why China will continue to be a hesitant *status quo* power despite its significant political and economic growth. Being the originator of the China Peaceful Rise theory, Zheng did not mention the strategic rivalry between the US and China in his work (Zheng, 2006). During the first years of his mandate, Hu Jintao emphasised that China's rise was peaceful (和平崛起, *hé píng jué qǐ*), and he sought to assure the world that China would not be a threat to global peace and stability. Hu believed that China's development would be guided by peaceful, cooperative, and mutually beneficial principles. This policy sought to build trust and foster cooperation between China and other countries and to counter fears of a potential Chinese military threat. During the 17th Party Congress in 2007, Hu Jintao officially articulated and implemented the concept of "peaceful development" as a cornerstone of China's foreign policy in a more systematic manner. In his speech, Hu noted the continued existence of hegemonism, power politics, local conflicts, hotspot issues, economic imbalances, and traditional and non-traditional security threats, which pose significant challenges to global peace and development. Hu emphasised that China's strategic response to these challenges would be to "unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development", while opposing hegemonism and power politics. Furthermore, Hu reiterated China's commitment to refrain from pursuing hegemonic status or expansion (Hu, 2007). Araszkievicz (2021) contends that China's peaceful rise strategy was opposing the US' likewise "liberal hegemony" strategy at the peak of unipolarity.

It is evident that the concept of peaceful rise was built upon the foundation of the previous “new security concept”, and as a result, it was formalised in the form of the Peaceful Development Road document, first in 2005 and then revised in 2011. Kissinger (2020) recounts the speech delivered by Zheng Bijian shortly after the conclusion of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. In his address, Zheng Bijian expressed that “China has successfully transcended the enduring impacts of the Opium War and a century-long struggle against foreign intruders and is currently undertaking a journey of national reconciliation” (2020: 455).

Hu Jintao also promoted the concept of a “harmonious world”, which emphasised the importance of cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence between nations. This concept sought to promote the idea that the interests of all countries are interconnected and that common challenges, such as climate change, terrorism, and economic development, require collective action. Hu Jintao’s foreign policy also emphasised the importance of multilateralism, particularly through engagement with international organisations such as the United Nations. China played an active role in the UN, seeking to strengthen the organisation’s ability to address global issues such as poverty reduction, climate change, and disarmament. China also sought to increase its influence in other multilateral organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund. He also recognised the importance of economic diplomacy in advancing China’s global interests. He made several high-profile visits to countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, seeking to expand economic ties and promote China’s investment and trade interests. China also increased its foreign aid to developing countries, which included infrastructure development, humanitarian assistance, and debt relief. Hu Jintao placed great emphasis on regional security cooperation, particularly in East Asia. He sought to build stronger relationships with China’s neighbours and establish a framework for regional security dialogue.

This included participation in the Six-Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear programme as well as efforts to improve relations with Japan and South Korea. Hu Jintao’s foreign policy recognised the growing importance of counterterrorism and non-traditional security threats. China has increased its cooperation with other countries in combating terrorism, particularly through participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and joint military exercises with other countries. It also sought to address non-traditional security threats such as climate change, energy security, and cyber security. During Hu Jintao’s tenure, China faced criticism from the

international community over its treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and its policies towards Tibet.¹⁶ Hu Jintao's foreign policy sought to address these concerns by engaging with other countries and promoting China's stance on these issues. He emphasised that these were internal issues and that China would not tolerate interference from other countries.

Under the leadership of Hu Jintao, the 2004 White Paper on Defence became the first of its kind. Unlike its predecessors, it is composed of ten chapters and seven appendices and is organised in a more comprehensive manner. The document acknowledges the ongoing "revolution in military affairs" worldwide, which has brought about changes in the mechanisation and computerization of security affairs (China White Paper, 2004). While the Asia-Pacific region has remained relatively stable in terms of security, the US military presence in the region, as well as its military alliances and missile defence systems, are directly addressed for the first time (2004: 4). The White Paper also highlights Japan's shift away from its constitutional obligations and redirection of its military and security policy towards China through the deployment of missile systems (2004: 4). The document highlighted several factors that pose significant security challenges for China. These include the growing influence of "Taiwan independence" forces, the technological gap resulting from the revolution in military affairs, risks and challenges stemming from economic globalisation, and the persistence of a unipolar world order in the face of emerging multipolarity (2004: 5). It also outlined China's approach to maintaining national security by advocating for an independent foreign policy of peace and adopting the "new security concept". This concept emphasises mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and coordination to establish a favourable and stable international and regional environment in the long run (China White Paper, 2004).

¹⁶ International critiques are dominantly oriented against China by the Western political world. In 2023, the United States Department of State made an official announcement regarding the imposition of visa restrictions on Chinese officials. This decision was prompted by their alleged involvement in what has been described as the "forcible assimilation of over one million Tibetan children through government-run boarding schools" (Anadolu Agency, 2023). Some scholars imply that China deploys a "strategy of securitization" to proclaim Xinjiang and Tibet the regions of "utmost security interest" (Anand, 2019). This author, however, does not mention that numerous violations of public security have been performed by some groups that the official Beijing considers terrorist. Dibyesh Anand explains her stance in a manner to dispute Beijing's claims against uprisings occurring in the two regions through "paternalism and political and economic control" (Anand, 2019).

In this document, the expenditures for defence and security affairs are presented in a separate section. For the first time in 2004, the principle of developing the economy in tandem with defence was introduced, in which the defence budget would follow China's overall economic growth (China White Paper, 2004: 6). Despite a growth rate of approximately 5.6%, the White Paper reminds us that China's defence budget in 2003 only amounted to 5.69% of that of the United States, 56.78% of that of Japan, 37.07% of that of the United Kingdom, and 75.94% of that of France (2004: 20).

The White Paper highlights the unique revolution in defence affairs in China, which involves computerization and a reduction of 200,000 PLA members from 2.5 to 2.3 million in 2004. Additionally, the document emphasises the improvement of management and the command system (2004: 9). The PLA gives priority to the development of the Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery Force, while still valuing the importance of the Army, in order to achieve a balanced combat force structure and strengthen capabilities for commanding the sea and air and conducting strategic counter-strikes (2004: 9). The White Paper also outlines various measures to support this revolution, including logistics reforms, increased joint training, establishing a strategic framework for talented individuals, and equipment modernization (2004: 12). During the 1990s, China had limited experience collaborating with other countries in military production. However, the 2004 White Paper laid the foundation for expanding such cooperation by emphasising China's commitment to enhancing collaboration in defence technology with its "friendly nations" (2004: 14). It also encouraged exchanges and cooperation in defence technology within the international industrial community.

China was active in external security cooperation with various countries, including the US, Russia, the UK, and partners in the region such as Pakistan, Japan, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan. The document highlights the strategic and cooperative partnership between China and Russia, which has led to the establishment of senior-level meetings to discuss major issues and consultations on strategic matters between relevant departments. In 2003, China and Russia also held vice-foreign ministerial-level consultations on topics such as the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula and the issues of Iraq and the Middle East. Additionally, the document mentions that China and the UK held two rounds of strategic security dialogue in 2003 and 2004, respectively, and established the Sino-British strategic security dialogue mechanism.

To address non-traditional security threats, particularly terrorism, China partnered with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan to sign the Memorandum of the Ministries of National Defence of the SCO Member Countries in May 2003. The purpose of the memorandum was to organise the “Joint-2003” counter-terrorism exercise, which was successfully conducted in August 2003 in the vicinity of Ucharal in Kazakhstan and Yining in China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Additionally, in August 2004, the armed forces of China and Pakistan conducted Friendship-2004, a joint counter-terrorism exercise in the border region between the two countries. The Chinese navy also conducted several joint maritime search-and-rescue exercises with other countries. In October and November 2003, it worked with the Pakistani and Indian navies, respectively, off the Chinese coast, while in March, June, and October of 2004, it conducted similar exercises with the French, British, and Australian navies, respectively, in the Yellow Sea area.

The 2006 White Paper marked China’s adoption of a strategy that promotes both security and development. According to this strategy, China aims to build a harmonious society at home and around the world, ensuring overall national security and global peace. The country aims to enhance both development and security, including internal and external security, as well as traditional and non-traditional security measures (China White Paper, 2006: 6). The paper also included the People’s Armed Police Force, which is responsible for maintaining public security and reports directly to the State Council. The force had a total of 660,000 personnel at the time (2006: 33). China’s contribution to UN peacekeeping operations was also highlighted, with nearly 6,000 troops sent to participate in 16 such missions between 1990 and 2006 (2006: 59). This was regarded as a significant effort to engage in international security cooperation.

This period of China’s Grand Strategy evolution reflects a shift towards a more global perspective on security issues. It could be split into early and later phases. During the early phase, China was no longer solely focused on its own national security but was also considering global security as a basis for promoting its newly adopted global agenda. This is evident in its efforts to jointly monitor certain security phenomena with other great powers and its increased monitoring of security issues worldwide. However, the internationalisation of internal issues, such as the Uyghur and terrorism in Xinjiang, remained a challenge for China’s Grand Strategy.

The previous four eras of the development of the Grand Strategy, inspired by the postulates of Eastern and Chinese philosophy, have certain patterns of similarity that can be observed, although significantly different and specific. Tables 2 and 3 show the basic characteristics of each of the four epochs of the development of China's GS.

Table 2. Overview of White Papers of Defence, 1995-2019

Year	Type of policy	Main topic/s	Threats
1995	Defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLA Disarmament • Promotion of peace and development • Low level of defence spending • Peaceful deployment of military industry • Sensitive arms transfer control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flawed understanding of ideology by external actors (countries & leaders)
1998	Defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Security situation assessment • National Defence Policy • China's national defence system, its capabilities and construction, cooperation in regional and global security affairs, and disarmament and arms control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hegemonism & Power Politics • Small wars
2002	Defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taiwan separatism • Terrorism • Institutional and normative building of the defence system • Regional security cooperation • Arms Control and Disarmament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taiwan separatist forces
2004	Defensive with acknowledged China's international role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taiwan Straits situation • China's role in the international system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hegemonism and unilateralism • Taiwan separatism • Terrorism and extremism

Year	Type of policy	Main topic/s	Threats
2006	Assertive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of both security and development • “China in harmonious world” • Worldwide security assessment – Iraq, Afghanistan, DPRK, US-Japanese alliance • Taiwan issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US-Taiwanese relations
2008	Assertive to moderately defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Defence Mobilization and Reserve Force Building • Military Legal System • Arms Control & Disarmament 	
2010	Defensive		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taiwan issues • Endangered national security threats
2013	Defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New security situation in Asia with US involvement • Defending National Sovereignty, Security and Territorial Integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-traditional threats • Military emergency response • Complex geostrategic environment
2015	Neutral to assertive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for Military Struggle • Imposition of Active Defence system • Preparing for military operations other than war • Improving military theories 	
2019	Neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Asia-Pacific Security Situation • Intensification of Global Military Competition • China’s Defensive National Defence Policy in the New Era • Non-traditional security – Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endangered China’s Overseas Interests • Countering Terrorism both inside and outside China • “Major Security Fields” - nuclear security, cyberspace, and outer space • Safeguarding National Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 3. Overview of China's Grand Strategy evolution – four periods

Timeframe	Key leader/s	Key elements of the GS	Security Threats
1949-1976	Mao Zedong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening revolutionary and ideological issues in the core of foreign agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal instabilities • Korean War • Sino-Indian War in 1962 • Sino-Soviet split
1977-1989	Deng Xiaoping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go-out policy • Promoting China outside its borders • Catching global attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic instability spill over • Internal instabilities (1989 Tiananmen Square protests) • USSR invasion in Afghanistan 1979
1990-2002	Jiang Zemin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of Comprehensive National Power • Establishing a basis for further economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional security issues (Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands, tensions in the South China Sea) • Separatist movements • Era of “non-traditional” security threats – terrorism, extremism, cyber wars • Nuclear proliferation
2003-2012	Hu Jintao Xi Jinping Li Keqiang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peaceful Development (Peaceful rise) • Harmonious World • Multilateralism • Economic diplomacy • Regional Security Cooperation • Counterterrorism and Non-Traditional Security Threats • Internationalisation of Internal Issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of counter-terrorism policy • Self-awareness of “security actor”
2012-2020		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internationalisation of China's agenda • BRI establishment • Promoting peaceful growth • “Chinese dream” • Decisive global economic dominance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of China as an assertive actor • China's hesitancy perceived as “threat” by other powers • Taiwan issue intensified

Source: Compiled by the author

The interpretation of the peculiarities of the Chinese Grand Strategy is aided by the benefit of historical perspective. However, in light of the current complex domestic and international challenges, a linear developmental approach to China's security policy is insufficient. Thus, this monograph proposes an innovative sequencing model to explore the potential formulation of China's Fifth Grand Strategy in the aftermath of the pandemic. The model presents a layered and sub-layered analysis to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the evolving strategy. Prior to that, this chapter will conclude with some up-to-date scholarly discussions on China's security policy in the post-pandemic global context.

TOWARDS THE FIFTH CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY: A POST-PANDEMIC OUTLOOK

It is widely acknowledged that academic debates within the field of contemporary international politics are dominated by discussions focused on answering a complex question: How are Chinese foreign policy preferences formed? Its contemporary foreign and security policy preferences are shaped by a range of factors that include its historical tradition and experience as presented at the beginning of this chapter, its ideological beliefs, its domestic politics, as well as external pressures. At the core of China's contemporary security policy is the longstanding principle of non-interference, which is rooted in its experience of being victimised by imperialist powers in the past. This principle guides China's stance on issues such as human rights, territorial disputes, and (non)intervention in the internal affairs of other states. China's ideological beliefs also play a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. The CPC, for instance, has long championed the principles of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory as the guiding ideologies of Chinese socialism. These principles emphasise the importance of maintaining national unity, achieving economic development, and pursuing a peaceful foreign policy. In recent years, President Xi Jinping has sought to emphasise the concept of the "Chinese Dream", which focuses on rejuvenating China as a great power and promoting a community with a shared future for humankind.

Furthermore, domestic politics also plays a key role in shaping China's foreign policy preferences. The CPC is a dominant political force in China and exercises significant control over the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. The leadership's priorities are influenced by a range of

domestic factors, including economic development, social stability, and popular opinion. The Chinese government is also highly responsive to public opinion, particularly on issues related to nationalism and territorial disputes. Finally, external pressures also play a significant role in shaping China's foreign policy preferences. China's rise as a global power has brought it into increasingly close contact with other major powers, including the United States, Japan, and India. China's relationships with these countries are shaped by a complex mix of competition and cooperation, as well as geopolitical factors such as the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. China's involvement in international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation, but also in the SCO, the ASEAN, and other regional formats, also shapes its foreign policy preferences and priorities.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has triggered multiple structural changes that have significantly impacted China's global security policy, beyond the realm of daily politics. These changes have not only been reflected in China's greater assertiveness but also in its growing influence on significant global trends. As a result, the assumption of "hesitancy" in China's foreign affairs domain has been challenged, leading to a proposal for a new scholarly discussion about a new, fifth period of development in its Grand Strategy.

At the end of December 2019, the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) caused the World Health Organisation to declare the state of pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020), which undoubtedly has had a significant impact on international relations and the recalibration of China's Grand Strategy. The virus, which originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan, quickly spread to other parts of the world, resulting in a global health crisis that forced countries to re-evaluate their relationships with China. In the early stages of the pandemic, China was heavily criticised for its handling of the outbreak. Many countries accused China of downplaying the severity of the virus and failing to share information in a timely and transparent manner. This led to increased scrutiny of China's political and economic system, as well as its global ambitions. The pandemic also highlighted China's growing economic and political influence around the world. As countries struggled to contain the virus and manage the economic fallout, China stepped in with medical supplies and financial assistance. This helped to enhance China's soft power and shape perceptions of its role in the global community.

However, the pandemic also exposed vulnerabilities in China's Grand Strategy. China's reliance on exports and supply chains came under threat

as countries implemented lockdowns and travel restrictions, disrupting global trade and manufacturing. Additionally, China's attempts to expand its global influence through initiatives such as the BRI faced setbacks as countries became more cautious about engaging with China and scrutinised the potential risks of Chinese investment. The pandemic also had an impact on the global balance of power. As the United States struggled to contain the virus and faced domestic political turmoil, China emerged as a more assertive global actor. The US's reputation was hurt by the perception that it handled the pandemic poorly, whereas China's effectiveness in suppressing the virus domestically and its provision of medical assistance to other nations served to improve its image as a responsible global player. China has made an effort to establish itself as a pioneer in global health regulation and economic recovery in reaction to the pandemic. The idea of a "community of common health", which highlights the value of international collaboration in addressing public health concerns, has been pushed by it. In contrast to certain nations' protectionist policies, China has also attempted to portray itself as a supporter of free trade and globalisation.

Contemporary efforts to analytically approach China's GS features in the academic domain include, among many, the edited volume edited by David Denoon (2021). As the conclusion of the monograph, Denoon summarises the key findings regarding the degree of agreement of the Chinese leadership on the proclaimed goals, which is one of the prerequisites for the implementation of the GS. Denoon claims that "each of the major elements of national policy fits together for the purpose of enhancing Chinese power and influence" (Denoon, 2021: 233), which undoubtedly confirms that there is a consensus within the top Chinese leadership over its GS postulates. China's goal to become a prominent world superpower by 2049 by peaceful means has been identified as the key feature of China's GS (Denoon, 2021: 233). However, Denoon believes that if coercion as a diplomatic means does not work in such endeavours "China would be willing to prosecute limited wars, as it did with India in 1962 and with Vietnam in 1979", but without entering the risk of getting involved in the major military dispute with the US (Denoon, 2021: 234). In addition, for China's GS to be plausibly implemented, it requires "a buoyant economy for a sustained period of several more decades, the hesitancy of smaller powers to challenge Beijing's plans, and the unwillingness or inability of other major powers to form an effective balancing coalition" (Denoon, 2021: 234). Contrary to some perspectives, China is not pursuing global military dominance. Instead, it has adopted a more equitable and inclusive approach, exemplified by

initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is regarded as China's "Fifth Grand Strategy" (Đorđević and Stekić, 2022).

According to David Denoon (2021), there are several areas of competition and potential developments that might influence Sino-American strategic competition and consequently the balance of power: internet development, applications of artificial intelligence, a possible "decoupling" of the two economies, China's efforts to sway public opinion inside the US, and China's efforts at shaping international institutions (Denoon, 2021: 239).

From a contemporary perspective, Avery Goldstein argues that there are fewer distinctions regarding the nature of China's Grand Strategy from the end of World War II to the present. The strategy of survival has been a feature of China's Grand Strategy since the establishment of the People's Republic of China to the present day (Goldstein, 2020). Goldstein identifies three modalities that China has employed to deal with practically existential disturbances and threats to the regime (CP China): the Sino-Soviet alliance during Mao Zedong, as well as the Sino-American alignment during Mao and Deng Xiaoping. While all three cases aimed at obtaining military support, in the case of the Sino-American alignment during Mao Zedong, China's interest was only gaining military backing (2020: 169). The Second Grand Strategy identified by Goldstein concerns the various modalities of the "rejuvenation of the nation", which has lasted from 1992 until today (Goldstein, 2020).

The enduring purpose is to regain standing as an advanced country or even a great power (2020: 169). To achieve this, China has relied on three approaches: "hide and bide" during Deng Xiaoping, "peaceful rise" during Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, and "Chinese dream" during Xi Jinping (Goldstein, 2020). Goldstein stands out from other academic authors by arguing that the Chinese Grand Strategy consists and persists constantly of two parallel strategies: a strategy of survival since 1949 and a strategy of rejuvenation that "joined" since 1992 (Goldstein, 2020: 170). However, he acknowledges that the primary focus of the first survival strategy was relevant for a significant period from 1949 to 1989 (2020: 170). Goldstein argues that it was not until China fully re-engaged in international affairs in 1992 that the country could capitalise on the opportunities of a transformed global landscape and shift its grand strategic priorities from dealing with foreign military threats to pursuing the long-standing goal of Chinese nationalists since the late nineteenth century: restoring the country to its

rightful place as one of the world's most advanced countries and a respected great power on the world stage.

China has demonstrated its own assertiveness over the last couple of years in the domain of public diplomacy and increased engagement in global affairs. In April 2022, within the framework of the BOAO Forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the concept of the Global Security Initiative (GSI). That concept was supposed to serve as a guideline for creating China's own vision of global security in the new order. In February 2023, the Chinese MFA published the concept paper of GSI,¹⁷ which specified the content of this idea in a much more concrete way.

In terms of the *modus operandi* of China's foreign and security policy, there exists a notion of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy, a term used to describe China's recent assertive and combative approach to foreign policy. According to Adam Araszkievicz (2021), it was around 2009 when China deviated from Deng Xiaoping's cautious foreign policy approach of maintaining a low profile and avoiding causing anxiety among South Asian states due to its growing economic and military power. Instead, China began adopting a more assertive, aggressive, and potentially even warlike posture (Mearsheimer, 2014: 380–383). The term is derived from a popular Chinese movie franchise called Wolf Warrior, which features a highly skilled Chinese special forces soldier battling foreign mercenaries and terrorists. Under the banner of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy, Chinese diplomats have become more confrontational and aggressive in their public statements and behaviour (Araszkievicz, 2021). They have used social media platforms to attack and belittle foreign governments and officials, as well as promote China's image and interests. According to some analysts, this new strategy is an effort to control China's emergence as a major power as well as a reaction to what is seen as Western aggressiveness. Others think it is a plan designed to demonstrate China's power and dominance on the international scene. However, some contend that Wolf Warrior Diplomacy has harmed China's reputation and relations with other nations, making it more challenging for China to accomplish its goals in terms of foreign policy. They are concerned that this aggressive strategy may have unexpected effects, such as starting a war.

Due to the stated dilemmas regarding the existence and survival of China's GS, the next and central chapter of this monograph includes a

¹⁷ The GSI postulates will be thoroughly addressed in Chapter III, under the spatial-hierarchical group of layers.

presentation of the constitutive elements of China's Grand Strategy manifested through the prism of one of the possible analytical levels—the layers of its security policy. The analysis will focus on contemporary spatial-hierarchical, functional, and institutional goals, activities, and strategies of China's security policy.

CHAPTER III

SEQUENCING THE LAYERS OF CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY SECURITY POLICY

SEQUENCING THE LAYERS OF CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY SECURITY POLICY

This chapter is of central importance for this book as it aims to provide a deeper understanding of how China responds to emerging threats and geopolitical phenomena in the wake of global system restructuring. One of the notable issues that China faces is the intensification of Western-led Cold War-like containment, which has pushed this rising power to become more assertive in its external affairs. To address this challenge, this book adopts an innovative method to sequence China's foreign and security policies by utilising the toolkit developed in the academic discourse of Security Studies as a scientific discipline. This approach employs levels and sectors of security policy that intersect with each other, providing a comprehensive analytical framework to better understand the ideas, actions, and policies of the official Beijing. Given that various policies are being deployed to address security threats, this chapter proposes and is therefore organised into three main sub-chapters:

- a) Hierarchical-spatial layers,
- b) Functional layers, and
- c) Institutional layers.

The analysis of China's security policy will be conducted through a vertical sequencing approach that examines its global agenda, national security concerns, human security, and related documents and policies. This sub-chapter also involves the spatial orientation of China's security policy and will specifically contain its goals for mainstream regions of East Asia, the wider Eurasia through the BRI, the Persian Gulf, the Arctic, China's Space Programme, and the specifics of China's policy towards Africa and Oceania.

Hierarchical-spatial layers of China's security policy

This group of layers sequences China's security policy, guided by Barry Buzan's (1983) *People, States, and Fear* monograph, which ushered in the path of "vertical objectification" of security. He argued that beyond national security, there is an individual component of security. He identified the

referent objects of security as the main problem in sequencing such analytical categories. If the state is organised through a maximal model, internal security, according to his stance, is going to be (come) a natural dimension, leaving no necessity to harmonise state and individual interests (1983, 24). The last decade of the 20th century brought an analytical concept of Human Security that replaced old-fashioned “individual security” in terms of providing detailed sub-dimensions through which the individual level of security might be assessed. Furthermore, another reason for this methodological decision stems from the fact that China has recently incorporated the Global Security Initiative (GSI), whose concretization during February 2023 called upon “vertical and indivisible security” from the individual to the level of universal security (MFA PRC, 2023). However, this chapter will not go into analysis at the dimensional level; rather, it will seek to determine what means China as a state deploys to provide its overall wellbeing to its society through policies and how individual security is perceived not only by its authorities but also by its scholars. Finally, this book’s hierarchical sub-layer concludes with China’s global (security) agenda and initiatives presented at the global level.

China’s Global Security Agenda: Initiatives and Policies

In recent years, China’s rise as a major economic and military power has been accompanied by a growing assertiveness in its foreign policy, as evidenced by its assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, its military readiness in the area around Taiwan, and increasing diplomatic engagement with other countries. One of the key aspects of China’s global security agenda is its focus on securing its economic and strategic interests around the world. As the world’s largest trading nation and a major investor in many countries, China has a strong interest in maintaining stability and security in key regions such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Another important aspect of China’s global security agenda is its emphasis on regional security and cooperation. China has been actively promoting regional initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to improve infrastructure connectivity and economic integration across Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Additionally, it has been playing an increasingly prominent role in regional security forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the ASEAN Regional Forum, where it has sought to promote dialogue and cooperation on issues such as counterterrorism and maritime security.

China's military modernization and expansion also play a significant role in its global security agenda. Over the past decade, China has invested heavily in modernising its military capabilities, including developing advanced missile systems, building up its naval forces, and expanding its cyber and space capabilities. While China has emphasised that its military build-up is defensive in nature, its growing military capabilities have raised concerns among some of its neighbours and other global powers. In addition to these more traditional security concerns, China's global security agenda also includes non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, cyber security, and public health.

So, if the usual premises of the science of international relations are omitted, in which China is treated as a growing hegemon that will be characterised by increasing assertiveness in security policy and military affairs, in what way is it adequate to analyse its contemporary security agenda? To address this question, this part of the chapter analyses the global initiatives proposed by Xi Jinping that prioritise security as the most crucial variable in the international order from Beijing's perspective.

Even though it was introduced a decade ago, the Belt and Road Initiative represents one of China's primary efforts to assert its contemporary vision of the world order, at least in the spheres of economy and trade. While the idea behind the BRI was to develop primarily an economic initiative, it also has a significant security component that has been studied in detail by the academic community (Haiquan, 2017; Hallgren & Ghiasy, 2017; Tortajada & Zhang, 2021). Security considerations associated with the BRI include the safeguarding of critical infrastructure, border security, transit security for goods and services, and food security. Additionally, some papers argue that the BRI serves as a means for China to establish itself as a leading regional power in the broader Eurasian region (Beeson, 2018; Oakes, 2021).

China has commenced formulating its newest global security agenda in the post-pandemic era through a series of initiatives proposed in 2022 and 2023. Xi Jinping proposed the Global Security Initiative during the annual Boao Forum on April 21, 2022. In his speech, he emphasised China's commitment to abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, rejecting the Cold War mentality, opposing unilateralism, and rejecting group politics and bloc confrontation (Xi, 2021). Furthermore, the GSI introduced by the Chinese President highlights two key concepts. The first is the notion of indivisible security, which should, according to Xi's (2021) words "oppose the pursuit of one's own security at the cost of others' security", while the

second emphasises the interconnection between traditional and non-traditional threats in the security domain. This is significant as it represents the first time that China has stressed the importance of addressing non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, cyber security, and biosecurity on the international stage (Xi, 2021).

To further elaborate on what was behind the proposed ideas, the Chinese MFA announced a Concept Paper on the GSI in February 2023. According to this paper, the GSI is grounded in six key concepts and linked principles, which, according to the Concept Paper, should be observed as “an organic whole of dialectical unity”. The first principle advocates for the promotion of comprehensive and sustainable security through a holistic approach in both traditional and non-traditional domains (MFA PRC, 2023). The second and third principles emphasise respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states and non-interference in their internal affairs, in compliance with the principles of the UN Charter (MFA PRC, 2023). China firmly believes that the UN is the only institution capable of providing common security for all nations, and therefore, the “Cold War” mentality, characterised by unilateralism, bloc confrontation, and the pursuit of hegemony by any state, is contradictory to the UN Charter and should be strongly opposed, as stated in this concept paper. China has expressed its support for peaceful dispute resolution and the recognition of the legitimate security concerns of all countries. These fundamental principles are at the heart of Xi Jinping’s concept of indivisible security, which was introduced a year prior. According to this principle, the security of one nation cannot be compromised at the expense of another, as all countries are equal in terms of their security interests (MFA PRC, 2023). Lastly, the Initiative promotes vertical indivisibility of security, which emphasises the interconnectedness of personal, communal, traditional, and non-traditional security, as well as national and universal security (MFA PRC, 2023).

The GSI outlines twenty cooperation priorities to achieve the stated objectives. Notable among these are the respect for UN peacekeeping missions and support for the African Union in implementing these missions, the promotion of cooperation among major countries, the complete rejection of the possibility of nuclear warfare, and adherence to agreements that regulate it. Other important priorities include the prohibition of the use of chemical and biological weapons, support for regional security initiatives, with the ASEAN identified as a significant partner in the Concept Paper, as well as the advancement of non-traditional security areas through the relatively novel instrument of China’s security policy, the Lancang-Mekong

Cooperation Mechanism (MFA PRC, 2023). The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism (LMC) was launched in 2015, and its first Leaders' Meeting was held in March 2016 (LMC, 2023). Apart from China, the members of this cooperation mechanism are all the riparian states along the Mekong River: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The following year, a Secretariat for this organisation was established in Beijing, which is subordinate to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (LMC, 2023). Despite receiving relatively little attention in the past few years, the LMC has gained importance with recent references to it as a "pivot of regional security" and a "pilot zone for the GSI (China) to jointly safeguard regional peace and stability" (MFA PRC, 2023). The LMC advocates for what is known as "3+5" cooperation, consisting of three foundational pillars of cooperation: political and security issues, economic and sustainable development, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges. In addition, the mechanism emphasises five key priority areas, which include connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water resources, agriculture, and poverty reduction (LMC, 2023). According to Western academic authors such as Bakker (1999), Middleton and Allouche (2016), and Hirsch (2016), the Lancang-Mekong region presents an opportunity to reshape global geopolitics by challenging US hegemony, promoting China's economic growth, and providing opportunities for Chinese product placement in the markets of participating countries. Bakker (1999) argued that China's hydropower dominance in the region gives it significant security leverage and potential for blackmailing the lower Mekong states through control of natural resources, electricity production, and infrastructure projects (pp. 212-215). These observations underscore the geopolitical implications of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism and its potential to reshape the balance of power not only in Southeast Asia but in the whole world, as ignited by the Global Security Initiative.

The GSI also identifies a set of goals aimed at addressing global security issues through a regional approach. While some of these goals are covered in the section on regionally tailored security policy, others are outlined below. The Initiative highlights strong support for Latin American and Caribbean states in preserving the Zone of Peace¹⁸, as well as providing

¹⁸ *The Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace* was made by 33 leaders from the region, who in Havana in 2014 signed a resolution declaring their commitment to resolving disputes as respectful neighbours without resorting to the use of arms (AP, 2014).

support to regional organisations in maintaining peace and security in the region (MFA PRC, 2023). The GSI also emphasises the importance of African states and the African Union in the fight against terrorism and providing financial assistance to African countries, while also promoting African-led solutions to African issues (MFA PRC, 2023). The GSI also advocates for supporting the League of Arab States and other organisations, particularly in resolving the Palestinian conflict. In the Middle East, China's policy is centred on implementing a five-point proposal for realising peace and stability, which includes promoting mutual respect, equity and justice, non-proliferation, collective security, and development cooperation, in order to establish a new security framework in the region (MFA PRC, 2023).

The final set of strategic priorities for cooperation in realising the GSI includes advocating for the role of the World Health Organisation in managing global health, preserving stable grain exports, ensuring food security, and maintaining stable energy security (MFA PRC, 2023). China also supports the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while respecting the sovereignty of each UN member state. The GSI emphasises the importance of Artificial Intelligence, particularly in the field of global governance and security, as well as the respect for newly introduced China's Global Initiative on Data Security (MFA PRC, 2023). The final part of the Concept Paper released by the Chinese MFA defines platforms and mechanisms for cooperation, which predominantly relate to international institutional capacities such as the General Assembly, relevant UN Committees, the Security Council, relevant institutions, and "other international and regional organisations based on their respective mandates" (MFA PRC, 2023). China sees the ASEAN, the BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia as important regional organisations (MFA PRC, 2023). The significance of the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum, and other initiatives implemented by governments, international organisations, and think tanks in the field of global security is particularly highlighted.

Bearing in mind that the GSI was made concrete only in February 2023, its academic thematization is still modest, and political criticism from other countries has not been absent. There are divided views in the domain of academic discussions about the GSI. The United States Institute of Peace (2022) argues that, in response to the GSI "Washington should project a

positive vision for the international rules-based order". It suggests that to compete for global security leadership, the US should prioritise the "indivisible security" principle of the GSI while ensuring that it is not misused as a pretext for armed conflict, given Russia's past misuse of the concept. This is why the US and its allies must have a deep understanding of the origins of the concept in their future politico-security actions (USIP, 2022).

If we were to follow all the views of the PR China on the relationship of its security policy to the international system at a given moment, it could be said that China is currently hesitant and assertive at the same time. On the one hand, its assertiveness is reflected in the fact that in a period of only ten years, it proposed as many as four initiatives of global scope (BRI, GSI, GDI, and GCI). Especially comprehensive, from the point of view of international politics, is the Global Security Initiative, which represents at the same time a kind of "National Security Strategy" of China, bearing in mind that it treats threats and challenges not only to its own but also to the security of humanity, and addresses the relevant institutional and other mechanisms for the implementation of its goals. The initiative is also divided into layers vertically, advocating indivisible security from personal to national to universal, but also regionally across many regions in which China plays (or will play) an important role in the future restructuring of the international order. Naturally, the greatest emphasis is placed on Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. In other words, practically the entire world except the Global West—the US, Canada, Europe, Japan, and Australia. It is likely that this Initiative will represent the first comprehensive step towards the next editions of this act, which in the years to come will be the basis for further promoting the strategic global security goals of China.

On the other hand, it can be said that China is still hesitant in the domain of the global agenda when looking at the specific activities that should support the proclaimed goals. There is no doubt that these goals are in accordance with international law and the existing international institutional design-order (UN and other agencies), but China needs a trigger that would enable it to more openly and more openly implement what it says in the act of strategic importance. In the period after the pandemic, many signs of more assertive behaviour were visible, such as Saudi Arabia-Iran mediation, increasingly decisive military-tactical policy in the area of Taiwan during 2022 and 2023, and also mediation in the crisis in Ukraine, the end of which is not in sight (April 2023). Despite this, China is still hesitant to respond decisively to the regrouping of forces in the new

locus of global security, the Indo-Pacific (which will be discussed in the spatial section of the layers of this monograph).

National Security Concerns of China in Relation to its External Policy

Xi Jinping's concept of "comprehensive national security" (总体国家安全—*zǒng tǐ guó jiā ān quán*) was introduced in 2014 and revived in 2022. In 2014, he presided over the first meeting of the Central National Security Council to emphasise the necessity of adhering to the "overall national security concept", which he denounced as "national security with Chinese characteristics" (Xinhua, 2014). This concept represents a broad and holistic approach to safeguarding China's national interests and maintaining its stability in the face of multifaceted challenges. Comprehensive national security encompasses a wide range of areas, including political, economic, military, cultural, social, and ecological dimensions. According to Xi Jinping, it is necessary to adopt an all-encompassing perspective and address both traditional and non-traditional security threats. This signifies a departure from a narrow focus on military security and highlights the importance of integrating various sectors and aspects of national security into a unified framework.

As noted earlier, one significant aspect of comprehensive national security is political security. Xi Jinping emphasises the importance of upholding the CPC's leadership and maintaining political stability as crucial elements of China's overall security. This includes safeguarding against internal political challenges, such as separatist movements or threats to the Party's authority, as well as external influences that may undermine China's political system. In the domain of economic security as another key dimension of comprehensive national security, the Chinese president pointed out the need to enhance China's economic strength, protect its resources and assets, and ensure sustainable development. This involves promoting economic reforms, pursuing innovation and technological advancement, and mitigating risks associated with economic fluctuations, trade tensions, or disruptions in the global economic system. When it comes to military security as a part of national security, Xi Jinping stressed the modernization and strengthening of the PLA. He underlined the importance of building a strong national defence capability commensurate with China's international standing (Xi, 2014). This includes enhancing military readiness, developing advanced technologies, and safeguarding China's

territorial integrity and maritime interests. Cultural security is also highlighted in the concept of comprehensive national security, which entails implementing social welfare policies, strengthening social governance, and ensuring social stability. Ecological security is a relatively new addition to the concept of comprehensive national security. Xi Jinping urged the need to protect the environment, address climate change, and promote sustainable development (Xi, 2014). This includes efforts to reduce pollution, conserve natural resources, and build an ecological civilization that balances economic development with environmental protection. The concept of comprehensive national security has significant implications for China's domestic policies as well as its engagement in international affairs. It reflects a proactive and comprehensive approach to addressing security challenges, with an emphasis on integrating different sectors and dimensions of security. This concept also aligns with Xi Jinping's broader vision of achieving the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and advancing China's status as a global power.

Nowadays, the PRC adopted its first national security strategy outline in 2015, unifying efforts across various departments under central leadership. This strategy encompasses sub-strategies covering political, homeland, military, economic, cultural, societal, technology, network, nuclear, ecological, resource, and biosecurity issues. The National Security Law, passed in 2015, provided a legal framework for national security, strengthening the role of central authorities. Subsequent laws addressing counterespionage, counterterrorism, cyber security, foreign non-governmental organisations, intelligence, and cryptography have further expanded the legal framework. At the institutional level, the CPC recognises traditional and non-traditional threats, the intersection of external influences on internal stability, and various economic, cultural, societal, and environmental challenges. To address these concerns, the CPC has taken steps to define national security, enhance coordination across party, military, and state organs, and increase domestic awareness of national security issues. The CPC's "Overall National Security Concept", proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2014, serves as the foundation for the PRC's contemporary national security system. This concept emphasises the importance of people's security, political security, and national interests as mutually reinforcing aspects of national security. People's security is regarded as the fundamental purpose of national security, while political security is considered essential for maintaining the ruling status of the Party and the system of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". The supremacy

of national interests guides the Party's stewardship of national security, emphasising the safeguarding of sovereignty, security, and development interests. Development and security are viewed as mutually supportive components of national security.

Figure 1: Conceptualisation of the Sino-centric national security notion



Source: Author

The developments in Hong Kong over the past few years have been a source of concern for both the international community and the central authorities in Beijing. The implementation of the new *Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* (hereinafter "Law on National Security") has been a significant turning point in the city's history, with far-reaching implications for China's assertiveness in defending its sovereignty over the former UK colony. Furthermore, the Hong Kong political system experienced some significant changes.

The Law on National Security, which was enacted on June 30, 2020, criminalises acts of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces and applies to anyone in Hong Kong, regardless of their nationality or residence status. The law has been criticised by human rights groups and democratic activists for its broad and vague language, which they argue could be used to target political dissent and stifle freedom of expression. In the months following the law's implementation, the Hong Kong government, with the support of Beijing, has taken a series of steps to crack down on dissent and opposition to the government. This has included the arrest of prominent pro-democracy activists, the disqualification of pro-democracy lawmakers from the Legislative Council, and the closure of pro-

democracy media outlets. The law has also had a significant impact on the city's civil society, with many non-governmental organisations and civil society groups feeling the pressure to self-censor or disband altogether. The law's provisions on foreign collusion have also raised concerns among international businesses and investors, with some worrying that they may be targeted for engaging in activities that could be deemed to be colluding with foreign forces. The implementation of the law has been met with widespread protests in Hong Kong, with tens of thousands of people taking to the streets to voice their opposition to the law and demand greater democracy and autonomy for the city. The protests have been met with a heavy-handed response from the police, with many protesters being arrested, beaten, or subjected to excessive force. The protests have also been met with criticism from Beijing, which has accused the protesters of being "foreign agents" and "separatists" intent on destabilising Hong Kong and undermining China's sovereignty. In response, the Chinese government has imposed sanctions on individuals and organisations it perceives as being supportive of the protests, including lawmakers, activists, and NGOs. Despite the crackdown, the protests in Hong Kong have continued, albeit on a smaller scale than before the implementation of the law. The protesters' demands have shifted from a focus on the withdrawal of the law to a broader call for greater democracy and autonomy for Hong Kong, with some even calling for independence from China. The situation in Hong Kong remains tense, with the city's autonomy and civil liberties under threat. The Hong Kong government has defended the law as necessary to maintain stability and security in the city, while Beijing has described it as a crucial tool for safeguarding China's national security. The international community has also weighed in on the issue, with many countries expressing concern over the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy and the impact of the law on civil liberties and political rights. The United States, for example, has imposed sanctions on Chinese officials and entities involved in the implementation of the law, while the United Kingdom has offered a pathway to citizenship for Hong Kong residents who hold British National Overseas passports. The implementation of the Law on National Security in Hong Kong has had far-reaching implications for the city's autonomy, civil liberties, and political system. The law has been met with widespread protests and criticism from the international community, with concerns being raised about the impact of the law on freedom of expression, civil society, and foreign businesses. The 2022 US National Security Strategy highly internationalises the internal issues described above. The NSS reiterates the US commitment "to holding

Beijing accountable for various abuses”, including the alleged genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, human rights violations in Tibet, and the erosion of Hong Kong’s autonomy and freedoms (NSS, 2022: 24). Despite China’s efforts to exert pressure and silence dissent, the United States will continue to emphasise the importance of accountability for these violations (NSS, 2022: 24).

Human Security as a New Instrument of China’s Security Policy

What are the key specifics of human security postulates in illiberal political regimes?¹⁹ Are societies today less inclined to defend individuals in countries with fewer democratic institutions? What variables influence the development of complicated policies that promote human security? These are the inquiries that this part of the chapter seeks to address. The theory that underlies the notion of human security has seen very little theoretical change in its nearly three decades of existence. Instead, the idea was (mis)used by practitioners, NGOs, and even international organisations to support the liberal agenda, which is mostly Western and focuses on the individual and demystifies the international order as something that happens apart from the person. It is why this concept was frequently criticised for being overly abstract and for being “alienated” from reality. The basic primary branches of critique focused on the “attractiveness” of the idea but lacked its analytical rigour as well as the framework of responsibility (Tadjbakhsh, 2007).²⁰

The concept of human security is inherently embedded within Western political and, thus, scientific discourse. It can be argued that the concept emerged during a specific period of time, when humanity was at the height of unipolarity, specifically in the mid-1990s. At this time, not only was it

¹⁹ In the following text, the term “illiberal political regimes” will be used. This phrase will denote states that do not have a democratic type of political regime in the political sense; more precisely, states that, apart from not being purely democratic, do not belong to the global West.

²⁰ In her 2007 article, Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh went into greater depth about the scope of the conceptual idea of human security. She categorised the concept’s proponents into three groups: those who believe that the concept of human security is an appealing one but one that lacks analytical rigour; those who accept the term but insist on defining it in a limited way; and those who believe that a broad definition of the concept is crucial for understanding current crises (Tadjbakhsh, 2007, p. 6).

necessary to legitimise the foreign policy decisions of the United States and its allies towards the rest of the world, but also to prioritise the individual within the analytical framework. This “humanization” of security analysis, in the broadest sense, was not immediately evident in other, particularly illiberal, states.

Furthermore, the concept’s components were examined in the context of several existing theoretical frameworks within the field of international relations, which both aided and hindered the integration of human security into predominately Western scientific narratives. In spite of much literature underlying this concept, not much attention has been devoted to how some states with illiberal political regime types are addressing these issues. Not much literature is devoted to human security within the Chinese global security policy agenda. For instance, the dominant discourse is occupied by research on human security in the Belt and Road Initiative (Dellios & Ferguson, 2017; Brown, 2018; Arduino, 2021).

Some papers tackle the human security perspective in analyses of the latest phenomena occurring globally, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Carlos, 2020; Shani, 2020; Siti et al., 2020; Dwinantoaji, 2021), while another group tends to reconceptualise the concept through the idea of some branch notions, such as biosecurity (Craig et al., 2021).

Given that China is currently (2023) the most populous country in the world, with nearly 19% of the world’s population, the subject of human security, particularly in the realm of public policies within the country, should be of significant significance for the academic community.²¹ This part of the chapter aims to systematically analyse the current state of understanding regarding the concretization of the concept of human security through various policies and actions implemented by the Chinese state. The analysis will be further enriched by incorporating the perspectives of Chinese scholars on the subject of human security. It posits that the notion of individual care by the national government has been integrated into the modern Chinese state for a longer period of time than it has become a dominant research focus within Western academic discourse. Therefore, the following text will, in addition to demonstrating that the

²¹ According to World Bank Data, in 2022, India will have already overtaken China (including Macao and Hong Kong) in terms of population size. In 2023, each of these two countries will have approximately 1.42 billion inhabitants.

individual is at the core of political attention, examine how contemporary Chinese political thought conceptualises the concept of human security.

Analysis commences with a critically-oriented examination of both Western and non-Western provenience of philosophical thoughts and ideas on how the concept of human security has been evolving within traditionally closed Chinese society. A particular emphasis is placed on the examination of Xi Jinping's thought on "communism with Chinese characteristics" and his vision for the individual within Chinese society. Furthermore, the text reviews the legislative solutions pertaining to human security in China as adopted by the CPC and other organs of the Chinese state. Additionally, the text delves into the main ideas and specificities of how the modern Chinese School of Political Science and International Relations conceptualises human security. Finally, the altered understanding of human security in modern Chinese society, as evidenced by legislation and China's five-year development plans, will be presented.

When human security in China is mentioned, the first association in the academic narrative is most often the discussion of the specific challenges to human security in China, such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and political repression. This part of the chapter will assess to what extent the notion and the Western-centric idea of human security have been present in the philosophical tradition of Confucianism as well as in modern PR China within the collection of the current President Xi Jinping's thoughts, the legislation adopted by the highest organs of the Chinese polity, and ultimately in the modern school of political science and IR by the Chinese scholars.

Some believe that the central category of sovereignty of the Chinese state throughout history reflects primary human concerns of survival, where the state's fundamental purpose is to preserve citizens' lives (Bedeski, 2007). Robert Bedeski pioneered research that linked the historical development of the Chinese state, both imperial and republican, with human security. He based his analysis on the "meta-constitutional" provisions to investigate whether the state was able to provide a minimum level of human security to its citizens throughout its history and the present. He claims that in modern sovereignty, the nation-state holds the dominant position in providing goods as well as humanitarian aid in the event of hazards (Bedeski, 2007). Being that China has been changing the level of national sovereignty throughout its history, the output of its human security efficacy has fluctuated at different historical eras.

From Confucianism to the Modern Sino-centric Conceptualisation of Human Security

In determining the evolution of human security in China, some authors tend to associate it with the philosophical tradition of Confucianism. It is, therefore, a more relevant toolkit for analysis, at least at the pure theoretical level. The emphasis is on the importance of relationships and the maintenance of social harmony. In Confucian thought, a harmonious society is one in which people are able to live in peace and prosperity and where there is a strong sense of community and mutual support. This emphasis on social harmony can contribute to human security by helping to prevent conflict and promoting cooperation and stability. Another link is the emphasis on education and self-improvement in Confucianism. Education is seen as a way for individuals to develop their moral character and become responsible and contributing members of society. This emphasis on education can contribute to human security by helping to empower individuals and communities and by providing people with the skills and knowledge they need to address the challenges they face. Confucianism is based on the idea that people are fundamentally good and that they can achieve harmony and order in society through the practice of virtues such as compassion, honesty, and respect for authority.

Today, numerous political solutions in the sphere of foreign and security policy of the PR China are based on the tradition of Confucianism interwoven with the Chinese socialist model of the organisation of the modern state. Therefore, China does not seek hard hegemony or unipolar dominance like the US did in the last decade of the last century. For instance, even the contemporary Chinese military doctrine does not rest on prevention or pre-emption, as in the case of the Western-centric vision of international order, but the Chinese armed force is “in the service of building a community with a shared future for mankind”. Some authors believe that the specifics of how China’s scholarly community defines human security are that the state is the key guarantor of human security, not a threat to it (Breslin, 2014).

One of the key themes in the Chinese literature on human security is the focus on the individual as the central unit of analysis. This is in contrast to the traditional state-centric approach in international relations, which emphasises the security of the state as the primary concern. Therefore, the notion of “人的安全” (*Rén de ānquán*) would probably be the most accurate translation of “human security” into the Chinese language. Chinese scholars

argue that human security is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional concept that encompasses not only physical security but also economic, social, and political security, all of which include “freedom from fear and freedom from want, which are what both individuals and countries want” (Guan and Guo, 2007: 99). Another important aspect of the Chinese literature on human security is the emphasis on the importance of human rights. Chinese scholars argue that human security cannot be achieved without the protection and promotion of human rights. They also stress that human security should be viewed as a universal concept that is applicable to all individuals, regardless of their nationality or location.

A third theme in the Chinese literature on human security is the emphasis on the role of the state in providing security. Chinese scholars argue that the state has a responsibility to protect its citizens from internal and external threats and that this responsibility should be carried out in accordance with the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Sung-Won Kim posits that Asia serves as the premier arena for the examination of future human security (Kim, 2010). This perspective aligns with the post-Westphalian concept of human security, as it calls into question traditional notions of sovereignty and advocates for the application of universal standards of human treatment. Furthermore, it advocates for intervention in the domestic affairs of states that fail to ensure the safety and well-being of their citizens (2010: 95). Finally, Chinese scholars have also been actively engaged in discussions on how to operationalize the concept of human security. They have proposed a variety of approaches, including the development of national human security strategies, the establishment of human security indices, and the integration of human security considerations into foreign policy decision-making. Kim (2010) believes that Confucianism even contained the idea that one state could intervene with military force in another state whose rulers failed to secure such basic levels of individual security and subsistence. Thus, one can find in Confucian thought features that resemble—if only in a rudimentary way—human security’s universal scope, its concern with holding leaders accountable, and its integration of mechanisms to intervene when human security is threatened (2010: 96). However, this position is very questionable, bearing in mind that this is the only analytical position of Confucius’s “*Analects*”, bearing in mind that Confucianism is based on the benevolence of man as well as the ruler and by no means on the model of coercion in securing goods on a personal level.

Xiao Ren (2016) believes that the main human security threats for and in China are based on air pollution, food safety, and cyber security. He argued that these three threats were distinctive in the case of China at the beginning of this century's second decade (2016: 117-118). In the contemporary academic Chinese political debate, the question of what level of security is necessary to lower the analytical framework has crystallized. The central dilemma refers to the relationship between national and personal security and the influence that the state apparatus should achieve in such a constellation. Several Chinese scholars hold the belief that human security is crucial in assessing the impact of China's human security situation on the country's economic and political advancement, as well as on regional and global stability.

*Xi Jinping's Human Security Policies:
Global Initiatives for Security and Development*

In China's example, the country's particular polity has recently finished a large process of opening up to the outside world while preserving a strong sense of responsibility for its own population in a Sino-centric manner. According to President Xi Jinping's philosophy, communism with Chinese characteristics, among other things, prioritises the person over the benefits that the state as a whole may offer. The Boao Forum in April 2022 saw Chinese President Xi Jinping propose the so-called Global Security Initiative (GSI), which drew much attention from the global media. China's Global Security Initiative and Global Development Initiative represent an attempt by official Beijing to be more assertive in terms of foreign policy and to use them as tools to justify possible military expansion in the future. Therefore, it is not surprising that the US observes the military and security capacities of China through the prism of strategic changes in the creation of foreign policy activities (Stekić, 2022). In an extensive analysis of the contents of 21 reports entitled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China", Nenad Stekić concludes that the increasing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China in the sphere of hard security represents one of the most important tools for analysing the strategic competition for the new hegemon in the system of international relations (Stekić, 2022). The Pentagon's perception is that the "threat" that comes from the enemy from the Far East in the last five years is most manifested in the sphere of security "transformation"—the security dimension (Stekić, 2022: 44). Therefore, it is certain that the two initiatives proposed by China

will perhaps also represent a new turning point in the relations between the two superpowers and mutual moves in world politics.

Another global initiative in which China's new policies can be read through the prism of human security is the Global Development Initiative (GDI). It represents an effort to establish China for the first time as a global actor in the fields of global aviation, human security, and humanitarian affairs. This is the first fundamental act directed "to the outside", that is, to the external environment, in relation to the rigidly structured Chinese political system. However, the GDI should not be interpreted as an alternative to the existing international order. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021, President Xi Jinping emphasised the imperative to enhance global governance and implement genuine multilateralism as a basic postulate on which the new idea from the GDI is based (Xi Jinping, 2021). In order to respond to the "profound changes that are taking place in human society", the world needs to respond to three additional questions. In defeating the global pandemic, President Xi emphasised that humankind "should always put people and their lives first and care about the life, value, and dignity of every individual" (Xi Jinping, 2021). In addition, he highlighted as another issue the promotion of mutual respect and win-win cooperation in international relations. He supported this with the slogan about the need to "advocate peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom, which are the common values of humanity, and reject the practice of forming small circles or zero-sum games" (Xi Jinping, 2021).

The Global Development Initiative should, according to what Xi said, consist of six principles. The first calls for global cooperation and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition to that, Xi proposed a global commitment to achieving benefits for all inhabitants of the planet in a manner in which this development is innovation-driven (Xi, 2021). In his pledge to promote the GDI, Xi also made a commitment to "harmony between man and nature" and to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 (Xi, 2060). But what is relevant from the aspect of human security to this area is the GDI principle, which calls for global development based on the individual.

"We should safeguard and improve people's livelihoods, protect and promote human rights through development, and make sure that development is for the people and by the people, and that its fruits are shared among the people. We should continue our work so that the

people will have a greater sense of happiness, benefit, and security and achieve well-rounded development” (Xi, 2021).

According to statements made by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of October 2022, a significant number of nations (roughly 100) and international organisations have publicly expressed support for the Global Development Initiative (GDI). Furthermore, a total of 68 countries have joined the UN-affiliated Group of Friends of the GDI in support of the initiative (Chinese MFA, 2022). It is in line with each of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (Chinese MFA, 2022), which for sure contributes to the “internationalisation” of China’s soft politics in the modern system of international relations. Suffices it to say that China has provided the finances for its GDI through the China-UN Peace and Development Fund. Along with the GDI, the Global Security Initiative (GSI), as also articulated by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aims to coordinate efforts to address security threats in both conventional and unconventional areas, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the global security governance system. This initiative emphasised the importance of human security and encompassed the official commitment of the Chinese government to address non-traditional security threats.

Human Security in China's Five-Year Development Plans

Although human security was not then recognised as a universal acquired value in the most general sense, it could be said that the Five-Year Development Plans (FYPs) of the People’s Republic of China are nothing more than the concretization of the concept of human security in practice. The examination of the Chinese government’s efforts to address human security issues, including its policies and programmes, is significant because the FYPs have established the directions in which China will direct its sectoral policies for the sake of improving the overall well-being of its residents, who are at the centre of these policies. The organs of the Communist Party of China have been regularly adopting these plans since 1953, when they were dominantly focused on the economic development of the post-war state and the constitution of state organs after the Second World War.

In the period 1953-1985, for which six of these development plans were adopted, the orientation towards improving the economy and macroeconomic stability of China was dominant. The planned economy, the general positioning of China in the new international system, the

development of agricultural production, and the development of technologies and capacities for national defence were the main tasks for this period. Furthermore, the development of heavy industry as well as the improvement of technology for scientific research were features of the fourth and fifth development plans.

Over the past three cycles, little has remained constant within the Five-Year Development Plans (FYPs) of China. Each successive plan has increasingly adopted a person-centric approach rather than focusing solely on the general economic development of the Chinese state. Furthermore, there has been consistent advocacy for the internationalisation of human security policy implementation in line with China's opening up. The following analysis will present a comparative examination of the 12th, 13th, and 14th FYPs from the perspective of human security.

The 13th Five-Year Development Plan of China, which covered the period from 2016 to 2020, placed a strong emphasis on human security. The plan included several key initiatives that are directly related to human security, such as the ones that fall into the "classical" Human Security dimensional field of analysis—reducing poverty and improving living standards, promoting environmental protection, and enhancing social security—while some policies of this FYP included more general tendencies such as building a harmonious society (China's 13th FYP, 2015).

As outlined in China's 13th FYP (2015), it aimed to raise the per capita income of urban and rural residents and increase access to basic public services such as education, healthcare, and social security. Additionally, the plan established a target of reducing the poverty rate to less than 4% by 2020 through the implementation of measures aimed at increasing income and employment opportunities in poverty-stricken areas. The plan also called for the improvement of the social security system and an increase in access to social services for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and individuals with disabilities. A paramount emphasis was placed on environmental protection, with targets set for reducing pollution and conserving natural resources. The plan also reflected the Chinese government's commitment to promoting social stability and harmony, addressing issues such as income inequality, ethnic and religious tensions, and social unrest (China's 13th FYP, 2015).

The 13th FYP of China was of great significance, particularly as it marked the first instance in which the country advocated for the assumption of international responsibilities and obligations within the realm of global

development and the internationalisation of human security policy. Through this plan, China has committed to expanding foreign cooperation and aid in various domains, including science, technology, education, medical care, disaster prevention and mitigation, environmental governance, the protection of wild fauna and flora, and poverty alleviation (China's 13th FYP, 2015: Chapter 53), which are all areas of human security concept. Overall, it can be argued that this FYP placed a strong emphasis on human security and promoted the well-being and prosperity of all Chinese citizens through a range of economic, social, and environmental initiatives.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report, released in 2021, critically evaluated China's latest FYP and found that it aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to a significant degree. However, the report also identified two areas that could be further strengthened in order to fully realise China's potential contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These areas include the need for improved coordination among different levels of government and the enhancement of the capacity of local government authorities. Additionally, the report suggests that a reassessment of financial resources may be necessary in order to strategically allocate funds towards the achievement of the SDGs (UNDP, 2021).

*Has the Concept Always Been Sinicized?
Human Security with Chinese Characteristics*

If the facts highlighted in the previous part of the text are taken into account, the question can rightly be asked: is the concept of human security actually immanent in the socialist system, that is, has it always been present in the case of China? The examination should also consider the effects of China's human security situation on the nation's political and economic development, as well as on regional and global stability. Among many, there are two distinctive reasons why examining the *sinicization* of this concept is important. The first relates to the view that the concept is largely de facto sinicized. Comprehensive Chinese measures related to the improvement of its position and status in international relations are based on targeting an individual. Over the course of the last two decades, China has made significant strides in the development and participation of financial mechanisms within the realm of Euro-Asia. This is evidenced by the wide range of institutions in which China's economic integration policy in this region is implemented, as well as the strong economic incentive for the

continued development of sectoral policies (Zakić, 2019). Another possible position is that the focus of global politics is shifting from the Euro-Atlantic to the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific regions, and there is a need for increasing “respect” for the perception of the concept by Sino-centric apologists. Therefore, this discussion is organised to answer these two questions based on previous findings.

Some authors, such as Craig and associates (2021), believed that the pandemic actually represented a chance for the US to promote its new leadership in the system of international relations through what they called “the new front against infectious diseases”. That did not happen in practice after three years. Counterintuitively, it seems that human security has been neglected instead of being placed on the pedestal of acquired values and norms after such a traumatic event for humanity occurred. The coronavirus has been widely presented within academia as a “non-traditional threat to Human Security” (Nurhasanah, 2020). From the analysis of human security in China, it should not be excluded that there are international institutions and organisations that analyse the work and strategies coming from China through the prism of this concept. Thus, the UNDP recognises that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are deeply rooted in the externalisation of China’s policy at the global level, and similarly, the Chinese Constitution, amended in 2018, deals with human security issues.

When analysing the specifics of the application of the concept at the practical as well as theoretical-knowledge level in China, the socialist component of Chinese society should be highlighted. It gives a special note to the concept, which is different in relation to other authoritarian regimes that can but most often are not directed towards the benefit of the individual. With its numerous policies, regular five-year plans, and concrete data that support the premise of a significant improvement in the position of the average Chinese citizen in the last four decades, China has shown that the concept of human security is a *de facto* part of the national development policy. Should we do a comparison of China’s human security situation with that of other countries, including both developed and developing nations? Probably not, bearing in mind that the concept of human security cannot be universally applicable in all societies in the modern world. Instead, it is more appropriate to argue about the possibilities of applying the analytical concept of human security in non-democratic states for the sake of more versatile results from scientific and practical research. But for further studies of this, it would be important to examine in what way the Chinese government favours the possible promotion of human security by

international organisations. Despite numerous scholarly attempts to delve into the intricacies of China's human security policy, this field remains relatively under-explored in practice. This can be attributed to a range of factors, including language barriers and the limitations placed on academic research within certain sensitive areas that are off-limits to researchers outside of China. These limitations make it challenging to gain a comprehensive understanding of the policies and practices surrounding human security in China.

Spatial Layers of China's Security Policy

In the following part of this chapter, the spatial layers of contemporary security policy of the PR China are presented. As China is an emerging superpower, it was to be expected that it would have formulated regional policies for the whole world. The so-called regionally tailored approach, which is inherent to all global hegemonies, is not a feature of China's security policy, at least not yet. Instead, China bases its regional approach on the need to respond to growing challenges in certain parts of the world that are of special interest to it. Therefore, in the rest of the chapter, only selected regional approaches will be presented, which, according to the general academic assessment, are important for understanding the foreign policy and security activities of contemporary China. In question are China's policy for the East Asian region, then the security aspects of the Chinese BRI, as well as the increasingly assertive Chinese presence in the Persian Gulf region with a different reference to relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia in the context of their rapprochement. The security component of the wider implications for the Middle East region is especially emphasised.

The technological development component of security represents an important advantage for every emerging superpower, as posited by the Hegemonic Stability Theory, despite not appearing significant at first glance. This is exemplified by indirect technological achievements that enable states to penetrate the domain of highly sophisticated actors. Therefore, this chapter places special emphasis on the postulates of China's security policy towards the Arctic, which were initially formulated in 2018, as well as the space policy of the People's Republic of China. Although the chapter does not aim to demonstrate the global reach of China's security policy, it presents and analyses premises regarding the security challenges of China's cooperation with Africa and the countries of Oceania.

China's East Asian Policy

China perceives the US as a pivot to Asia and its alliances in the region, particularly with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, as part of a containment strategy aimed at limiting China's influence. This perception has led to increased military activities and assertiveness in the South China Sea and the East China Sea in recent years. It could be argued that China's stance towards these two countries and Taiwan, which it considers its own territory, does constitute China's East Asian policy. The central idea of contemporary China's East Asian policy is to confront the US-led "hub and spokes" system. Such a system is a fundamental concept in international relations and regional security architectures, often employed to describe the structure of security alliances, particularly in the post-World War II era. In this system, a central power, often referred to as the "hub", forms bilateral security alliances or agreements with multiple peripheral states, the "spokes". The hub, typically a dominant global or regional power, which was the US throughout the era of unilateralism, assumes a central role in these alliances, while the spokes interact primarily with the hub rather than with each other (Heiduk, 2022). The hub and spokes model offers several advantages for both the central power and the peripheral states. For the central power, it allows for the consolidation of influence and control over a network of allies, enhancing its strategic reach and providing a means of projecting power across multiple regions. Simultaneously, peripheral states benefit from the security guarantees and resources offered by the central power, often in exchange for cooperation and alignment with the hub's strategic objectives. This system has been particularly evident in the context of US security arrangements, such as NATO in Europe and bilateral defence treaties with various Asian nations, dominantly with Japan and after with South Korea, Taiwan, or even the QUAD, as a relatively recent initiative that includes Australia and India as well. While the hub and spokes model can enhance security and stability for participating states, it also raises questions about the potential for conflicts of interest among allies and the central power's capacity to maintain commitments to multiple partners. Nonetheless, it remains a prominent feature of contemporary international relations, reflecting the dynamics of global and regional security.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China asserts that the bilateral relationship between China and Japan holds significant imports due to their geographical proximity. Noteworthy milestones in this relationship include the historic event of September 29, 1972, when both

nations entered into and subsequently ratified the “Joint Statement between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of Japan” (MFA PRC, 2023p). This accord marked a pivotal moment in diplomatic history, signifying the normalisation of diplomatic ties between the two nations. Furthermore, on August 12, 1978, both parties formalised their commitment to peaceful coexistence by signing the “Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship” in Beijing. The treaty entered into force on October 23 of the same year, following the exchange of ratification documents in Tokyo, Japan. Subsequent to these foundational agreements, China and Japan further solidified their diplomatic relationship by releasing the “Sino-Japanese Joint Declaration on Establishing a Friendship and Cooperative Partnership Committed to Peace and Development” in November 1998 and the “Sino-Japanese Joint Statement on Comprehensively Promoting Strategic and Mutually Beneficial Relations” in May 2008 (MFA PRC, 2023p). Collectively, these four pivotal political documents serve as the fundamental underpinning for the political framework governing Sino-Japanese relations.

In 1974, a significant development in Sino-Japanese military relations occurred when both nations established reciprocal military attaché offices, initiating military exchanges in the latter part of the 1970s. This relationship showed positive progress in its early stages. However, a temporary hiatus occurred in military exchanges between the two nations following the events of 1989. In 1995, a pivotal moment took place when the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Japanese Defence Agency made an official visit to China, thereby rekindling high-level interactions between the Chinese and Japanese military establishments. This momentum continued in 1998, when defence ministers from both countries reciprocally visited each other. The year 2000 witnessed an exchange of visits between the chiefs of general staff of the respective armies, further solidifying their military relations (MFA PRC, 2023p). Notably, in November 2007, a noteworthy event marked the first visit of a Chinese warship to Japan since the conclusion of World War II. Subsequently, from 1997 to 2011, the defence departments of China and Japan engaged in nine security consultations, underscoring their commitment to regional stability and cooperation. Beyond traditional military exchanges, China and Japan have expanded their collaboration into other domains, including defence medicine, educational institutions, and academic research. During President Hu Jintao’s visit to Japan in May 2008, both nations affirmed their intent to bolster defence exchanges, signalling a continued commitment to enhancing

their military relationship (MFA PRC, 2023p). Of particular significance, a noteworthy milestone was reached on June 8, 2018 with the official launch of the maritime and air liaison mechanism between the defence departments of China and Japan, underscoring their dedication to promoting communication and coordination in matters pertaining to maritime and aerial security.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, bilateral political engagement between the PR China and South Korea has evolved progressively and harmoniously. An illustrative timeline of significant developments in Sino-South Korean political relations includes the following milestones: In 1998, a pivotal moment occurred when South Korean President Kim Dae-jung embarked on an official visit to China, during which both parties jointly announced the establishment of a cooperative partnership for the 21st century between China and South Korea. Subsequently, in 2003, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun undertook a diplomatic mission to China, resulting in the announcement of the establishment of a “comprehensive cooperative partnership” between the two countries, signifying the deepening of their multifaceted collaboration (MFA PRC, 2023c). In May 2008, the visit of South Korean President Lee Myung-bak to China marked another significant juncture in bilateral relations, as both nations declared the establishment of a strategic partnership between China and South Korea, reflecting a heightened level of mutual cooperation and shared objectives. During the visit of President Xi Jinping to South Korea in July 2014, the two leaders made a joint declaration, expressing their mutual aspiration for China and South Korea to evolve into partners committed to realising common development, fostering regional peace, revitalising the Asian continent, and contributing to global prosperity (MFA PRC, 2023c). Further underscoring the enduring commitment to diplomatic engagement, South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s visit to China in December 2017 facilitated extensive discussions on the enhancement and expansion of China-South Korea relations. These discussions encompassed a range of topics, including cooperative efforts concerning the Korean Peninsula and cooperation on various international and regional issues. The visit culminated in mutual agreement on numerous pivotal matters, reinforcing the robust foundation of their diplomatic ties (MFA PRC, 2023c).

The security landscape in East Asia has undergone notable transformations since the year 2020, marked by complex geopolitical dynamics, evolving regional alliances, and strategic manoeuvring among

major players in the region. China's establishment of ADIZs²² in the East China Sea and the South China Sea is a security measure intended to safeguard its territorial claims and protect its interests. However, these zones have raised concerns and led to tensions with neighbouring countries as well as the United States, which views them as attempts to challenge the freedom of both civilian and military air navigation (Stekić, 2023). As per the "Statement on the Establishment of the East China Sea (ECS) Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ)" released by the Chinese Ministry of National Defence, aircraft operating in this zone are required to submit their flight plans to either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China or the Civil Aviation Administration of China. Notably, most East Asian countries, including China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, have delineated their respective ADIZs (Stekić, 2023). Furthermore, in the broader geographical region encompassing this area, the Philippines and the United States have also established similar zones, specifically on Guam. China's growing military presence and its heightened assertiveness in its immediate vicinity, particularly concerning Taiwan, have been exemplified by the increased frequency of military aircraft, both combat and non-combat, conducting overflights across the central demarcation line of the Taiwan Strait. These incidents, occurring daily and on a more frequent basis over the past three years, are viewed by Taiwan as violations of its airspace and declared ADIZ. It is noteworthy that data from the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) indicate that nearly 98% of these sorties originate from bases within China's Eastern and Southern Theatre Command (FPRI, 2023). Despite the security tensions prevalent in the South China Sea, arising from competing territorial claims and rights to its waters, China has not yet established a "Southern ADIZ" for this airspace (Stekić, 2023). Adding complexity to the regional security environment is the escalation of US military presence in the area. In 2022, the United States deployed approximately 82,000 troops and maintained military installations solely in Japan and South Korea (Heiduk, 2022). This development further contributes to the intricate web of security dynamics in East Asia.

²² An ADIZ, or Air Defence Identification Zone, is a specific airspace area where a country requires incoming aircraft to identify themselves and follow certain procedures when entering that airspace. ADIZs are established by a country for national security and defence purposes, and they are not the same as a country's sovereign airspace, which is the airspace directly above its territory.

Stekić (2023) posits that China has adopted a regionally nuanced strategy in its interactions with neighbouring countries, a strategy aimed at fostering a coordinated response to potential Western containment efforts. This approach introduces a novel variable into the geopolitical landscape, one that encompasses the complex interplay of factors and dynamics inherent in the emerging Indo-Pacific region—a construct that underscores the promotion of US-led multilateral security arrangements. Within the evolving security architecture of East Asia, a series of discernible processes, broadly characterised as “pull factors”, have come to the fore in shaping China’s strategic responses. These pull factors include the delineation of a new geopolitical sphere, namely the Indo-Pacific, as an area of heightened global security significance. Concurrently, there has been a resurgence of traditional multilateral security frameworks alongside the creation of new ones, exemplified by the QUAD and AUKUS initiatives. Notably, Taiwan occupies a central position in US foreign policy objectives aimed at constraining China, garnering support from South Korea and Japan in this endeavour. The ongoing rivalry between the United States and China within the realm of global affairs has contributed to the emergence and delineation of the Indo-Pacific as a newly constructed region of paramount global interest. This transformation signifies a shift away from the traditional *Pax Americana* paradigm towards a *Pax Sinica* paradigm, culminating in the formation of a San Francisco System characterised by a “hub and spokes” configuration.

Has the Belt and Road Initiative become obsolete?

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), previously introduced as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project, is one of the most ambitious foreign policy initiatives in recent Chinese history. The BRI aims to enhance connectivity and cooperation between countries along the ancient Silk Road, primarily through infrastructure development and economic cooperation in the vast space of Eurasia as well as in the maritime domain. It was introduced as one of the first steps in the realm of global policy by newly appointed Xi Jinping in 2013. Even though the BRI has emerged as an economic project, during its decade of existence, it has also been considered a part of China’s security policy and an important asset of its global agenda (Hussain, 2019; Anwar, 2020; Janardhan, 2020; Li, 2020). From a security perspective, the BRI has been viewed as a way for China to increase its influence and presence in strategically important regions around the world. For example, the China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a significant part of the BRI, involves the construction of a series of highways, railways, and pipelines that will connect China's western region to Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea.

This project provides China with access to the Indian Ocean, which is a critical maritime route for trade and energy supplies. In addition, it helps to secure China's interests in the region by providing an alternative transportation route that bypasses the Strait of Malacca, which is currently vulnerable to US interdiction. Similarly, the BRI's investment in the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka has raised some security concerns about China's potential military presence in the Indian Ocean. In 2017, the Sri Lankan government handed over control of the port to China on a 99-year lease, which led to speculation that the port could be used as a naval base for the Chinese military. This move has also raised concerns about China's intentions in the Indian Ocean, as it could allow China to establish a military foothold in the region and challenge India's dominance. Moreover, the BRI has been viewed as a tool for China to expand its soft power and promote its political and economic model. The passage of a decade since the initiation of the BRI affords an analytically advantageous opportunity to consider its place within the broader context of China's Grand Strategy. Given the gradual removal of the BRI from Beijing's official political discourse and the exhaustion of some of its sub-initiatives, it is pertinent to re-examine its relevance and impact.

The BRI is not only about infrastructure development but also involves cultural exchanges, education, and people-to-people exchanges. By investing in other countries' infrastructure, China seeks to portray itself as a responsible global power committed to promoting development and prosperity. However, the BRI's implementation has been criticised for its lack of transparency and accountability, leading to accusations of "debt-trap diplomacy" and concerns over China's growing influence. In terms of China's global agenda, the BRI is seen as a way to counterbalance the United States' influence in the region. As the United States has been seen as withdrawing from the world stage, China has stepped up its efforts to fill the void. The BRI is seen as a way for China to promote its own economic and political interests, challenge US hegemony, and reshape the world order in its favour. Furthermore, the BRI has been viewed as a way for China to enhance its relations with countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. By investing in infrastructure projects, China seeks to establish closer ties with these countries and promote trade and economic cooperation. The BRI is seen as

a way for China to enhance its strategic partnerships and establish new allies, which would increase China's global influence and help it achieve its broader foreign policy objectives.

The BRI has achieved stunning results over the course of the decade. As of December 2022, a total of 150 countries and 32 international organisations have participated in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with over 200 documents signed to join the initiative. In 2022, China's trade with the BRI participating states totalled \$1.8 trillion USD, marking a 20% increase from the previous year (China Daily, 2023). Direct investments by China in the BRI countries also rose to \$19.1 billion USD in 2022, reflecting a 6.5% increase from the previous year (China Daily, 2023). Furthermore, the value of intended deals reached \$73 billion USD in 2022, while more than 15,100 China-Europe freight trains were operated during the year (China Daily, 2023). State-owned enterprises (SOEs) play a major role in the economic component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2022, PowerChina accounted for 22% of all BRI investments, followed by China Railway Engineering (10.3%), China Energy Engineering (9.8%), China Communications Construction (9.4%), and State Construction Engineering (9.3%) in terms of total construction projects.

According to some scholars, the implementation of the BRI also has a significant security component on the ground. Janardhan (2020) argues that Beijing uses a "three-pronged security approach" to protect Chinese investments in countries hosting the BRI projects. This approach includes relying on the security forces of the host country where the projects are being undertaken, using Chinese private security contractors and personnel who work alongside locally recruited staff or collaborate with official security forces of the host country (as seen in Iraq, Sudan, and South Sudan), and even a direct involvement of Chinese military personnel (Janardhan, 2020: 4).²³

The BRI started to receive its first serious critique in 2018. One of the main critiques of the BRI occurred in Europe, more precisely by three Baltic EU Member States, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, that even decided to withdraw from the "17+1" format. The critiques addressed the lack of

²³ In May 2019, one of several security incidents involving Chinese nationals in Pakistan occurred when a hotel in the port city of Gwadar was attacked by the Balochi Liberation Army. The group claims to be fighting against China's alleged exploitation of Baluchistan's mineral wealth (Reuters, 2019).

transparency in project financing and implementation. European leaders have expressed concerns that the BRI is a way for China to advance its own strategic interests by offering countries loans and investments in infrastructure projects that are often expensive and of questionable economic value. Critics also argue that China uses the BRI to extend its economic and political influence in other countries, with little regard for local needs or environmental concerns. Another concern is the potential for China to use the BRI as a way to export its own standards and norms to other countries, particularly in the areas of labour, human rights, and environmental protection. European leaders worry that the BRI will exacerbate existing economic, social, and environmental challenges in recipient countries rather than address them. There are also concerns that China's use of its own firms to carry out the projects may lead to poor labour conditions and the exploitation of workers. Additionally, there are concerns about the security implications of the BRI, particularly with regard to the potential for China to use its investments and infrastructure projects to gain access to sensitive information and technology in Europe. Some European countries have raised concerns that the BRI could be used by China to undermine their sovereignty and security interests, particularly in regions where China has territorial disputes with other countries. Another critique of the BRI in Europe is that it may contribute to a lack of coherence and coordination in regional development plans. Some experts argue that the BRI is a top-down initiative that fails to take into account the specific needs and circumstances of individual countries and regions. As a result, it may not align with existing regional development strategies and could undermine efforts to promote economic integration and cooperation in Europe. Finally, some critics argue that the BRI represents a threat to global governance and the rules-based international order. They argue that China's efforts to expand its influence through the BRI could undermine the existing global institutions and norms that have governed international relations for decades.

Most critiques were induced by the US-led influence in Central Europe and the Baltics, prompting those states to express Sino-scepticism. In order to prevent a reduction in the number of countries that participate in the "17+1" cooperation, China renamed the format "China-CEE Cooperation". This approach to the Belt and Road Initiative, particularly in Europe, where it faces significant political criticism, prompts questions about whether the BRI has become obsolete from the perspective of Beijing's official stance. The decision to rename the format demonstrates that China is aware of the concerns and criticisms regarding the BRI in Europe. One of the main

critiques of the initiative is that it favours Chinese interests over those of the recipient countries, leading to a “debt trap” scenario where the countries cannot repay their loans to China. This has resulted in scepticism and hesitancy from European countries to participate in the initiative. Furthermore, there are concerns that the BRI may have geopolitical implications, with China using it as a tool to extend its influence and power in other regions. This has led to criticism that the initiative is part of China’s larger strategy to become a dominant global superpower. Despite these concerns, the BRI remains a significant part of China’s global agenda and security policy. In Europe, the initiative has been linked to China’s broader ambitions to increase its influence and challenge the United States’ dominance in the region. Therefore, it is unlikely that China will abandon the BRI altogether, especially given its importance to China’s domestic economic growth and regional development objectives. Instead, China may seek to address the critiques and concerns through measures such as the renaming of the “17+1” format to “China-CEE Cooperation”. Additionally, China may seek to make the initiative more transparent and involve local stakeholders in decision-making processes to address concerns about a lack of local ownership and accountability.

A decade after its introduction, the BRI’s economic and soft power capabilities have been depleted for various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic and new developments in the international system. The inability to implement this initiative in Eastern Europe, which is one of its key geographical parts, has also contributed to its obsolescence. In 2021, Lithuania’s pulling out of the “17+1” multilateral format was the first serious sign of the ongoing obstacles China faced in implementing the BRI in the region. The initiative, which had its first summit in Warsaw (Poland) and its most recent one in Beijing in 2021, has shown a slowdown in its activities, and several states that were initially members have withdrawn. Recently, on August 11, 2022, both Estonia and Latvia announced their intention to withdraw from the initiative. Latvia stated that this decision was made “in light of its current foreign and trade policy priorities”, while Estonia emphasised the importance of maintaining pragmatic relations with China through EU-China-level relations that “uphold the rules-based international order and values such as human rights” (LRT, 2022).

However, neither country’s foreign ministry provided a clearer explanation regarding the specific reasons for withdrawing from the 17+1 Initiative, nor did it explain the context in which human rights triggered those decisions to leave. Bearing in mind all these circumstances that have

impeded the BRI implementation, especially in the last three years, it is justified to ask the question of whether the BRI has ever had the potential to be(come) China's mainstream Grand Strategy or at least its major driver.

The answer is probably only partial, as this initiative, despite numerous analyses that it should be a politico-security initiative, failed to do so. The BRI has certainly contributed to reformulating and implementing the idea of a Sino-centric order based on economic postulates and modes of cooperation in trade and infrastructure investments. Such a strategy was in line with China's decade-long goal to align its internal economic development with international occurrences without severely interfering with global politics. In that sense, could the thesis on the BRI as a transitional component of China's GS be accepted? Some scholars suggested that the BRI should have become China's security gateway to the world (Janardhan, 2020).

The Chinese MFA stated that it will not follow the traditional path of major powers in seeking hegemony (PRC MoD 2021). However, some literature argues that the BRI could contribute to the "Eurasian revival" and lead to a shift in Asia's role in global geopolitics (Yiwei 2015). Wang Yiwei argues that China is taking on Halford Mackinder's view of the "world island", which puts the US aside from global competition (Yiwei 2015). These claims align with the ongoing discussion about international hegemony as the "third wave" of international hegemony studies, as discussed by Evelyn Goh (2019). This paradigm follows the idea of an innovative, non-coercive hegemony that is not achieved through military power alone and raises the question of benevolent hegemony.

China's Gulf Policy

China's involvement in the Persian Gulf²⁴ (hereinafter the Gulf) has increased significantly in recent years. China, being a major importer of oil, has vital interests in the region and seeks to secure its energy supplies. In

²⁴ This analysis aligns with definitions of the Persian Gulf as a huge geographic area that includes eight countries: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The Gulf has significant economic and strategic importance due to its vast reserves of oil and natural gas, which make up a substantial portion of global energy resources. It is also a vital transportation route for oil tankers, which travel through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The Strait of Hormuz is a critical chokepoint that handles a large share of the world's oil supply.

addition, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has opened up new opportunities for engagement in the region, including infrastructure development and investment, as a part of what some Chinese scholars have described as a "civilian first, military later" strategy. Due to its strategic importance, the Persian Gulf has long been a site of competition and conflict among regional and global powers, including the United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia, other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and China nowadays. However, China's growing presence in the region has raised concerns among some Gulf states and the United States about its intentions. This part of the chapter explores China's foreign and especially security policy agenda for the Persian Gulf, including its main goals and strategies in the post-Pandemic period as a sub-layer of its overall security policy.

After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, China initiated its first interactions with the Gulf states during the early Cold War in the 1950s. At that time, the Gulf monarchies were largely seen as Western vassals, while Iraq and Iran were even members of the UK-led defensive alliance, the Baghdad Pact (CENTO). Therefore, Chinese policy was quite limited, except for providing support to the 1958 revolution in Iraq, which became the first country to establish diplomatic relations with China (Liu, 2016). After the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, China began to perceive the wider Middle East region and the Gulf states as a means to counter the Soviet Union and developed stronger partnerships in the area. According to Liu Zhongmin (2016), China's most assertive activity during that period was providing support to the Dhofar Liberation Front in Oman, which aimed to weaken Western influence while also countering the Soviet Union (2016: 4). During the 1970s, the historical rapprochement between China and the United States resulted in a shift in China's foreign policy towards the Persian Gulf region. This shift saw an end to Chinese support for revolutionary movements in the area and led to the establishment of official diplomatic relations with the Gulf governments. Notably, Kuwait and Iran were among the first Persian Gulf countries to establish such relations with China in 1971 (Liu, 2016). During the Cold War era, Iraq in 1958 and Yemen in 1963 were the initial countries to establish diplomatic relations with China. Following these early diplomatic ties, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established relations with China in 1984, followed by Qatar in 1988 and Bahrain in 1989. Sino-Saudi Arabian diplomatic relations were established in 1990, during the period following the end of the Cold War. In the 1980s, the Gulf region was dominated by the Iran-Iraq war, which was the most pressing security issue at the time. According to Liu (2016), China's primary

objectives during this period were to prevent the escalation of the conflict, maintain regional stability, and curb Soviet expansion in the region. To this end, China adopted a neutral stance towards the Iran-Iraq war and advocated for peaceful negotiations to resolve the conflict. The Chinese government also engaged in military trade with both countries, which resulted in some economic gains for China (Liu, 2016: 6).

In the 1990s, China's policy towards the Gulf underwent a significant shift following the end of the Cold War. The focus of cooperation with the states in the region was no longer driven by the fight against the USSR or other strong security interests, at least not in the strict military sense. Instead, China's growing dependence on energy imports from the region, due to its own internal development, became the primary motivation for engagement. By the turn of the millennium, China was importing half of its energy from the Gulf states, with 30% of its oil and gas alone sourced from Saudi Arabia and Iran (Bajpraee, 2006: According to: Liu, 2016). This emerging energy dependence necessitated a reorientation of China's policy towards the region, as the security and stability of the Gulf became vital to ensuring the uninterrupted flow of energy resources to sustain China's economic growth. The early 21st century witnessed a shift in China's security agenda towards the Persian Gulf, which can be attributed to various factors. The military interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the emergence of a new geopolitical order, China's increasing need for energy imports, and its aspiration to establish itself as a major actor in the Gulf region necessitated a recalibration of China's approach to security issues in the region. In this regard, China vehemently opposed the invasion of Iraq and played an active role in the post-conflict recovery of the country by waiving 80% of its foreign debt and providing financial aid and support to the affected population (Liu, 2016).

The aforementioned developments led to a renewed emphasis on China's diplomatic and economic engagements with the Gulf states. Specifically, China sought to strengthen its partnerships with the Gulf states through various diplomatic initiatives. In 2010, the first Ministerial Meeting of the Strategic Dialogue between China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was convened in Beijing. The outcome of this dialogue was a recognition of the significant progress made in China-GCC relations in recent years. The establishment of the strategic dialogue mechanism was deemed crucial for enhancing mutual trust, strengthening cooperation that benefits both parties, and increasing consultation and coordination in international organisations. Both China and the GCC expressed their willingness to

continue expanding cooperation across various domains (MFA PRC, 2010). In the early years of the second decade of this century, Xi Jinping assumed leadership of China and introduced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has significant implications for the strategic, economic, and security domains of the Gulf and Middle East region. Despite this, security concerns and divergences in regional issues, including the “Arab Spring” Syrian conflict and the Iranian nuclear programme, continue to pose challenges for China in maintaining a balanced relationship with both the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Iran (Liu, 2016).

China’s recent security agenda in the Gulf region appears to be driven by its pursuit of a stable and secure energy supply via maritime paths from the majority of countries in the region. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), China’s consumption of petroleum and other liquid energents has been steadily increasing over the past decade. Specifically, in 2017, China consumed 12.3 million barrels per day (bpd), while in 2021, this figure rose to 15.2 million bpd (EIA, 2023). Over the last decade, crude oil imports from the Gulf states to China have doubled from 130 to 256 million metric tonnes (UN Comtrade, 2023). According to Joseph Webster and Joze Pelayo (2023), the Gulf states exported more than 210 million tonnes of goods to China in 2022, which is more than double the amount exported in 2014. The report identifies Saudi Arabia as China’s top exporter in the Gulf region, followed by the UAE in second place and Oman in third place in 2022 (Webster and Pelayo, 2023). Furthermore, in 2022, over 41 percent of China’s crude oil imports originated from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Webster and Pelayo, 2023). On the other hand, the CSIS assessed that the year 2021 witnessed China’s import of a remarkable \$128 billion worth of crude oil from countries situated along the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. This amount is three times higher than the combined crude oil imports of the United States and the European Union. Based on the EIA data, China overtook the United States as the world’s top crude oil importer in 2017, importing 8.4 million bpd compared to 7.9 million bpd for the US. Since 2013, China has also been the largest net importer of total petroleum and other liquid fuels globally, surpassing the US in this aspect as well (EIA, 2023).

Saudi Arabia was China’s top crude oil supplier during 2020 and 2021, with China importing nearly 81 million metric tonnes of crude oil from the Middle Eastern producing giant in 2021 (Statista, 2022). Most of China’s oil imports came from countries in the Middle East, with five of the top ten oil suppliers located in the Gulf region: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, and the

UAE (Statista, 2022). In the first two months of 2023, Russia became China's largest oil supplier, surpassing Saudi Arabia, as per Chinese government data (Al Jazeera, 2023). The steep discounts offered on the sanctioned Russian oil made it popular among buyers, with arrivals from Russia totalling 15.68 million metric tonnes, or 1.94 million bpd, a 23.8 percent increase from 1.57 million bpd in the same period of 2022. Meanwhile, imports of Saudi crude fell to 13.92 million metric tonnes, or 1.72 million bpd, down from 1.81 million bpd a year earlier (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Undeniably, in the past three years, China has heavily relied on the Gulf states for energy supply. However, this dependence raises concerns about the security of the energy supply, particularly in a region of the world that is security-fragile and experiences frequent security incidents. The Gulf region is connected to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea via the 30-mile-wide Strait of Hormuz, which is a crucial chokepoint for global oil transportation. It is one of the most strategically important waterways in the world because it is the main passageway for oil exports from the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world. It is estimated that over 30% of the world's oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz (CSIS Group, 2023), making it a vital artery for global energy security. Over the years, there have been several security incidents in the Strait of Hormuz that have caused concern for global energy security. One such incident occurred in June 2019, when two oil tankers were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz. The United States and other countries blamed Iran for the attacks, which caused a rise in tensions between the two countries (CSIS Group, 2023). The CSIS Group also reported that over the last eight years, there have been at least 40 small or middle-range incidents between the US and Iranian navies in this geographical area (CSIS Group, 2023).

ADCOP, a company owned by ADNOC, owns a 406-kilometre pipeline that carries crude oil from an ADNOC Onshore collection centre in Abu Dhabi to the Fujairah oil export terminal, providing access to international shipping routes. The pipeline, a vital asset for the UAE's oil industry, enables a significant portion of the UAE's total crude oil production to be transported directly from Abu Dhabi to the Arabian Sea and then exported to international markets, taking advantage of Fujairah's strategic location.

Another component of China's approach to the Gulf is its ideational nature. For four decades, the US and its other western allies have been approaching the Gulf and the Middle East through the politics of spreading values. During the 1990s, the United States promoted democratic values in

the Gulf region as part of its foreign policy objectives. The US government saw the promotion of democracy as a way to advance American interests in the region, including promoting stability and security, fostering economic growth, and ensuring access to oil resources (Dalacoura, 2005). Sun Degang and Zhang Jieying (2021) have criticised such Western-led initiatives to democratise the Middle East, arguing that these initiatives have not resulted in democratisation and have only worsened the security situation in the region. With Western models of governance failing to produce positive outcomes for Middle Eastern development and security, regional countries are seeking alternative partners and proposals to advance their growth and security agendas (Sun and Zhang, 2021: 390). The authors suggest that the primary problem in the Middle East is a “development deficit”, rather than a democratic or governance deficit. Therefore, they believe that China’s modern security strategy in the Gulf is based on development peace rather than democratic peace (Sun and Zhang, 2021).

In 2016, China released China’s Arab Policy Paper, which outlines cooperation with all 22 Arab states in the world. The paper includes areas of cooperation in the field of peace and security in the Middle East. According to the text, China supports the building of an “inclusive and shared regional collective cooperation security mechanism to realise long-term peace, prosperity, and development in the Middle East” (China’s Arab Policy Paper, 2016). China also aims to deepen military cooperation with Arab states, including the exchange of visits by military officials, personnel exchange, cooperation on weapons, equipment, and specialised technologies, joint military exercises, and support for the development of national defence and military forces. The paper also emphasises the importance of anti-terrorism cooperation, consular, immigration, judicial, and police cooperation, as well as non-traditional security threats such as piracy and cyber security. In 2019, Camille Lons and associates sought to analyse China’s “great game”, as they dubbed it, in the Middle East. They believed that the GCC states have diversified their foreign policies to focus on east Asia, particularly China, Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN, as a part of their “Look East policy” (Lons et al., 2019). This shift was due to China’s rising economic activity in the MENA, with the GCC countries becoming the centre of gravity for Chinese economic activity. Additionally, the GCC states were increasingly uncertain about their relations with the United States, as tensions have risen since 9/11 and the Obama administration’s pivot to Asia and response to the Arab uprisings. With the US becoming less dependent on oil imports from the Gulf due to the shale

boom, the GCC countries started to strengthen their independent military capabilities and diversify their economic and military ties with China, among other key external players (Lons et al., 2019). Lons and associates believed that this could possibly lead to some GCC countries strengthening their military and security ties with China or even hosting Chinese military facilities in the long run, characterising such moves as a deployment of a “hedging-to-uncertainty” strategy (Lons et al., 2019).

Ghafouri (2009) noted that China’s policy for the Gulf started to represent a “microcosm of its global policy”. He claimed that over the past century, China has supported anti-colonial movements and communist insurgencies, such as the Dhofar Province rebellion in Oman during the mid-1970s, while, in contrast, the US has taken on a more proactive role in shaping the international system. While the US historically prioritised stability in the region, even at the expense of supporting unpopular regimes, China has become a vocal proponent of stability in the international arena (2009: 91). Such trends exposed previously by Ghafouri were confirmed in the aftermath of the pandemic when China resolutely transitioned from being a passive observer of the region to playing a more active role in international security affairs. This is exemplified by its recent efforts to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the spring of 2023, indicating a potential move towards a leadership position in the region.

Yoram Evron (2021) also argues that China has shifted from a passive to an active role in the Middle East in the last few years. He points to two reasons for this change in strategy. The first is that China risks harm to its interests if it does not consolidate ties and assert its position more robustly in the region, as seen during the Arab Spring events (Evron, 2021). Secondly, the Arab Spring disrupted the deep ties and interests that previously existed between local players and world powers in the Middle East and blocked the entry of other players, including China. This new situation provides China with opportunities to shape its role in the region with relatively mild friction with other powers (Evron, 2021).

Jonathan Fulton suggests that China’s growing presence in the Gulf does not aim to strengthen Iran or challenge the regional order. Even in cases where it might seem that way, such as joint naval drills with Russia and Iran, China works to maintain a balanced approach. China’s interests in the Gulf actually favour the *status quo*, and it seeks to compete without becoming a rival to the United States (Fulton, 2021). This presents opportunities for the US and its Gulf partners to use China’s preference for stability to exert

leverage. For example, the 2019 attack on Saudi Aramco resulted in China paying an extra \$97 million a day for energy imports (2021: 213). Given China's deep interests on the Arab side of the Gulf, it becomes more evident that China favours a Gulf order aligned with US preferences, as Fulton (2021) argues that the interests of the US and China in the Gulf are largely compatible since both want a stable region that supports their strategic and economic concerns.

At the first China-GCC summit held in October 2022, President Xi Jinping announced the four areas of cooperation between China and the GCC. They include consolidating political mutual trust and upholding the principle of non-interference in internal affairs; synergizing development strategies to cultivate driving forces for development; supporting the GCC countries in safeguarding their security and building a "Gulf collective security architecture"; and enhancing interactions between their peoples, increasing cultural exchanges, and promoting the rich values of Eastern civilizations (Xi, 2022g). Furthermore, President Xi outlined five priority areas for China-GCC cooperation in the next three to five years during the 2022 summit. Firstly, China will continue to strengthen energy cooperation with the GCC countries by importing more crude oil and LNG, cooperating in oil and gas development, and establishing a China-GCC forum on nuclear technology (Xi, 2022).

Xi also proposed (2022) a plan to collaborate on financial regulation, investment, and green development, as well as to focus on innovation, science, and technology cooperation by building innovation and entrepreneurship incubators and convening a seminar on climate response, as the second and third areas of cooperation. Fourthly, China and the GCC states will aim to deepen aerospace cooperation by working on remote sensing and communications satellites, space utilisation, and the selection and training of astronauts. And finally, they will cooperate on language and cultural education by providing Chinese language education and setting up Chinese language learning and testing centres (Xi, 2022).

In 2023, Sino-Iranian relations reached their peak in April, when Qin Gang met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Beijing. Qin Gang emphasised the strong relationship between China and Iran and expressed China's willingness to deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. He also expressed China's appreciation for Iran's support of China's efforts to safeguard its core interests and its opposition to external forces interfering in Iran's internal

affairs, as well as his support for Iran to soon become a member state of the SCO (MFA PRC, 2023p). Amir-Abdollahian congratulated China on the success of its 2023 Two Sessions and expressed Iran's commitment to following through on the outcomes of President Raisi's visit to China and implementing the comprehensive cooperation plan between Iran and China. Both sides expressed their support for each other's initiatives, including China's Global Civilization Initiative, and pledged to continue working together to safeguard common interests (MFA PRC, 2023p).

During the Group Meeting with Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Qin Gang stated that the recent improvement in Saudi Arabia-Iran relations has positive implications in four areas: it enhances regional peace and stability and promotes cooperation among neighbouring countries; it demonstrates that conflicts can be resolved through dialogue and meets the common interests of regional nations; it sets a positive example for the Global Security Initiative; and it shows progress in humanity's efforts towards conflict resolution and reconciliation (Qin, 2023).

Webster and Pelayo (2023) believe that growing security cooperation between China and the GCC is particularly noteworthy given the region's increasing dissatisfaction with the West. The latter has been criticised for either doing "too much" in places like Iraq or "not doing enough" in countries such as Iran. It is worth noting, however, that China's expanding presence in the region is not solely driven by a desire to challenge the US. In addition to Beijing's greater push for influence, many regional capitals are also seeking to attract China politically, creating a pull factor (Webster and Pelayo, 2023).

They also argue that Beijing's recent actions in the region are a result of its establishment of its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017, which is strategically located near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden, suggesting that "China seeks to project military power beyond its borders in addition to its expanding regional economic interests; though China initially denied any intention of using the base for military purposes, its location and capacity indicate otherwise" (Webster and Pelayo, 2023).

The last segment of China's Gulf policy is characterised by further assertive actions taking place in this region. In March 2023, China conducted military joint drills with Iran and Russia in the Gulf of Oman as part of the Security Belt-2023 joint maritime exercise (MoD PRC, 2023d). This exercise was a continuation of the joint maritime exercises held among China, Iran,

and Russia in 2019 and 2022. China's MoD announced that this exercise was conducted under the theme of "Working Together to Create Security and Peace" and included drills on various subjects, such as maritime shooting, joint search and rescue, communications, and counterterrorism and counter-piracy operations (MoD PRC, 2023d).

The exercise, which lasted for three days between March 15 and 17, simulated a scenario where ships carrying cargo were hijacked. It also included precision shooting drills against a simulated enemy as well as search and rescue exercises (MoD PRC, 2023d). A similar drill, though a bit southern in the Indian Ocean, was held in January 2022. The significance of this military exercise is attributed to the fact that the Strait of Hormuz was recognised as one of the three strategically important areas in the world in terms of global security. The exercise narrative emphasised that in addition to the Strait of Hormuz, the Malacca Strait and Bab-el-Mandeb also hold significant importance in terms of their role in international trade, which results in China, Russia, and Iran putting forth significant efforts to maintain security in these critical waterways (IRNA, 2022).

However, the aforementioned military exercise was preceded by another exercise that was held in February 2023 near the Pakistani city of Karachi, which is also located near the Strait of Hormuz. The AMAN-23 military exercise involved warships, aircraft, special operations forces, and numerous observers from over 50 countries. The multinational maritime exercise in which China participated actively has helped to improve the participating countries' ability to respond jointly to maritime security threats and demonstrated the determination of all participants to jointly safeguard maritime security (PRC MoD, 2023p).

Jonathan Fulton (2021) argues that security cooperation between China and the Persian Gulf states has not yet advanced to a significant level, and this can be attributed in part to the United States' dominant military presence in the region. Both China and the Gulf monarchies are concerned that any deepening of their security cooperation could strain their relationships with the US, and as a result, they have not taken many steps to strengthen security ties (2020: 501). Fulton recognises that China has some security interests in Iraq, primarily centred around the protection of their oil interests and citizens working there, but the ongoing instability in the country means that prospects for deeper engagement on the security front with Iraq are currently limited (2020: 501). As a result, the focus for now remains on lower-level involvement, such as joint training exercises

and weapons sales, as a part of the Gulf states hedging between the US and China (2020: 501).

The Gulf region has been a key link in the BRI chain, as noted by Lokhande (2017). China's involvement in economic governance in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf region, is marked by distinctive goals that differ from those of its Western counterparts. These differences extend to security and military cooperation as well.

Referring to previously identified matters, it could be argued that China's policy towards the Persian Gulf region can be characterised through the application of the "1+2+3 principle" enacted by China in 2014 and reaffirmed in its "China-Arab policy paper" adopted in 2016. In this constellation, "1" stands for energy cooperation, "2" for trade and infrastructure investments, and "3" stands for nuclear energy, space satellite development, and renewable energy (China's Arab Policy Paper, 2016).²⁵ The "1+2+3" pattern is being conducted by China in the post-pandemic period by four specific means. The first is the effort to build political relations with these countries based on supplying energy to China, which reflects China's significant energy dependence on this part of the world. This interest in the Gulf region over the past five years has led to China's increased desire for security influence in regional issues, which leads to the second means of its Gulf policy: efforts to invest in strategic-security sectors such as oil pipelines and energy infrastructure and to maintain the security of the Strait of Hormuz as the most important geographical area for the transit of oil and other derivatives to the whole world, especially to Asian countries.

The third component and means of China's security policy for the Gulf lie in the implementation of its assertive military activities through joint military exercises with Russia and Iran in April 2023, building on similar

²⁵ The first priority area is energy cooperation, which includes expanding oil and gas trade, developing clean and low-carbon technologies, and establishing a China-GCC forum on peaceful use of nuclear technology. The second and third priority areas focus on finance and investment and innovation, science, and technology cooperation, respectively. They involve collaboration on financial regulation, investment, and green development, as well as building innovation and entrepreneurship incubators and convening a seminar on climate response. The fourth priority area is aerospace cooperation, which aims to foster breakthroughs in remote sensing and communication satellites, space utilisation, and deep space exploration. Finally, the fifth priority area is language and cultural cooperation, which includes the promotion of Chinese language education and people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

exercises organised in 2019 and 2022. However, it remains to be seen how such military efforts will manifest themselves in the near future, and it is likely that this assertiveness could intensify in the future. The fourth and most profound component of China's security policy for this part of the world is its efforts to position itself as a key external factor in possible dispute resolution and regulation of the regional interstate regime in this area. This refers, first of all, to China's recent mediation in the Iran-Saudi dispute and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. This component of China's policy is essential and significant, as it has the potential to shape the region's political and economic landscape in the long run.

China's Security Plea for the Arctic

The Arctic is a region that encompasses the area within the Arctic Circle, an imaginary line at approximately 66.5 degrees north latitude. It spans across three continents and includes the territories of eight countries: Canada, Greenland (Denmark), Russia, the United States, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. The region is characterised by its extremely cold temperatures, vast expanses of ice, and unique ecosystems adapted to the extreme conditions. Socially, the Arctic region is home to many indigenous communities, including the Inuit, Saami, and Yakuts, who have traditionally relied on hunting, fishing, and herding for their livelihoods. The region is vastly rich in natural resources such as oil, gas, minerals, and fish, making it an important economic and geopolitical area of interest for many countries. Climate change is having a significant impact on the Arctic, with rising temperatures causing melting ice and opening up new shipping routes and resource exploration opportunities, making this region a "security affair" and a new potential area for further geopolitical competition among the great powers.

The Arctic region is emerging as a significant alternative maritime route to Europe. Given China's declared long-term foreign policy goal of ensuring peace and stability in this area, it is reasonable to anticipate a more assertive Arctic approach. The increasing involvement of various actors in the Arctic has prompted scholarly discussions about the potential establishment of a new hegemon in this region. Scholars have questioned whether China, as a growing global leader, possesses the capacity to assume the role of "sovereign of the Arctic" (Stekić, 2021a) and how such a status could be legitimised on the international political stage. Answering this question is closely intertwined with discussions on the future dynamics of regional

security in the Arctic. Several authors (Røseth, 2014; Daniels & Mitchell, 2017) highlight the growing geopolitical significance of the Arctic and emphasise its inclusion as a crucial factor in the analysis of relations between major powers in the coming decade. They argue that the Arctic represents a distinct sphere where traditional Westphalian notions of hard national power are absent, creating a vacuum that may prompt dominant actors to assert their presence. These discussions underscore the evolving dynamics in the Arctic and the heightened importance attributed to the region in global affairs. As China's influence and presence continue to expand, its engagement in the Arctic is likely to become more prominent. The Arctic's potential as a strategic maritime route and its significance in shaping relations between major powers emphasise the need for comprehensive analysis and understanding of this region.

Shipping through the Arctic is becoming increasingly viable due to the shrinking sea ice caused by global warming. The Northern Sea Route (NSR), which runs along the Russian Arctic coast, is of particular interest to shippers due to its potential to significantly shorten transit times between Europe and Asia compared to traditional routes through the Suez Canal or around the Cape of Good Hope. In recent years, there has been a steady increase in shipping activity along the NSR, with the number of vessels using the route rising from 46 in 2012 to 510 in 2020. According to Humpert (2023), the volume of cargo passing through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) has displayed a notable upward trend. In 2023, the NSR witnessed a modest 2 million metric tonnes of cargo, but subsequent years have shown a consistent and substantial increase. Specifically, in 2017, the NSR accommodated 15 million metric tonnes of cargo, while between 2019 and 2023, the annual cargo volume has consistently hovered around 20 million metric tonnes (Humpert, 2023). Projections indicate a remarkable surge in cargo volume for the NSR in the coming years. It is anticipated that by 2024, the amount will soar to an astounding 80 million metric tonnes, and by 2030, it is predicted to reach 200 million metric tonnes (Humpert, 2023). Long-term forecasts even suggest that by 2035, the NSR could handle approximately 270 million metric tonnes of goods. To provide context, the Suez Canal, renowned as one of the world's busiest shipping routes, witnessed a throughput of 1.27 billion metric tonnes of cargo in 2022. These figures highlight the remarkable potential of the NSR, as just a few years ago, the notion that it could handle 20 percent of the cargo volume of the Suez Canal would have appeared implausible (Humpert, 2023).

However, despite the potential benefits of Arctic shipping, there are also significant challenges and risks. The harsh climate, unpredictable weather patterns, and lack of infrastructure and emergency response capabilities pose serious threats to safety and security. The potential for accidents or oil spills could have disastrous consequences for the fragile Arctic environment, and the limited capacity for search and rescue operations could leave crews stranded in remote and dangerous locations. In addition, the geopolitical implications of increased Arctic shipping are complex and potentially contentious. As more countries seek to exploit the economic and strategic opportunities presented by the Arctic, there is a risk of competition and conflict over territorial claims and resource extraction. Russia, in particular, has been investing heavily in developing its Arctic infrastructure and promoting the NSR as a key shipping route, raising concerns among some Western countries about its growing influence in the region.

As the Arctic becomes more accessible due to melting ice caused by climate change, countries around the world are eyeing its vast natural resources and potential shipping routes. Even though it is not geographically located within the Arctic Circle, China has increasingly shown interest in the region in recent years. Even being more than 1400 kilometres away from the Arctic, China declared itself a “near-Arctic State” in its only document regulating its stance towards the Arctic, China’s Arctic Policy (2018). This claim was supported by geographical reasons, stating that it is one of the continental states that are closest to the Arctic Circle (2018: II). With this document outlining its strategic objectives and vision for the region, China articulated its policy on the principle of “respect, cooperation, win-win, and sustainability” (China Arctic Policy, 2018). It aims to contribute to the sustainable development of the Arctic, uphold the legal order of the region, and safeguard its peace and stability. To achieve these objectives, China’s policy focuses on three main areas: environmental protection, economic cooperation, and scientific research. The paper claims China is committed to protecting the fragile Arctic environment and preserving its biodiversity. The country has stated that it will comply with international laws and regulations related to environmental protection in the Arctic and actively participate in regional cooperation on environmental issues. China has also pledged to reduce its carbon emissions and promote clean energy development to combat climate change, which is causing the Arctic ice to melt at an alarming rate. In addition, China has expressed its support for the establishment of a “Polar Silk Road” that would connect Asia, Europe, and the Arctic region through maritime trade routes. However, China has

also recognised the need to protect the environment and ensure the safety of shipping in the Arctic. To this end, China has stated that it will work with other countries to develop and implement safety standards for Arctic shipping and support the establishment of an international search and rescue centre in the region. Economic cooperation is the next segment of this policy, as the Arctic is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas, and minerals, and China is interested in exploring these resources to meet its growing energy needs. China has stated that it will conduct “lawful and reasonable” economic activities in the Arctic and participate in regional cooperation on resource exploration and exploitation. However, China has also recognised the need to ensure that such activities are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner and that the rights of indigenous peoples are respected. China has expressed its interest in participating in infrastructure development projects in the Arctic, such as the construction of ports, railways, and other transportation facilities. China has already invested in infrastructure projects in Iceland and is exploring opportunities for further investment in other Arctic countries. China has also expressed its willingness to participate in the development of the Arctic shipping industry, including the construction of icebreakers and other vessels needed for Arctic navigation.

China has stated that it will conduct scientific research in the Arctic to better understand the region's ecology, climate, and other natural phenomena. It has already established research stations in Iceland and Norway and plans to conduct further research in other Arctic countries. Furthermore, Beijing has also expressed its willingness to cooperate with other countries on scientific research in the region and to share data and information. China's policy for the Arctic has drawn both praise and criticism from the international community. Some have welcomed China's commitment to environmental protection and its willingness to participate in regional cooperation on economic and scientific issues. Others have expressed concerns about China's increasing presence in the region and its potential impact on the Arctic's delicate ecosystem. One issue that has raised particular concerns is China's interest in exploiting the Arctic's natural resources. The US has accused China of engaging in “resource nationalism” and seeking to dominate the region's natural resources at the expense of other countries. Others have questioned China's commitment to environmental protection and suggested that its economic activities in the region could cause irreparable harm to the Arctic ecosystem. In response

to these concerns, China has emphasised that its activities in the Arctic will be conducted in a responsible and sustainable manner.

China's exports to Western markets have historically used the most logical and nearest maritime route, which commences in Chinese ports, crosses the Strait of Malacca, follows the coasts of India, and proceeds towards the Persian Gulf or goes through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea, further advancing to European ports. However, this route presents significant security risks to merchant ships, with the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean route, and international waters being considered the most insecure areas for shipping (Starr, 2013). Ensuring maritime security has been a major concern for China, particularly with regard to the Strait of Malacca, a critical transit point for merchant ships. To describe China's security concerns in this region, then Chinese President Hu Jintao coined the term "Malacca Dilemma" in 2003, as non-state actors such as pirates and terrorists could attack merchant ships. Additionally, other states may intentionally disrupt shipping traffic, thereby impeding China's continuous transit (Hu, 2003). The changing natural conditions for navigation in the Arctic, coupled with increased activity in the region, prompted China to develop a more comprehensive policy for the Arctic. This was achieved through two significant policy documents: the Vision for Maritime Cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative (adopted in 2017) and China's Strategic Arctic Policy document. The latter is considered the most important document that guides China's current policy in the Arctic. Prior to these policy documents, China had already institutionalised its participation in regional issues by obtaining observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013. The Arctic Council is a significant multilateral forum that focuses on the formulation and implementation of sectoral policies in the Arctic.

One of the additional claims of the official Beijing about the reasons for increasing involvement in the Arctic is its historical dedication to the region. As stated in China's Arctic Policy White Paper in 1925, it became a participant in the Spitsbergen Treaty, signalling its early engagement in addressing Arctic matters. China's active involvement in scientific research in the Arctic is exemplified by its membership in the International Arctic Science Committee in 1996 (China Arctic Policy, 2018). This marked a significant step towards enhancing its participation in scientific endeavours in the region. Starting in 1999, China has organised multiple scientific expeditions in the Arctic, utilising its research vessel, the Xue Long (Snow Dragon), as a key platform, while in 2004, China constructed the Arctic

Yellow River Station in Ny Alesund, situated in the Spitsbergen Archipelago (China Arctic Policy, 2018). China's commitment to fostering international dialogue and collaboration on Arctic matters was evident when it became the first Asian country to host the Arctic Science Summit Week in 2005. This high-level conference on Arctic affairs served as a platform for knowledge exchange and cooperation.

At the contemporary institutional level, China has established the Polar Research Institute under the Ministry of Natural Resources, headquartered in Shanghai, which is dedicated to the study of the Arctic (as well as Antarctica) and the management of Chinese-produced icebreakers *Xuě Lóng* and *Xuě Lóng 2*. According to the Institute's data, the *Xuelong* is a Chinese icebreaker vessel that has a length of 167 metres, a gross tonnage of 15,352 tonnes, a moulded breadth of 22.6 metres, and a moulded depth of 13.5 metres (Polar Research Institute, 2023). The vessel's loaded draft is 9.0 metres, and its loaded displacement is 21,025 tonnes. With a maximum speed of 17.9 knots, an endurance of 20,000 nautical miles, and a capacity of 120 individuals, the R/V *Xuelong* has the ability to continuously break through ice that is 1.2 metres thick at a speed of 1.5 knots (Polar Research Institute, 2023). The *Xuelong 2*, on the other hand, has a length of 122.5 metres, a moulded breadth of 22.32 metres, and a moulded depth of 11.8 metres, with a designed draft of 7.85 metres and a designed displacement of approximately 13,990 tonnes. It has a maximum speed of 18 knots, an endurance of 20,000 nautical miles, and a capacity of 101 individuals. The vessel has the capability to continuously break through ice that is 1.5 metres thick at a speed of 2-3 knots (Polar Research Institute, 2023).

In terms of the proclaimed goals, as well as in the absence of an official act or strategy that would renew the goals of China's policy in the Arctic, it can be assumed that China's security policy in this part of the world is oriented towards a dual civil-military approach. Funaiolo and associates (2023) posit that China's contributions to polar science have not only granted it a platform and influence in polar affairs but have also created opportunities to advance its military and strategic objectives. It is worth noting that leveraging scientific activities for strategic purposes is not exclusive to China, as other major powers have similarly employed this approach. However, the intensifying geopolitical competition in the polar regions is amplifying the significance of China's polar endeavours (Funaiolo, 2023). To demonstrate the significance of the civilian domain that China relies upon, it has concluded numerous agreements in the energy domain, primarily with the Russian Federation. In addition to crude oil and LNG, the

Arctic region is currently recognised for its significant titanium reserves. A notable development in this regard occurred in February 2023 when Russian Titanium Resources (Rustitan) and China Communications and Construction Company entered into an agreement to jointly develop the Pizhemskeye mining project situated in the Komi Republic. As highlighted by Humpert (2023b), an essential element of this project is the transportation infrastructure, which facilitates the export of materials via the Urals and Siberia, ultimately channelling cargo through the NSR. Matthew Funaiolo and associates (2023) highlight that over the past seven years, a subsidiary of China Poly Group, a state-owned defence industry giant, has invested \$300 million in a coal terminal located in Murmansk and has committed to the development of a deepwater port in Arkhangelsk (Funaiolo et al., 2023). Furthermore, Chinese financiers have contributed up to 60 percent of the capital for Russia's Yamal liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, which concludes at the port city of Sabetta. The Yamal project is considered a pivotal investment for Russia in the Northern Sea Route, with expectations of producing approximately 926 billion cubic metres of LNG from the South Tambey field, earning it the status of a "crown jewel" (Funaiolo et al., 2023).

Rush Doshi and associates (2021) also recognise the significance that China places on scientific endeavours within the realm of Arctic research. In alignment with the aforementioned scholars, they validate the presence of a dualistic approach to the Arctic in recent years, specifically emphasising China's aspirations and the impression it engenders among other nations. These authors rely on the discourse delivered by Liu Cigui, the Director of the State Oceanic Administration of China, in 2014, in which he delineated China's Arctic strategy into three distinct periods. The first period, spanning from 1980 to 2000, constituted a preparatory phase and marked the initiation of activities at the North and South Poles, aligned with China's broader opening to the outside world. The second period, extending until 2015, was characterised as the "development stage," during which China bolstered its capabilities in the Arctic by constructing icebreakers, autonomous platforms, and Arctic-adapted aircraft, as well as engaging in increased political activities such as obtaining membership in the Arctic Council. However, the authors contend that the most pivotal phase within this timeline is the period from 2015 to 2030, denoting China's emergence as a "polar great power" (Doshi et al., 2021). According to them, this concept encompasses not only hard power elements but also transcends them, heralding a more substantial Chinese presence in the Arctic. This presence

is anticipated to encompass additional scientific expeditions, the establishment of more research stations, the deployment of new fixed-wing aircraft and icebreakers, enhanced autonomous capabilities, the formation of a “polar survey fleet”, augmented technological investments, the development of a Polar Silk Road, intensified efforts to safeguard China’s Arctic rights and interests, and increased military deployments within the region (Doshi et al., 2021: 6). Consequently, China adopts a dual perspective on the Arctic, one driven by its aspirations to become a polar great power and the other viewing the Arctic as “China’s new strategic frontiers” (Doshi et al., 2021: 9). To illustrate this, the authors highlight that China’s National Security Law from 2015 emphasised China’s interests in these “new frontiers”, outlining the domains encompassed by these interests, thereby establishing a legal framework to safeguard China’s rights in the Arctic (2021: 10).

The Arctic Circle is compounded by the territories of countries with various political regime types. While Canada, the US, and the Nordic states are all democracies, Russia, on the other hand, is rather anocratic, while aspiring China as a “near-Arctic” state is authoritarian (V-Dem, 2023). Such a mix of polities in this region implied that some studies attempted to implement the Democratic Peace Theory postulates to determine whether the theoretical premise of inter-democratic wars in the maritime context is confirmed within the wider historical context. Statistical research on whether democratic dyads are more likely to get involved in the armed conflict over maritime resources was conducted by Kelly Daniels and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell in 2017. Their study demonstrated that diplomatic disputes over maritime claims are more prevalent among democratic dyads compared to mixed or autocratic dyads (2017: 306).

Moreover, they discovered that economic capabilities play a significant role in shaping the likelihood of maritime conflicts (2017: 306), which might be extremely applicable to the Arctic context. Major powers and highly developed states exhibit a greater propensity to pursue maritime claims, while the presence of asymmetric economic ties tends to reduce the chances of conflict. Additionally, their theoretical framework suggests that states’ aggressive tendencies to compete for maritime resources are heightened in threatening security environments, particularly in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks (Daniels and Mitchell, 2017).

China’s strong desire to secure the northern route could potentially turn the Arctic into a new regional security complex. While the NSR is attractive

to China due to its shorter duration, the lack of infrastructure, harsh weather conditions, and limited search and rescue capabilities during emergencies pose significant challenges (Røseth, 2014). China's assertive stance towards the Arctic region aligns with all three proposed modifications of the theory of hegemonic stability: it favours regional domination over global dominance, is not achieved through military force, and is unlikely to cause a large-scale conflict with other great powers like Russia and the US. The nature and degree of China's assertiveness will determine the dynamics of regional security in the Arctic over the next decade (Stekić, 2021).

Counterintuitively, each of these assumptions is not in line with what China's officially proclaimed policy is. In terms of security affairs, China advocates for the "peaceful utilisation of the Arctic and upholds its commitment to preserving peace, stability, and the security of maritime trade, operations, and transportation in the region" (China Arctic Policy, 2018). While recognising the importance of "safeguarding lives and property" in the Arctic, it supports the "peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes among all relevant parties in accordance with established treaties such as the UN Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and general international law" (2018: 4). In line with these principles, China endorses endeavours aimed at protecting security and stability in the Arctic region. But rather than these diplomatic theses, from the standpoint of *realpolitik*, this region will play a securitized role not only in Beijing's steps but in Moscow and Washington as well. Making a "security plea" means a contribution towards the preparation of more assertive actions in the ice-melting Arctic with more and more capacity for cargo transit that would not have security-related obstacles such as the southern route in the Malacca Strait and throughout the Indian Ocean with piracy. According to Lajeunesse and Choi (2021), China's Arctic policy lacks a clear articulation of its security interests in the region, resulting in an inadequate definition. However, these authors suggest that China's future deployments in the Arctic may include the deployment of domestically produced submarines. They posit that China may seek a presence in the region to safeguard its commercial interests, deter potential adversaries, and assert its influence in regional governance.

Brady (2021) views this development as a natural progression for the PLAN as it aligns with the principles espoused by Mahan regarding the strategies of rising powers (2021: 7). China's approach to the Arctic region, as outlined in the China Arctic Policy of 2018, demonstrates its commitment to considering the interests of other nations and the global community at

large. Regardless of whether the Arctic evolves into a distinct regional security complex, China would recognise the significance of “safeguarding and advancing Arctic-related matters” (2018: 6), even if it is not geographically in the polar circle. In doing so, China aims to maintain an equilibrium between its immediate and long-term interests, thereby fostering the sustainable development of the Arctic (China Arctic Policy, 2018). It is interesting to note how the US perceives China as an “aggressive” entity, even in Arctic affairs. According to the US National Security Strategy, China has demonstrated “a growing interest in the Arctic region, characterised by increased investments, scientific endeavours, and the utilisation of dual-use research with potential intelligence or military applications” (NSS, 2022: 44). Recognising these developments, the United States aims to ensure its security in the region through various measures. To effectively address emerging challenges, it seeks to “enhance its maritime domain awareness, bolster communication capabilities, strengthen disaster response capabilities, and improve icebreaking capacity” (NSS, 2022: 44). These efforts are intended to prepare for the anticipated rise in international activities in the Arctic region. By actively improving its understanding of the maritime domain and promoting effective communication channels, the United States aims to maintain situational awareness and respond effectively to potential security threats. The Pentagon recognises China’s growing engagement in the Arctic, which has resulted in new avenues for collaboration between China and Russia (Pentagon, 2022). The Russian Foreign Minister has emphasised that China is Russia’s “priority partner” in the Arctic region. In April 2019, the establishment of the Sino-Russian Arctic Research Centre further solidified their cooperation. But the COVID-19 pandemic limited the extent of joint research expeditions and plans to study optimal routes of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and climate change.

China’s Space Policy

Space policy is a relatively underexplored aspect within the various spatial layers of security policy. Despite its relative neglect, space has historically been a significant arena for competing for technological supremacy, particularly during the Cold War. This domain offers valuable insights into a country’s technological development, making it an important dimension to observe. Over the past two decades, China has made substantial strides in its space programme, positioning itself as a strong competitor alongside the United States, the Russian Federation, and

nowadays India. The importance of space in the field of Security Studies has been recognised in numerous scientific publications. Lađevac and Stekić (2023) point out that space can serve as a potential locus of global security and a dimension for strategic competition among major powers in the international system. This acknowledgement emphasises the need to consider space as a significant component in the analysis of security policies.

Understanding a state's engagement in space policy provides valuable insights into its technological advancements, military capabilities, and potential areas of strategic advantage. It is within this context that China's progress in its space programme becomes noteworthy, as it has kept pace with established space powers such as the United States and Russia. The recognition of space as a potential *locus* of global security highlights its relevance in the broader dynamics of international relations. As major powers compete for dominance, space becomes an arena where strategic rivalries unfold, encompassing intelligence, communication, reconnaissance, and potentially offensive capabilities. Exploring this dimension enriches our understanding of the multifaceted nature of security policy and its implications within the international system.

The analysis proceeds as follows: After a brief introduction to China's space programme, including its history, objectives, and milestones, its current space policy and strategy will be examined. Special attention will be paid to inspect what are the main stakeholders of China's space industry, i.e., state-owned enterprises and private companies that provide exploration of space in the satellite tech sphere. Furthermore, the analysis will capture China's international cooperation in space policy and military use of space and its impact on international security and stability, especially China's development of anti-satellite weapons and other military capabilities in space and how they fit into China's overall military strategy.

Geopolitical competition in space has intensified in recent years as a result of China's ascent to space dominance. It competes with other significant spacefaring countries, especially the US and Russia, for technological leadership, successes in space exploration, and influence over global space governance. The goal of dominating space is consistent with China's larger aspiration to become a great power and influence world politics. Usually, some scholars argue that there are three motives laying behind China's Space Programme: military applications, soft power projection, and new norms and governance promotion (Handberg and Li, 2006). In order to enable capabilities like information gathering, satellite

navigation, missile defence, and anti-satellite weaponry, China's space programme aids its military modernization ambitions.

These developments spur strategic competition in space and generate concerns among other countries about potential dangers to their space assets. Furthermore, China exploits its space programme to improve its reputation and influence abroad by taking advantage of soft power. China promotes alliances and goodwill with other nations through international collaboration, such as the space cooperation framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, achieving its geopolitical goals. Last but not least, China actively engages in international forums for space administration and works to influence the creation of space norms and regulations. By advocating for multilateralism, equitable access to space resources, and the prevention of weaponization of outer space, China aims to position itself as a responsible space actor and gain influence in global space governance frameworks.

China's space programme serves as a showcase for its scientific strength and national prestige, spurring domestic innovation and economic growth. The larger objective of China is to move from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based economy, and advancements in space technology help with this. Additionally, the development of China's national security and defence capabilities is greatly aided by its space program. Satellites make it possible to perform crucial tasks including communication, reconnaissance, surveillance, and navigation, giving China better situational awareness and a more robust defensive posture. The integration of space assets into China's military operations is seen as crucial for safeguarding its interests and maintaining regional stability. At the doctrinary and strategic level, China also devotes a lot of attention to its outer space policy. The White Paper of Defence from 2019 confirms that:

“Outer space is a critical domain in international strategic competition. Outer space security provides strategic assurance for national and social development. In the interest of the peaceful use of outer space, China actively participates in international space cooperation, develops relevant technologies and capabilities, advances holistic management of space-based information resources, strengthens space situation awareness, safeguards space assets, and enhances the capacity to safely enter, exit, and openly use outer space” (White Paper on Defence, 2019).

From a geopolitical perspective, China's space programme allows it to assert its influence on the global stage and challenge the dominance of

traditional space powers such as the United States and Russia. By achieving significant milestones in space exploration, such as manned missions and lunar landings, China aims to demonstrate its technological prowess and project itself as a global leader in space exploration and research. Furthermore, China's space programme aligns with its broader foreign policy objectives, such as the BRI. This initiative seeks to enhance connectivity and infrastructure development across the Eurasian continent and beyond. Space technology and satellite systems play a vital role in supporting the BRI's objectives, enabling improved communication, navigation, and remote sensing capabilities for infrastructure projects and maritime security.

China's growing investment in infrastructure and space-related businesses indicates its long-term goal of becoming a significant space power. Its commitment of substantial financial resources and human capital to space research, development, and production reflects this aim. China wants to establish itself as a major player in the global space market by developing a robust space industry, not only in terms of satellite production but also in terms of offering launch services and other space-related technology.

In January 2022, China released its newest white paper on space activities, titled "China's Space Programme: A 2021 Perspective". It was the fifth such publication, following previous white papers in 2000, 2006, 2011, and 2016. The paper is a follow-up to 2016, when China launched its high-tech approach to space exploration and took some significant steps, as evidenced by the construction and operation of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System and a steady increase in space infrastructure (State Council, 2022).

The mission of China's space programme encompasses several key objectives. Firstly, it aims to explore outer space with the intention of advancing humanity's comprehension of the Earth and the cosmos (State Council, 2022). Through scientific research and exploration missions, China seeks to contribute to the global knowledge base and deepen our understanding of the universe. Additionally, the programme seeks to foster global consensus on the responsible utilisation of outer space for peaceful purposes while ensuring the security of space assets to benefit all of humanity. Moreover, the programme strives to address the demands of economic, scientific, and technological development within China. By investing in space-related industries and fostering innovation, China aims to stimulate socio-economic growth and enhance its technological prowess.

Furthermore, the programme acknowledges the significance of meeting national security requirements and promoting social progress (State

Council, 2022). Additionally, the mission of China's space programme encompasses endeavours to elevate the scientific and cultural levels of the Chinese population. By engaging in space exploration and related scientific activities, China aims to inspire and educate its citizens, thereby cultivating scientific literacy and fostering cultural enrichment. Additionally, the programme plays a role in safeguarding China's national rights and interests in the context of space activities while contributing to the overall strengthening of the country. The paper advocates "safeguarding outer space security and pursuing long-term sustainability in operations relating to outer space", but it also seeks to expand its space footprint generally in order to uphold China's national security (State Council, 2022).

China has additionally outlined ambitious plans to achieve crewed lunar landings before the year 2030, signifying its active engagement in what is increasingly perceived as a renewed space race (Source One, 2023). Concurrently, the United States has set its sights on returning astronauts to the lunar surface by the conclusion of 2025. During a press conference held in April 2023, Lin Xiqiang, the Deputy Director of the Chinese Manned Space Agency, officially affirmed China's objective, although no precise timeline was provided (Source One, 2023). In addition, Lin disclosed that China intends to augment its in-orbit crewed space station by incorporating an additional module. This announcement coincided with the imminent launch of the Shenzhou 16 spacecraft, which transports a new three-person crew to the Tiangong station, fostering a temporary overlap with the existing three astronauts already present aboard the station.

Navigating Africa and Oceania

China's regional policies in Africa and Oceania are still developing and deserve significant attention in analysing China's global agenda. Although Africa is a vast and diverse continent, China has a straightforward approach to cooperation with the countries there. This approach involves developing investment cycles, constructing major infrastructure projects, and gaining support from African countries for a new multilateralism in international relations, led by China. More recently, China has taken a slightly more assertive stance with the construction of its first overseas PLA military base in Djibouti in 2016, which became operational in 2017. Furthermore, the vast space of (especially eastern) Africa and Oceania is within the focus of the extraterritorial military presence of China. It primarily caters to countries that are not strongly aligned with the West and strategically

chooses the location of its overseas capabilities to avoid the “imperial overstretch” paradox.

a. China’s Security Agenda for Africa

China’s engagement with Africa dates back to the 1950s, with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Egypt. Since then, China has expanded its presence and investment on the continent. In 2000, China launched the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to promote economic and trade relations between the two regions. Since then, China’s investment in Africa has grown significantly, with Chinese companies investing heavily in infrastructure, natural resources, and energy projects. One significant aspect of China’s engagement with Africa is its security interests, as reflected in the establishment of its military base in Djibouti. The base is strategically located at the entrance of the Red Sea, making it a vital hub for maritime trade. In addition to supporting China’s anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the base provides China with a foothold in the region and allows it to project power and protect its interests. China’s security interests in Africa extend beyond the Djibouti base, with China also providing military aid and training to African countries. However, China’s military presence and activities in Africa have also raised concerns among some Western powers, who view it as a challenge to their interests and influence on the continent. In 2020, Jean-Pierre Cabesten contended that China’s first military base outside its own territory, established in Djibouti, has symbolised a “microcosm of China’s growing competition with the US” (Cabesten, 2020). Furthermore, in his paper on China’s security policy over (East) Africa, he made the assumption that this continent could play a decisive role in creating the new bipolarity of the international system (2020: 746).

b. Navigating Security Issues in Oceania

In April 2022, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that China had signed a security agreement (pact)²⁶ with the Solomon Islands,

²⁶ Security alliances and defence alliances are two distinct concepts within international relations. A security alliance encompasses various dimensions of security, including political, economic, and military aspects. It involves cooperative relationships among states to promote mutual security interests, address common threats, and maintain

an archipelago state in Oceania. A year earlier, the Solomon Islands had suspended all ties with Taiwan and focused its diplomatic relations exclusively on Beijing. The claim about the conclusion of the pact caused a flurry of concern in the West, which was reflected in media reports. Although the content of the agreement remained largely unavailable to the public, Western media have speculated that it is about China's desire to install military bases in this country, as well as that it represents only China's first step in the "subjugation" of this part of the world in security affairs.

Following the signing of the agreement with the Solomon Islands, Wang Yi, who was then China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that the agreement was not an indication that China would sign similar deals with other countries in Oceania, including Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, and American Samoa (Chinese MFA, 2022a). Additionally, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare clarified that the agreement did not involve the establishment of any Chinese military bases on the Solomon Islands' territory. The agreement represents a clear beginning of efforts to respond to China's threats posed by its containment by the West. In addition, the agreement intensified the security dynamics of this area, taking into account the geographical proximity of Australia, which took a negative position on the issue of greater security involvement by China in that area.

stability globally. In contrast, a defence alliance focuses specifically on military cooperation and collective defence. It entails a formal agreement among states to provide mutual assistance in the event of an armed attack on any member state. The primary objective of a security alliance is to enhance overall security and stability among member states. This involves cooperation in areas such as intelligence sharing, counterterrorism efforts, conflict resolution, and addressing non-military threats like cyber security, climate change, and economic stability. On the other hand, defence alliances primarily aim to ensure collective defence and deterrence. Member states commit to coming to each other's defence in case of an armed attack, forming a united front against external aggression. Regarding membership, security alliances can have a broad composition, extending beyond traditional military allies. They include states with diverse security concerns and interests, emphasising the promotion of overall security and stability in the international system. Examples of security alliances include the United Nations and regional security arrangements like the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In contrast, defence alliances tend to have a more restricted membership, consisting of states that share immediate military defence concerns and a commitment to collective defence. NATO and the Warsaw Pact, which existed during the Cold War, are examples of defence alliances.

Functional Layers of China's Security Policy

Indo-Pacific Locus Response

A decade ago, in his 2014 book *On China*, Henry Kissinger astutely recognised the emerging landscape of the Pacific region as a crucial factor in global peace. Specifically, when discussing Sino-American relations, he highlighted the potential for establishing a novel regional order in the Pacific, denoted as the "Pacific Community". Such an endeavour would necessitate the consideration of three interrelated dimensions: firstly, grappling with challenges stemming from the influence exerted by major political centres; secondly, seeking to address internal crises within a comprehensive framework that mitigates underlying causes of tension; and fundamentally, acknowledging the potential for a strategic confrontation between the two sides separated by the Pacific (Kissinger, 2020: 477).

Kissinger posits that China, driven by what he perceives as "unfounded fear", seeks to expel the United States from Asia in response to its apprehension regarding American containment strategies aimed at curbing China's rise within the international system (2020: 477). However, this pursuit of driving out the United States would, according to Kissinger, engender new challenges rather than foster cooperation within the regional framework of the Pacific Community, to which both parties belong. Furthermore, Kissinger expresses critique towards US efforts to implement containment, asserting that neighbouring countries with substantial resources, such as India, Japan, Vietnam, and particularly Russia, represent geopolitical realities that predate American policy, as China has coexisted with these nations throughout their respective histories (Kissinger, 2020: 479).

The latest tensions in the South China Sea, on the Korean Peninsula, the further deterioration of Beijing's relations with Taiwan, and many other security incidents have prompted certain authors to propose the concept of academically thematizing the Indo-Pacific region as a macroregion of significant importance for global security. The premise underlying this notion is that, at any given moment, there exists a distinct security regime that encompasses not only the prevailing discourse among academic authors but also the actual strategic commitments and orientations of the superpowers or major powers within the international relations framework, focused on a specific geographic area. This particular conceptual space, identified by Lađevac and Stekić (2023) as a locus of global security, emerges from a historical reflection, encompassing the

intricate interactions among key states in the system and events that give rise to critical focal points. These authors reflect on the philosophical considerations that Hegel set forth in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Hegel indirectly propagated the notion of a central hub of global security, employing the example of the United States during the 19th-century Civil War. Hegel held the belief that the US represented the “country of the future”, where its world-historical significance would become apparent in the forthcoming era. In a similar vein, Hegel designated the Mediterranean Sea as the focal point of the Old World, emphasising its indispensable role in shaping present-day world history (Hegel, 1951). He posited that without the Mediterranean, the course of world history would be drastically altered, much like how ancient Rome or Athens would be bereft of their forums, which served as meeting places for significant societal interactions. Hegel’s classification of the Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Germanic worlds, within the context of an overarching historical continuum, centres around the wars and social phenomena characterising each epoch’s development in world history (Hegel, 1951).

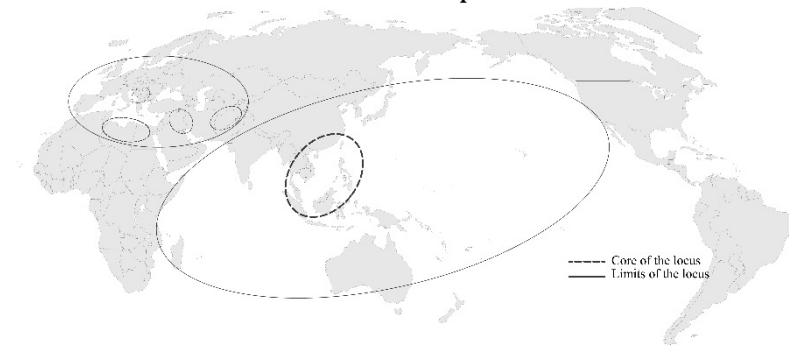
Lađevac and Stekić (2023) argue that the concept of locus in global security reflects the dominance of superpowers, requires a precise definition of global security, exhibits geographic exclusivity with some flexibility, can possess multidimensionality, and often encompasses broad regional security complexes.

Promotion of the Indo-Pacific has arguably started in 2018, when the US changed its military command name and mandate from US Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command.²⁷ During a change of command ceremony in Hawaii, US Secretary of Defence James Mattis announced a

²⁷ The US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) encompasses a larger expanse of the globe than any other geographic combatant command and shares borders with all five other geographic combatant commands. It operates with the support of various component and sub-unified commands, including US Forces Korea, US Forces Japan, US Special Operations Command Pacific, US Pacific Fleet, US Marine Forces Pacific, US Pacific Air Forces, and US Army Pacific (USINDOPACOM, 2022). According to the official statement issued by the US MoD, the primary objective of USINDOPACOM is “to safeguard the territory of the United States, its citizens, and its interests”. Working alongside allies and partners, USINDOPACOM is dedicated to enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region through the promotion of security cooperation, the encouragement of peaceful development, the timely response to contingencies, the deterrence of aggression, and, if required, the successful execution of military operations (USINDOPACOM, 2022).

significant move in response to heightened tensions with China regarding the militarization of the South China Sea. He stated that the US Pacific Command “is renamed the US Indo-Pacific Command, and reflects an expanded strategic focus, while the decision to rebrand the command was made to underscore the evolving security dynamics in the region and acknowledge the growing importance of the broader Indo-Pacific region in US military strategy” (CNN, 2018). By changing the name, the United States aimed to signal its commitment to addressing the security challenges posed by China’s assertive actions in the South China Sea and its expanding influence in the wider Indo-Pacific region. This decision served as a clear message to China that the United States is actively monitoring and responding to its military activities and seeks to maintain a favourable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Illustration 1: Macro-European and Indo-Pacific global security loci with focal points



Source: According to Lađevac and Stekić, 2023

The most recent US National Security Strategy (NSS), published in 2022, states that to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific, collective capacity building is paramount. It claims that the US will strengthen “its five regional treaty alliances and deepen partnerships with close allies while recognising the centrality of ASEAN” (NSS, 2022: 37). Collaborative efforts with South Asian regional partners address challenges such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and “coercive behaviour by the PR China while promoting prosperity and economic connectivity in the Indian Ocean region” (NSS, 2022: 37). The NSS recognises the Quad and AUKUS initiatives as key players in vital roles in addressing regional challenges, and the US reinforces

collective strength by fostering closer ties between like-minded Indo-Pacific and European countries.

Acknowledging India, Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand as major politico-military partners in the Indo-Pacific region, the 2022 NSS reaffirms that the United States has entered a crucial phase in its foreign policy. This new period calls for heightened engagement and commitment from the United States in the Indo-Pacific, surpassing the level of involvement seen since the Second World War (NSS, 2022: 38). It emphasises the exceptional significance of the Indo-Pacific region, not only for global affairs but also for the everyday lives of American citizens. This recognition underscores the strategic importance and priority given to the Indo-Pacific in shaping US foreign policy objectives and actions (NSS, 2022: 38).

Mediating Ukraine's Conflict

Russia's invasion of Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022, has led to abnormal disturbances in international relations that have consequences for their functioning. With Russia's attack on Ukraine, war is being waged in Europe for the first time since the 1990s, unless the events related to the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 are excluded. The "special military operation" against Ukraine, as Russia designates it, has lasted for more than a year and a half (as of July 2023) and represents a classic interstate armed conflict. Almost all European countries, with the exception of Belarus and Serbia, imposed sanctions on Russia because of this act, and classification into "blocs" that condemn and do not condemn aggression became inevitable from the beginning of the conflict itself.

Since its founding in 1949, China has had quite a poor experience in mediating armed conflicts. Rather, its foreign policy approach was based on neutrality and aligned with its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, among which the most important one was non-intervention in the internal affairs of another sovereign country. Despite this stance, China actively participated in the peace negotiations, colloquially known as the "Four-Party Talks", during 1997 and 1998. This mediation effort involved China, the United States, South Korea, and North Korea, with the aim of ending the long-standing conflict between the two Koreas, which had persisted since the Korean War. China also played host to the six-party talks, which included Japan and Russia in addition to the four aforementioned countries. These

negotiations occurred in multiple rounds, spanning from 2003 to 2007, with the objective of alleviating security concerns related to North Korea's nuclear arsenal.

Chinese involvement in mediating disputes has been primarily focused on its immediate region, with particular attention given to North Korea, which has been characterised by the United States as a “renegade” state. Scholars Peter J. Carnevale and Dong-Won Choi (2000) posit that cultural factors were the determining factor for China's entry into the mediation process regarding relations between North and South Korea. They argue that intrinsic cultural factors have played a crucial role in re-evaluating how mediation is organised in the context of China as both a neutral mediator and an interested party in the conflict (Carnevale & Choi, 2000, p. 108). According to these authors, Chinese mediation in the Four-Party Talks was predicated on the assumption that it shared cultural similarities with both parties involved in the dispute. The dispute between the Russian Federation and Ukraine practically enabled it to establish itself as one of the mediators. However, such mediation remained under the radar in the first months of the dispute. The very first official Beijing's reaction towards the crisis occurred a few weeks after the beginning of the invasion, when then Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed that China has not condemned the Russian invasion as its “position is objective and fair” and lays “on the right side of history” (Wang, 2022). Wang announced this statement after a video call between Xi Jinping and Joseph Biden on the occasion of the resolution of the newly emerging war. Wang pointed out that the solution is to “reject the Cold War mentality, refrain from bloc confrontation, and truly build a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture for the region so that long-term stability and security on the European continent can be achieved”, and that China is ready to become a mediator and “guarantor of preserving world security” (Wang, 2022).

Regarding the ongoing conflict, it seems that China has been reluctant for a long time to present its own stance towards it. Such a breakthrough coincided exactly with the first anniversary of the conflict, when Wang Yi, as the new Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission²⁸,

²⁸ The Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission is one of the key bodies of the Communist Party of China that directs state decisions in the sphere of foreign and security policy. Wang Yi became its head on January 1, 2023, and Qin Gang succeeded him as the Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, Wang Yi remained one of China's top diplomats even after his term as head of the ministry ended.

presented the Chinese twelve-point plan for resolving the conflict in Ukraine at the annual Munich Security Conference.

The plan is organised into twelve points that indicate China's efforts to de-escalate this conflict into a peaceful solution. It could be said that the twelve points, although not in order, are grouped thematically into several smaller units. The first part of the agreement refers to the diplomatic level of negotiations and to somewhat more general principles by which China is guided in its foreign policy. One of them is respect for the sovereignty of all states in accordance with the United Nations Charter. In this domain, China does not differentiate between weak, strong, rich, or poor countries. In connection with this point, it is interesting that China did not determine itself either according to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 or according to the referendums in the eastern regions of Ukraine, which became federal units of the Russian Federation during the initial phase of the 2022 invasion.

Leaving the Cold War mentality is the next point in the framework of the proposed plan. According to what the plan envisages, all parties should refrain from prioritising their own security over the security of others, to avoid engaging in confrontations between blocs, and to collaborate towards achieving peace and stability across the Eurasian Continent (Wang, 2023). Such a stance is predominantly directed towards the presentation of China's position in terms of containment, which is voided against it by the West, primarily the US. The strategic part of this Plan ends with an extremely important provision that refers to the promotion of post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine. For the first time, China may point out that it could represent a credible actor in the post-conflict reconstruction of war-torn areas, in which it once again appeals to the international community and emphasises its own readiness to participate in this effort itself after the armed conflict (Wang, 2023).

The next segment of the Plan refers to more specific activities, which include a call to both sides to stop hostilities, continue peace talks, and resolve the humanitarian crisis. China calls on the international community, and above all the United Nations, to take decisive measures and to undertake all activities related to negotiations under their leadership (Wang, 2023).

The third thematic segment of the Plan is the most concrete in relation to the current conflicts and proposes measures to resolve security tensions on the ground. First of all, the focus is on the protection of civilians and prisoners of war, in which China especially emphasises support for the

exchange of prisoners of war between Russia and Ukraine (Wang, 2023). In addition, China calls on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in all efforts to preserve the safety of nuclear power plants located in the area affected by the armed conflict and emphasises the importance of respecting the Convention on Nuclear Safety. In this regard, one of the points states China's expectations for a complete ban on the use of nuclear weapons and nuclear wars, and China also expects a complete ban and non-use of biological weapons. In this way, "reduction of strategic risks" is carried out under any circumstances.

The final component of China's strategy for resolving the conflict in Ukraine posits two significant assumptions with respect to the foreign policy conduct of other prominent international actors amid armed confrontations. The Plan unequivocally denounces the adoption of unilateral sanctions as an instrument of global policy and underscores that such actions merely engender further predicaments. China deems legitimate only those restrictive measures authorised by the United Nations Security Council, and any imposition of sanctions outside of this purview would amount to an exercise of "long-arm jurisdiction" over other nations (Wang, 2023).

The aforementioned stance may be construed as a narrative propagated by China with the aim of presenting potential sanctions, consequent to a potential exacerbation of tensions with Taiwan, as illegitimate and hostile acts. Moreover, the proposed Plan espouses the preservation of supply chain stability on a global scale, particularly in relation to China and European seaports. It is noteworthy that the scope of this initiative extends beyond mere transit routes to encompass the perpetuation of global supply pertaining to vital sectors such as energy, food, and the financial system (Wang, 2023).

As previously highlighted, the aforementioned Plan is ostensibly directed towards the Taiwan issue. It serves as a quite unique declaration issued by China of the modalities and principles that ought to be adopted, in the official opinion of Beijing, in response to armed conflicts on the international stage. The US Secretary of State responded to this proposal by stating that China is attempting to adopt a dual approach, whereby it publicly presents itself as impartial and advocates for peace while simultaneously endorsing Russia's deceptive portrayal of the conflict. Consequently, the United States rejected the plan and, as anticipated, discredited China's credibility as a mediator.

What can certainly be criticised about the Plan is the absence of more concrete ways to approach the resolution of disputes. It is likely that China anticipated that the Plan would be initially rejected by the United States and other Western nations; thus, any additional elaboration on the concrete security confidence measures would serve as an invitation to potential disputes and challenges to China's vision for a ceasefire. Despite the initial contestation of China's mediation intentions, a significant shift in paradigm occurred in the following weeks. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Beijing engaged in negotiations and bilateral meetings with various representatives from Russia, the European Union, France's President Emmanuel Macron, and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. Consequently, the outcomes of these meetings will be examined, and China's approach as a new actor in global mediation will be analysed.

After being confirmed for his third consecutive term as Chinese President by the People's National Congress in March 2023, Xi Jinping chose to pay a visit to the Russian Federation as his first foreign destination. During his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Xi described such a choice as a "logical sequence of history" given the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership and invited Putin to visit China. While there were speculations that Xi could also hold a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky via video call immediately after the meeting, no such event was made public. The implications of this meeting are numerous and will be studied in the future.

The first reactions to the Plan were efforts to challenge China's legitimacy as a neutral mediator; but after a while, it seemed that the Europeans had recognised the possibility of China actually being a mediator and that it was the only country that could convince Russia, if not to suspend military activities, then at least to direct some decisions that would be the preferences of the European Union.

This opened a new question: why would China potentially be the only credible partner that might challenge or even change the course of Russia's activities in Ukraine? First, this state has not waged any war in its near history. Second, Russia acknowledges that China shares similar values and ideologies that are different from those of the US. The two countries have signed a comprehensive partnership with each other. Lastly, the EU Member States, at least the most notable ones, started to desperately believe that only through China might their actions against Russia have an influence. It turned out that severe packages of economic sanctions have not worked well.

During the initial seventy years of its establishment, China exhibited a limited influence in mitigating conflicts among third-party nations. However, in recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, China has assumed a series of notable mediating positions. Contemporary occurrences in the international system now demonstrate that China has cemented its role as a credible mediator, which has been confirmed once again in the case of the relaxation of bilateral relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was discussed in more detail in the part of the chapter on Chinese security policy for the Persian Gulf.

***Filling in the Afghan Security Vacuum:
Odd Chances, Low Deliverable***

The US military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked a significant turning point in the country's turbulent history. After nearly two decades of involvement, the United States decided to end its military presence, aiming to shift the responsibility of security to Afghan forces. However, concerns arise regarding the potential security vacuum that could emerge in the wake of the withdrawal. China, as a regional power, has a vested interest in the stability of Afghanistan and has been positioning itself to play a more significant role in the country.

This part of the chapter examines the implications of the US military withdrawal and China's evolving role in the Afghan security vacuum. China and Afghanistan have enjoyed a long-standing historical and diplomatic relationship since their establishment of diplomatic ties in 1955. Notably, the first visit by a Chinese official to Kabul took place in 1957, when Zhou Enlai visited the country. Over the years, the two nations solidified their bond through numerous key agreements, including the Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression in 1960 and the Border Treaty signed in 1963 (MFA PRC, 2023q). The diplomatic engagement continued in 1965 when Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Chen Yi visited Afghanistan, resulting in the signing of significant agreements such as the Sino-Arab Boundary Protocol, the Sino-Arab Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, and the Sino-Arab Cultural Cooperation Agreement (MFA PRC, 2023q).

On December 27, 1979, the Soviet Union launched an invasion of Afghanistan, which was strongly condemned by China in a government statement issued on December 30 (MFA PRC, 2023q). China did not recognise the Karmel regime that was installed by the Soviet Union.

Following the collapse of the Najibullah regime in April 1992, Afghanistan experienced a period of political turmoil as various guerrilla factions vied for control, leading to an intensification of the civil war. Due to security concerns, China withdrew its embassy staff from Afghanistan in February 1993, resulting in the interruption of normal exchanges between the two countries until the Western-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (MFA PRC, 2023q). In January 2002, President Karzai of the Afghan interim government made an official visit to China. During this visit, President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji held meetings with President Karzai, leading to the signing of an exchange of letters. China provided emergency material aid worth 30 million yuan and 1 million US dollars in cash to Afghanistan. President Jiang announced China's commitment to providing 150 million US dollars in aid for Afghanistan's reconstruction over the period 2002-2007.

The aid materials amounting to 30 million RMB were delivered to the Afghan side by the end of March 2002 (MFA PRC, 2023q). During the presidency of Hu Jintao, China actively engaged in several conferences focusing on the post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan. These conferences included events in 2004, 2006 in London, 2007 in Rome, and 2008 in Paris. In June 2012, President Karzai visited China and participated in the Beijing Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, marking an important milestone in bilateral relations. During this summit, China and Arab states issued a "Joint Declaration" and expressed their commitment to establishing a strategic cooperative partnership (MFA PRC, 2023q).

The US military withdrawal from Afghanistan was the culmination of a process that began in 2020 under the Trump administration's Doha Agreement. The agreement²⁹ aimed to end the long-running conflict by initiating a phased withdrawal of American troops and facilitating peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. It was signed on February 29, 2020, between the US and the Taliban regime and outlined a series of commitments. As per the agreement, the US pledged to reduce its military presence in Afghanistan to 8,600 troops within 135 days of the joint declaration's announcement and the US-Taliban Agreement. Additionally, the United States agreed to collaborate with its allies and the Coalition to proportionally decrease the number of Coalition forces in Afghanistan over a

²⁹ The document's full title was "Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan".

corresponding period, contingent upon the Taliban fulfilling its commitments as outlined in the US-Taliban Agreement (Doha Agreement, 2020).

The Biden administration continued this process, and by September 2021, the US had pulled out most of its troops, leaving a residual force to protect the US embassy and the international airport. The decision to withdraw has been driven by various factors, including war fatigue, the belief that the Afghan government should take responsibility for its own security, and a desire to reallocate resources to other pressing global challenges. However, concerns persist regarding the readiness of Afghan forces to effectively counter the Taliban's insurgency and the potential for a power vacuum that could undermine the progress made over the past two decades.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has had a significant impact on the shifting security dynamics in the broader Middle East region. Scholars argue that this can be attributed to the strategic decision of the United States to prioritise its security and political resources in the Indo-Pacific region. This strategic realignment of global security priorities has led to the relocation of US strategic capabilities and efforts, including Ukraine, from Europe and the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific region (Stekić, 2023). The consequences of this shift have brought about notable changes in the security landscape and geopolitical calculations in the Middle East.

The academic literature during 2021 and 2022 sheds light on the dynamic of Chinese activities within Afghanistan through a triad that also includes Pakistan in the realm of security policy (Ali, 2022; Tahir & N. Hussain, 2022; Wang, 2022). This triad of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan relations has garnered significant interest and attention within scholarly discussions. Ghulam Ali (2022) asserts that although China and Pakistan were not direct signatories to the peace agreement, they played a crucial role in its finalization. Their involvement was instrumental, particularly at this stage, as the peace deal may not have materialised without their contributions. Through diplomatic efforts, both China and Pakistan addressed significant challenges in the peace process (Ali, 2022). Pakistan, leveraging its influence, successfully brought the Taliban to the negotiation table, while China played a pivotal role in resolving deadlocks between Islamabad-Kabul and Kabul-Taliban relationships. Evidently, Beijing and Islamabad collaborated on this matter with the aim of safeguarding and advancing their respective interests (Ali, 2022: 2). China, recognising the implications of this withdrawal, has been positioning itself to play a more significant role in Afghanistan. At the beginning, it had an odd potential, as

many sides expected China to deliver an internal security vacuum in Afghanistan and to become a regional leader in security affairs in the wider Middle East. But after almost three years since the Doha Agreement was signed, it seems that China has failed to promote itself as a relevant external actor in Afghanistan. The following text will offer some possible explanations for such an outcome.

First, as a regional power, China's interests in Afghanistan extend beyond security to encompass economic opportunities and geopolitical influence. The evolving dynamics in Afghanistan will likely shape the regional balance of power and have far-reaching consequences for both Afghanistan and the broader international community. China seeks stability in its western border region to prevent the spillover of terrorism and extremism into its own territory. Furthermore, Afghanistan's vast mineral resources, estimated to be worth trillions of dollars, present significant economic opportunities for China. Beijing has already made substantial investments in Afghan infrastructure projects and seeks to further expand its economic footprint. To enhance its engagement in Afghanistan, China has initiated diplomatic efforts, hosting intra-Afghan peace talks and supporting dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan government. It has also pledged to provide economic aid and assist in Afghan reconstruction. China's growing influence in Afghanistan can be seen as part of its broader geopolitical ambitions, seeking to establish itself as a major player in the region while countering perceived US dominance.

Second, even aware of the lack of a US presence and solid relations with the Taliban regime, China was reluctant to undertake more proactive actions inside Afghanistan. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the US withdrawal, China has sent a substantial amount of aid to Kabul. In response to the recent unveiling of the Taliban's new government, China has declared its provision of emergency aid amounting to a minimum of \$31 million to Afghanistan. This assistance encompassed crucial supplies, including COVID-19 vaccines (Al Jazeera, 2021k). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang emphasised the critical juncture at which Afghanistan finds itself, confronting not only the challenges of post-conflict recovery but also enduring humanitarian crises such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These circumstances highlight the pressing need for sustained support and aid to address the multifaceted predicaments faced by Afghanistan (Xinhua, as cited in Al Jazeera, 2021k).

Third, the BRI component and economic interests of China, especially through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have vastly defined China's position towards the Afghan vacuum. Some scholars contend that the post-American Afghanistan situation holds significant academic interest due to the potential ramifications of regional instability on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Chinese interests. Consequently, China has exhibited a heightened level of concern and seriousness in addressing the intricate dynamics of regional security to ensure the protection of key corridors, notably the CPEC (Tahir & Hussain, 2022).

In January 2021, the Chinese embassy in Afghanistan released a significant document outlining the state of Sino-Afghan relations. This document serves, to date, as a crucial and comprehensive post-pandemic policy framework representing China's current stance towards Afghanistan. Within the paper, both countries are acknowledged as having endured significant hardships due to the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and bullying (PRC Embassy in Kabul, 2021). In July 2021, a phone conversation took place between President Xi Jinping and President Ghani, signalling an important interaction between China and Afghanistan. During this period, Baradar, who was leading the political committee of the Afghan Taliban, visited China with a delegation, where State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a meeting with him. Subsequently, in October, State Councillor Wang Yi engaged in talks with Baradar, the acting deputy prime minister of the Afghan interim government, and Mottaki, the acting foreign minister, in Doha, Qatar. In March 2022, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi conducted a visit to Afghanistan, engaging in meetings and discussions with Acting Deputy Prime Minister Baradar and Acting Foreign Minister Mottaki of the Afghan Interim Government.

Furthermore, on March 31, Mottaki, the acting foreign minister of Afghanistan, was invited to China to participate in the "Afghanistan Neighbouring Countries + Afghanistan" Foreign Ministers' Dialogue. On June 27, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a telephone conversation with Mottaki, the Acting Foreign Minister of the Afghan Interim Government. Later, on July 28, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Mottaki on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tashkent. Finally, on January 21, 2023, Foreign Minister Qin Gang engaged in a telephone conversation with Mottaki, the Acting Foreign Minister of the Afghan Interim Government, further highlighting the diplomatic interactions between China and Afghanistan (MFA PRC, 2023q).

On April 14, 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) released its latest policy regarding the Afghanistan issue, outlining its stance in eleven points. The policy emphasises China's adherence to the principles of "three respects" and "three nevers". Specifically, China upholds the principles of respecting Afghanistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, as well as the independent choices made by the Afghan people and the religious beliefs and ethnic customs of Afghanistan. Furthermore, China asserts that it never interferes in Afghanistan's internal affairs, never pursues self-interest in Afghanistan, and never seeks to establish a so-called sphere of influence (MFA PRC, 2023x). Despite the Taliban's governance in Afghanistan, China expresses its support for moderate and stable governance in the country. It also welcomes Afghanistan's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to promote its transformation from a "land-locked" to a "land-linked" country. Moreover, China endorses the concept of "peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan" (PRC MFA, 2023x). China acknowledges the continued threat posed by the "three forces" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism entrenched in Afghanistan, which constitute significant security risks to both the region and the world. In this regard, China calls upon the international community to firmly support Afghanistan in combating these "three evil forces." China further urges support for Afghanistan in implementing active measures to disrupt terrorist financing channels, combat terrorist recruitment, prevent cross-border movement, and counter the dissemination of violent terrorist audio and video materials (MFA PRC, 2023x).

At the international level, China's security policy towards Afghanistan is framed within the context of highlighting the perceived ineffectiveness of the United States' two-decade-long post-conflict efforts in the region. Beijing asserts that the United States, as the primary initiator of the Afghan issue, has not only seized Afghan overseas assets but also imposed unilateral sanctions on Afghanistan. These actions are perceived by the Chinese MFA as the most significant external factors impeding substantial improvements in the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. It therefore urged the United States to "draw lessons" from the evolving situation in Afghanistan, acknowledge the severe humanitarian, economic, and security risks and challenges facing the country, promptly lift sanctions, return Afghanistan's overseas assets, fulfil its promised humanitarian assistance, and ensure that it is directed towards addressing the urgent needs of the Afghan people's livelihood (MFA PRC, 2023x). Additionally, China opposes the "intervention and infiltration of external forces in Afghanistan" (MFA PRC, 2023x).

Countries in the region, including China, share the general belief that the military intervention and the attempted imposition of “democratic transformation” by foreign forces in Afghanistan over the past two decades have resulted in significant losses and suffering for the Afghan population (MFA PRC, 2023x). China advocates for multilateral forums to play a crucial role in promoting the political settlement of the Afghan issue. These include initiatives such as the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan’s Neighbouring States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-Afghanistan Liaison Group, the “Moscow Model” consultations, the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Tripartite Foreign Ministers’ Dialogue, the China-Afghanistan-Russia-Pakistan-Iran Foreign Ministers Informal Meeting on Afghanistan, the “China-US-Russia Plus” consultations, and engagement through the United Nations. China believes that these platforms are vital for regional coordination and fostering a political resolution to the Afghan conflict (MFA PRC, 2023x).

Instead of focusing solely on internal strategies, China has adopted a distinct approach to contributing to Afghan security by establishing formalised cooperation with Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries. In April 2023, a specific multilateral forum known as the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Neighbouring Afghanistan was convened in Samarkand, resulting in the issuance of the Samarkand Declaration. Alongside China, foreign affairs ministers from Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan actively participated in this forum. Notably, the Declaration identified numerous terrorist organisations operating in Afghanistan, including the “Uyghur Movement”, which the Chinese government perceives as a significant threat not only to its national security but also to the regional and global security landscape (Samarkand Declaration, 2023). In addition, China expressed its endorsement of Uzbekistan’s proposal to establish an international negotiating group for Afghanistan under the auspices of the United Nations. Furthermore, China welcomed Tajikistan’s initiative to create a “Security Belt around Afghanistan” and eagerly anticipated the submission of comprehensive concept papers by the participating parties involved in these initiatives (Samarkand Declaration, 2023). Lastly, even though the deliverables have been weak so far, it would be quite early to assess the strategic orientation of China in the post-pandemic environment in Afghanistan.

China's Soft Power Projections

Soft power is a concept that has gained significant attention in the field of international relations, particularly in the study of diplomacy and foreign policy. Coined by Joseph Nye (2012), soft power refers to a nation's ability to influence others and shape global outcomes through attraction, persuasion, and cultural appeal rather than through coercion or force. It encompasses a range of non-coercive tools and strategies, including cultural, ideological, and diplomatic means, that enable a country to achieve its objectives and enhance its reputation on the global stage. Soft power operates on the idea that attractiveness and legitimacy can be powerful sources of influence in international affairs.

Unlike hard power, which relies on military might or economic strength, soft power focuses on the power of ideas, values, and culture. It involves projecting a positive image and fostering goodwill through means such as cultural exchange programmes, educational initiatives, media influence, and diplomatic engagement. It is important to note that soft power is not a substitute for hard power but rather complements it. A balanced and comprehensive foreign policy approach combines both hard and soft power strategies to achieve national objectives effectively. While soft power can shape perceptions, build trust, and create favourable conditions for cooperation, hard power remains crucial for security, defence, and the protection of national interests. According to Joseph Nye (2012), soft power is not solely generated by culture, values, and policies; economic resources can also play a significant role in producing both soft and hard power behaviour. Economic resources possess the capacity to attract and coerce, making it challenging to distinguish between the elements of a given economic relationship that contribute to either hard or soft power dynamics. European leaders often cite the aspirations of other countries to join the European Union as an indication of Europe's soft power influence in the world.

Henry Kissinger has also acknowledged the significance of China's soft power projection since mediaeval times. He highlights the extraordinary naval mission led by Zheng He in the 15th century, which involved voyages to the Horn of Africa, India, and Indochina, well before the development of powerful European fleets (Kissinger, 2020). Kissinger asserts that this naval undertaking was unparalleled in history. It is noteworthy that Zheng He, an experienced Chinese admiral, did not aim to conquer foreign territories or establish Chinese colonies. Instead, he extended invitations to local rulers

to visit China and pay ceremonial homage to the Chinese emperor through a process known as “methanizing”.

Kissinger argues that this approach created opportunities for Chinese traders to establish trade routes and laid the foundation for Chinese soft power (Kissinger, 2020: 19). Before the mediaeval period, Henry Kissinger offered another noteworthy instance of the historical employment of soft power in China. He contends that the Chinese have historically relied less on hard power tactics, instead employing a distinct form of Chinese pragmatism that characterised the approach of Chinese emperors and armies towards their adversaries. Kissinger posits that when confronted with defeat by enemy feudal lords on the battlefield, the Chinese elite would extend “favours” to the vanquishers, demonstrating the vastness and administrative governability of China using “Chinese methods”, the Chinese language, and the existing administration (Kissinger, 2014: 31). Consequently, according to Kissinger, the conquerors would assimilate into the Chinese order, incorporating their conquered territories into China itself and aligning their interests with those of China. This unconventional perspective fundamentally altered the nature of the conquest campaigns. Kissinger further highlights that this process facilitated the expansion of Chinese sovereignty over regions such as Mongolia and Manchuria (2014: 31).

Contemporary China has been actively cultivating its soft power in recent years, employing various strategies and initiatives to enhance its global influence. Several key factors contribute to China’s soft power projection on the international stage, including historic events like the 2008 Olympics, the establishment of Confucius Institutes and Cultural Centres, and other variables. The 2008 Beijing Olympics marked a significant milestone for China’s soft power efforts. The Games presented an opportunity for China to showcase its rich cultural heritage, economic progress, and modernization to the world. The impressive opening ceremony, featuring grand performances and displays of Chinese history and culture, left a lasting impression on global audiences. The event demonstrated China’s capacity for hosting large-scale international events and its ambition to be recognised as a global leader. The establishment of Confucius Institutes and Cultural Centres has been another crucial component of China’s soft power strategy. These institutions promote the teaching of Chinese language and culture worldwide, fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange. By providing resources and support for language learning, cultural activities, and academic cooperation, Confucius Institutes facilitate people-to-people connections and promote a

positive image of China. However, they have also faced criticism for their potential influence on academic freedom and for promoting a specific political agenda. Through the Confucius Institutes and other educational and scientific institutions, China sends its employed professors, promotes the study of Chinese language and culture, advocates the use of Chinese medicine, and has recently increasingly financed the education of foreign students in China. Additionally, economic factors play a significant role in China's soft power projection. China's rapid economic growth has allowed it to become a major player in global trade and investment. As the world's second-largest economy, China offers economic opportunities and partnerships to other nations, attracting interest and fostering positive relationships. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for instance, presents a vision of connectivity and economic cooperation, facilitating infrastructure development and trade linkages across Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond. Through economic engagement, China seeks to gain influence and shape the global economic order. According to Fred Bergsten and associates, a significant dimension of contemporary China's soft power strategy is centred on debunking the narrative portraying China as a potential threat (Bergsten et al., 2008). They contend that it is imperative for China to identify a distinct aspect of its national identity that is exclusive to China and garners global credibility. Consequently, the authors assert that the soft underpinnings of Chinese security policy, including the recurring themes of peaceful development, the aspiration for a harmonious world, and the cultivation of strategic partnerships, are considered insufficient and not the optimal strategic path that Beijing should pursue (Bergsten et al., 2008). Contrarily, these authors posit that traditional Chinese cultural values deeply rooted in philosophical traditions like Confucianism represent "a more significant and universally applicable cultural heritage that China can promote in the forthcoming years" (Bergsten et al., 2008: 284).

China's cultural exports, such as films, music, and cuisine, also contribute to its soft power influence. Chinese movies like "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "Raise the Red Lantern" have achieved international acclaim, showcasing China's cinematic talent and cultural narratives. Popular Chinese TV dramas and music have gained a following in various regions, contributing to cultural exchanges and fostering an appreciation for Chinese creativity and entertainment. Moreover, China's technological advancements and innovation, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence and 5G technology, are increasingly shaping its soft power narrative. China's ability to offer advanced technologies and solutions to

global challenges positions it as a leader in the digital era. However, China's soft power projection is not without challenges and controversies. Issues related to human rights, censorship, and political control have led to criticism and concerns, particularly from Western democracies. These factors can hinder China's soft power efforts and impact its reputation on the global stage. Over the past two decades, China has effectively blended "idealistic rhetoric with constructive endeavours" (Bergsten et al., 2008) as a means to cultivate a favourable perception of itself among specific regions of the developing world, namely Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

Semiconductors Race

The last segment of the functional group of security policy layers is devoted to the analysis of two very important variables that mediate China's hesitancy in the contemporary international system: semiconductors' production/circulation and arms trade. What connects these two variables is the fact that each of them is still unknown for conducting an in-depth analysis, as both are quite newly involved in China's security policy analysis. Even though arms trade exists almost in parallel to mankind, inclusion of its analysis in China's case could be a novelty in reasoning Beijing's position towards these issues. McKinsey's evaluation done in 2022 indicated that due to the accelerated influence of digital technology on both individuals and businesses, semiconductor markets have experienced significant growth, with sales surging by over 20 percent, reaching approximately \$600 billion in 2021 (McKinsey, 2022). According to McKinsey's analysis, which is grounded in a range of macroeconomic assumptions, the industry's combined annual growth rate is projected to hover between 6 and 8 percent per annum until 2030, prompting the industry worth to \$1 trillion by the close of this decade, contingent upon average annual price increments of approximately 2 percent and a return to stable supply and demand conditions following the present period of volatility (McKinsey, 2022).

China's military arms trade has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, transforming the country into a significant player in the international arms market. It is driven by a combination of economic, political, and strategic factors. Economically, it seeks to boost its defence industry, generate revenue, and promote technological advancements. Politically, arms exports enable China to expand its influence, build alliances, and gain diplomatic leverage. Strategically, China aims to enhance its military capabilities, secure access to critical resources, and safeguard its

national interests. China's military arms trade has significant regional implications. It has emerged as a major arms supplier to regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. By providing advanced weaponry and military equipment, China aims to expand its influence, establish military partnerships, and secure access to strategic resources. However, its arms exports also raise concerns regarding regional stability, as they may contribute to arms races, proxy conflicts, and exacerbate existing tensions.

In scholarly discourse concerning the phenomenon commonly referred to as the "Digital Silk Road" or "Technological Silk Road", two central inquiries come to the fore: firstly, an exploration of the strategic intentions underpinning the initiatives pursued by the PR China in this domain, and secondly, an examination of the potential ramifications of these endeavours on the strategic objectives of Western powers (Stekić, 2020). The initial phase of this strategic endeavour encompasses a substantial influx of investments by Chinese corporations into the countries situated along the "Belt and Road" corridor. Subsequently, the second phase entails a competitive pursuit *vis-à-vis* Western nations, particularly in the realm of defining and promoting preferred technological standards. This competition is chiefly geared towards gaining ascendancy in the burgeoning landscape of next-generation information and communication technology. Within this overarching context, the deployment of 5G technology assumes a foundational role, serving as a cornerstone for the proliferation of various other innovations (Stekić, 2020). These innovations encompass advancements in data collection, analysis, and utilisation, encompassing a spectrum of technologies such as artificial intelligence tools, quantum computing, network infrastructure, financial technology, industrial automation, and other emergent technological domains. In a comprehensive exploration of the digital transformation of the Chinese economy, Yu Hong posits that the "Digital Silk Road" epitomises a showcase through which China underscores its technological advancements (Yu, 2017). These advancements span the domains of telecommunications, broadband connectivity, and various other facets of contemporary communication technologies. Hong contends that the communication infrastructure of the "Digital Silk Road" operates as a fulcrum situated at the intersection of two parallel economic trajectories: one being an export-oriented economy driven by transnational capital, and the other being an economy subject to state regulation within the broader system (Yu, 2017).

Some authors argue that the production of the most advanced AI systems heavily relies on semiconductor chips designed with specifications ranging from 7 nm to 5 nm, which are currently not being manufactured in the United States, posing a chance for China to overtake the throne in the tech race (Sujai and Wessner, 2022). Intel, for instance, produces field-programmable gate arrays used in AI systems based on a 10 nm design, which is one generation behind the cutting-edge 7 nm technology. Simultaneously, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. is constructing a fabrication facility in Arizona, slated to commence operations with 5 nm chips around 2024 (Sujai and Wessner, 2022). However, it is worth noting that the technology landscape is dynamic, and by that time, the forefront of chip technology is anticipated to have progressed to 3 nm chips, with all production still concentrated in Taiwan (Sujai and Wessner, 2022). Consequently, these authors argue that the United States presently relies on facilities located in Taiwan for the manufacturing of the most advanced semiconductors that empower critical algorithms used in defence systems and various other applications (Sujai and Wessner, 2022). In their commentary, Sujai and Wessner wrote that China has made more advancements than the US in this area. By drawing the conclusion that “the US faces a significant strategic vulnerability due to its global reliance on semiconductor production facilities in Taiwan for cutting-edge chips”, they assert that

“...at present, China is two or more generations behind the US semiconductor industry technologically and will find it virtually impossible to leapfrog the United States—unless it can acquire the foreign technology and know how to do so. This is an objective that China is actively pursuing through multiple channels with a vast deployment of resources” (Sujai and Wessner, 2022).

On October 7, 2022, the United States implemented targeted sanctions related to the export control of microchip components destined for China (Allen, 2023). Gregory Allen outlines four responses by China to these US measures, which include reducing China’s vulnerability to foreign economic pressure, deterring future economic pressures from the US and its allies, increasing international economic interdependence with China, and reaping the economic and security advantages of AI (Allen, 2023). Moreover, he posits that the Western perspective on China’s strategy encompasses several facets: evading the new controls and maintaining access to foreign technology; attempting to create divisions between the United States and its allies; obtaining foreign technology through industrial espionage and

talent recruitment; exerting pressure on Chinese companies to favour domestic products and eliminate American suppliers; and retaliating against the United States and its allied nations (Allen, 2023).

In December 2022, Reuters reported that Beijing was preparing a substantial support package totalling \$143 billion for its semiconductor industry (Reuters, 2022). This strategic move represents a significant endeavour to achieve self-sufficiency in chip manufacturing and to counteract US efforts aimed at impeding its technological progress. The agency noted that “Beijing’s plan encompasses the implementation of one of its most extensive fiscal incentive packages, distributed over a five-year period, while the core components of this package will consist primarily of subsidies and tax credits, strategically designed to reinforce domestic semiconductor production and research endeavours” (Reuters, 2022).³⁰

However, regardless of the trajectory of China’s technological advancements, it is widely acknowledged that, in order to sustain its position as a “techno-hegemon” (Stekić, 2022a), China will encounter several pivotal challenges in the forthcoming years. One challenge is intricately linked to the concept of the “digital” dimension of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, serving as a complement to the physical land and sea components. Another challenge that Chinese authorities will confront pertains to the preservation of technological autonomy, which serves as a manifestation of their technological supremacy. Specifically, the utilisation of China’s potential monopoly over global technology and its interactions with other entities within the international system, particularly buyer countries, in the event of attaining dominance in this sphere will be of paramount importance for analysing its future foreign policy conduct (Stekić, 2022a).

³⁰ In an article published on December 14, 2022, Reuters identified that both state-owned and private enterprises within the industry are poised to benefit. This includes prominent semiconductor equipment companies such as NAURA Technology Group, Advanced Micro-Fabrication Equipment Inc., China, and Kingsemi (Reuters, 2022).

Institutional layers of China's Security Policy

The Party

The Communist Party of China was founded in 1921 and is one of the world's most influential political entities. As the ruling party in the PRC, it holds a paramount position in shaping the nation's domestic and foreign policies, particularly in the realm of security. The CPC's organisational structure is characterised by a hierarchy of bodies, each with its own defined functions and roles. At the apex of the structure is the National Congress of the CPC, which convenes every five years and plays a pivotal role in policymaking. Below the National Congress is the Central Committee, which constitutes the highest decision-making body between congresses. The Politburo, within the Central Committee, consists of approximately 25 members and is responsible for formulating major policies. The Politburo Standing Committee, a subgroup of the Politburo, comprises the highest-ranking officials in the party, including the General Secretary and the President of China. These individuals wield considerable power and play a crucial role in setting the national agenda, including security policies. According to data provided in the portal Qiushi, as of December 31, 2022, the Communist Party of China boasted a total membership of 98.04 million, representing a net growth of 1.329 million members compared to the year-end figure in 2021, marking an increase of 1.4%. Furthermore, the Party currently oversees 5.06 million grassroots organisations, experiencing a net expansion of 129.000 organisations since the close of 2021, signifying a growth rate of 2.6%. Within this framework, these organisations encompass 289.000 grassroots party committees, 320.000 general branches, and 4.45 million branches (Qiushi, 2022). The Party's organisations have been instituted in 9.062 urban streets, 29.619 towns, 116.831 communities (neighbourhood committees), and 490.041 administrative villages throughout the nation, achieving a comprehensive coverage rate surpassing 99.9% (Qiushi, 2022).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the PRC was primarily focused on safeguarding its regional security. During this period, the Communist Party's attention was particularly directed towards managing post-war relations with Japan and establishing a foundation for future collaboration with the Soviet Union (Stekić, 2021). The gradual process of opening up to the world played a crucial role in shaping more coherent foreign policy positions for the Chinese Communist Party. This transformative journey was accompanied

by various concurrent developments, including the professionalization of the state apparatus and an increased administrative-executive role for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, China underwent a process of integration into global political and economic dynamics.

Examining the Communist Party of China and its influence on shaping the country's foreign policy presents a formidable research challenge. As pointed out by Stekić (2021), the complexities of this endeavour have been extensively discussed, dating back to as early as 1990, when scholars like Michael H. Hunt and Odd Arne Westad underscored the cognitive obstacles faced by academic researchers when delving into the role of the Communist Party in China's decision-making processes. These scholars advocate for the adoption of a multifaceted research approach, which entails the analysis of internal party documents, the exploration of memoirs authored by prominent leaders, and the examination of academic nonfiction works authored by individuals who have gained access to CPC archives or had the opportunity to conduct interviews with high-ranking party officials. This comprehensive strategy is deemed essential for gaining insights into the CPC's role in shaping foreign policy decisions.

The CPC formulates its policies at the National Congresses. For instance, Swaine asserts that the 19th Party Congress signalled a pivotal shift in China's foreign policy, notably highlighting a firm commitment to assume a more proactive and influential role on the global stage. This marks a departure from the previously prevalent strategy of "hide and bide" that had been in place since the onset of the reform era (Swaine, 2018). The 20th National Congress of the CPC in October 2022 not only affirmed Xi Jinping's third term as General Secretary but also solidified a cadre of loyal supporters, all within a backdrop of domestic socioeconomic challenges and an increasingly adversarial global environment (Zhao, 2023).

Addressing the 20th National Congress, Xi Jinping stated that the Party achieved a lot in the domain of foreign policy:

"We have pursued major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics on all fronts. We have promoted the development of a human community with a shared future and stood firm in protecting international fairness and justice. We have advocated and practiced true multilateralism. We have taken a clear-cut stance against hegemonism and power politics in all their forms, and we have never wavered in our opposition to unilateralism, protectionism, and bullying of any kind. We have improved China's overall diplomatic

agenda and worked actively to build a global network of partnerships and foster a new type of international relations. We have demonstrated China's sense of duty as a responsible major country, actively participating in the reform and development of the global governance system and engaging in all-around international cooperation in the fight against COVID-19. All this has seen us win widespread international recognition. China's international influence, appeal, and power to shape have risen markedly" (Xi, 2022).

In his address to the most recent Congress concerning the Party's role in the modernization of the defence system, Xi Jinping articulated a comprehensive strategy. This strategy encompasses the simultaneous execution of military operations, the enhancement of combat readiness, and the augmentation of military capabilities, driven by mechanisation, informatization, and smart technology applications across military theory, organisational structures, personnel, weaponry, and equipment. The overarching objective of the Party, according to Xi Jinping, is "to fortify China's military strength to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and developmental interests in the evolving global landscape" (Xi, 2022). Xi stressed the paramount importance of reinforcing Party leadership throughout the armed forces, emphasising unswerving obedience to the Party's directives. This entails refining the institutions and mechanisms related to the ultimate responsibility vested in the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Furthermore, military personnel will be educated in the Party's contemporary theories, cultivating a strong military culture while fostering a profound understanding of military history and inculcating a resolute fighting spirit. Additionally, the military's political work will be enhanced, aiming to improve behaviour, enforce discipline, and combat corruption. Intensified troop training and combat readiness will ensure the capability to prevail in diverse scenarios, with particular attention to comprehending the intricacies of informatized and intelligent warfare. The establishment of a robust system of strategic deterrence, characterised by the development of new-domain forces with advanced combat capabilities and the advancement of unmanned and intelligent combat capabilities, is envisaged. Finally, the improvement of the command system for joint operations, coupled with enhancements in reconnaissance, early warning, joint strikes, battlefield support, and integrated logistics support, is central to China's military modernization efforts (Xi, 2022). In his address, Xi Jinping delineated a multifaceted role for the Party in the new era, encompassing several key principles. Firstly, the Party is tasked with upholding and

improving the “One Country, Two Systems” policy in regions like Hong Kong and Macao while promoting national reunification, particularly in the context of Taiwan, through peaceful and diplomatic means (Xi, 2022). Secondly, the Party assumes a global responsibility, aiming to foster world peace, development, and the concept of a “human community with a shared future” by participating actively in international governance and cooperative efforts (Xi, 2022). Thirdly, the Party’s role involves rigorous self-governance and discipline to prevent corruption and misconduct, ensuring its responsiveness to the needs and trust of the Chinese people. Fourthly, the Party is committed to advancing its internal structure and functions to meet the evolving challenges of the modern era, encompassing ideological development, organisational efficiency, and fostering a strong Party spirit. Finally, the Party’s actions in the new era are underpinned by the guiding ideology of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”, and serve as the basis for its policies and governance, promoting unity and a common purpose within the Party and society at large. This comprehensive and dynamic approach reflects China’s aspiration to contribute positively to the global community while ensuring its continued development and stability.

Leadership holds significance across all political systems, yet its import is particularly pronounced in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. In democratic settings, political leaders contend with constraints imposed by electoral cycles, term limits, and public approval ratings. In contrast, within the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) single-party system, which underscores principles of discipline, hierarchy, and democratic centralism, leaders wield substantial decision-making authority with limited checks from bureaucratic institutions, opposition factions, or public sentiment. In the realm of national security and strategic policy, PRC leaders exercise paramount influence and control.

The State

This section of the chapter will explore how China’s foreign policy doctrines and activities related to the allocation and utilisation of resources for the coherence of its security policy are being facilitated at the level of the state. Specifics of the Chinese polity instruct that a differentiation between its national apparatus and the Party organs should be emphasised. The Chinese Constitution provides certain provisions for the creation of security policies, which is why the following text introduces its norms related to this matter. In addition, the text also examines the roles of the

highest authorities, as they play an indirect but significant role in the implementation of such policies.

The Constitution of the PR China was adopted in 1982 and has been amended several times to date. These amendments include the Amendment to the Constitution adopted at the First Session of the Seventh National People's Congress on April 12, 1988; the Amendment to the Constitution adopted at the First Session of the Eighth National People's Congress on March 29, 1993; the Amendment to the Constitution adopted at the Second Session of the Ninth National People's Congress on March 15, 1999; the Amendment to the Constitution adopted at the Second Session of the Tenth National People's Congress on March 14, 2004; and the Amendment to the Constitution adopted at the First Session of the Thirteenth National People's Congress on March 11, 2018. All of these amendments have addressed various issues related to the governance, political system, and structure of the Chinese state. For instance, the 1988 Amendment reaffirmed China's socialist system, while the 1993 Amendment added provisions related to the protection of private property rights. The 1999 Amendment included language that recognised the importance of "maintaining social stability" and "ensuring national security", while the 2004 Amendment added provisions regarding the protection of human rights and the promotion of social welfare. The most recent amendment in 2018 abolished the two-term limit for the presidency and vice presidency, allowing President Xi Jinping to potentially remain in power indefinitely. Additionally, it enshrined Xi Jinping's political philosophy, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", as the constitutional norm. Overall, these amendments reflect the evolving priorities and values of the Chinese Communist Party and its leadership. They have also been instrumental in shaping the legal and political landscape of modern China.

The Constitution consists of 4 chapters: general principles, fundamental rights and obligations of citizens, state institutions, and the last one—the national flag, national anthem, national emblem, and the capital (PRC Constitution, 2018). The third chapter is the most valuable for this analysis as it regulates national institutions, namely the National People's Congress, the jurisdiction of the President and the State Council, the Central Military Commission, and the local level of authorities across the country (PRC Constitution, 2018). The Constitution envisages China as a nation-state formed by the collective efforts of the Chinese people, encompassing a multitude of ethnic groups. To promote socialist ethnic relations based on equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony, the state strives to

continuously strengthen these principles. In the pursuit of preserving ethnic unity, the government condemns all forms of “ethnic chauvinism”, including major ethnic group chauvinism, primarily represented by Han chauvinism, and local ethnic chauvinism (PRC Constitution, 2018). China is defined as a socialist state “governed by the people’s democratic dictatorship” (2018: Art. 1), led by the CPC as a “defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics (2018: Art. 1).

Within Chapter 1, the Constitution regulates that the PRC armed forces “belong to the people” with missions to “strengthen national defence, resist aggression, defend the motherland, safeguard the people’s peaceful work, participate in national development, and work hard to serve the people” (2018: Art. 29). The highest legislative organ is the National People’s Congress and the NPC’s Standing Committee (2018: Art. 57), both of which have a five-year term while holding regular sessions once a year (2018: Art. 60). In the area of relations to other organs, it elects the president and vice president of China, the chairperson of the Central Military Commission, and nominates other members of the Commission (2018: Art. 62/5). Beside other duties usual for legislation, such as reviewing and approving the state budget, electing the president of the Supreme People’s Court, and the role in proclaiming special administrative regions and systems, the NPC also decides on issues concerning war and peace (2018: Art. 62/15). According to the Chinese Constitution, the NPC holds the authority to dismiss specific government officials from their positions. These include the president and vice president of China, as well as various members of the State Council such as the premier, vice premiers, state councillors, ministers of ministries, ministers of commissions, the auditor general, and the secretary general. Additionally, the NCP is also authorised to remove the chairperson of the Central Military Commission and other members of this commission.

The Central Military Commission (CMC) holds the fourth position in the institutional state organisation outlined by the Constitution and is arguably the most critical body responsible for ensuring national security and managing military policy. As per the constitutional provisions, the Commission’s mandate runs parallel to that of the NPC (2018: Art. 93), and it is headed by a Chairperson, who is supported by vice chairpersons and other members (Ibid.). The CMC was established in 1954, and its members are appointed by the Communist Party. One of the key functions of the CMC is to ensure the Communist Party’s control over the military. The CMC is tasked with maintaining the PLA’s loyalty to the Party and safeguarding the country’s national security interests. In recent years, there has been a

greater emphasis on modernising the PLA and enhancing its combat capabilities. The CMC has played a crucial role in overseeing these efforts, such as the ongoing reforms aimed at transforming the PLA into a world-class military force by 2049. The CMC's role in the management of China's military extends beyond the country's borders. It is also responsible for developing relationships with foreign militaries as well as participating in international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.

While the Chinese Constitution does not specify the number of members on the Central Military Commission (CMC), historically, the number has typically been set at seven. However, as noted by Mulvenon (2018), there have been deviations from this norm in the past. For instance, the 14th and 15th CMCs had seven members, while the 16th and 17th CMCs had eight. The 18th CMC was the largest, with 11 members, while the 19th CMC reverted to having seven members. Following the 20th Party Congress held in October 2022 and confirmed at the 2023 National People's Congress, the current CMC still has seven members. The specific number of CMC members may reflect the priorities and objectives of the current leadership, as well as the broader political context within which the CMC operates.

The CMC represents a continuation of connectedness between the Party and the State, as it operates as the leading body of the Chinese Ministry of Defence as well as one of the highest bodies of the Communist Party. Because of that, it is often referred to as "one body, two names" due to its dual role as both the CPC Central Military Commission and the CMC of the PR China. As an organ of the Communist Party, the CMC oversees military operations and provides guidance on military affairs. At the same time, as an element of the institutional organisation of China, the CMC plays a key role in maintaining national security and safeguarding the country's interests.³¹ The "one body, two names" concept reflects the complex interplay between the Party and the state in China's political system. It underscores the significance of the CMC in ensuring the Party's control over the military while also emphasising the importance of the military in maintaining national security and safeguarding the country's interests. While the Party's role in security policy was declared in the previous part of this chapter, the following text will elaborate on China's MoD organisation and activities.

³¹ The current membership (2023) of the CMC consists of Xi Jinping, who is the acting Chairman, two vice-chairmen, Zhang Youxia and He Weidong, and four members: Li Shangfu, Liu Zhenli, Miao Hua, and Zhang Shengmin.

The Chinese MoD is a complex organisation made up of several units that work together to ensure the country's military preparedness and security. One of the key units is the General Office of the Military Commission, which manages the daily operations of the Military Commission and serves as a liaison between the commission and other military departments. Another important unit is the Military Commission Joint Staff Department, which provides strategic guidance and planning for military operations and exercises (PRC MoD, 2023). The Military Commission Political Work Department is responsible for overseeing the ideological and political education of military personnel and ensuring morale and discipline, while the Logistics Support Department of the Military Commission provides logistical support to the military, including transportation, medical care, and supply chain management. The Equipment Development Department of the Military Commission oversees the development of military equipment and technology, including research and development, production, and procurement. Additionally, the Military Commission Training Management Department is responsible for overseeing the training of military personnel, while the Military Commission National Defence Mobilization Department coordinates national defence mobilization and emergency response efforts (PRC MoD, 2023). The Disciplinary Inspection Committee of the Military Commission enforces disciplinary measures and investigates violations of military regulations, while the Political and Legal Committee of the Military Commission oversees legal and political matters within the military, including military justice and human rights. The CMC Science and Technology Committee is responsible for overseeing the development of science and technology in the military, including research, development, and innovation. The Military Commission Strategic Planning Office is responsible for strategic planning and policy-making related to military operations and national security, while the Military Commission Reform and Establishment Office is responsible for implementing reforms and establishing new policies within the military (PRC MoD, 2023). The CMC International Military Cooperation Office coordinates international military cooperation and exchanges, while the CMC Audit Office conducts audits and inspections of military departments and organisations. Finally, the General Administration of Military Affairs oversees the overall management and administration of the military, including personnel management and budgeting (PRC MoD, 2023).

Apart from that, it seems that military diplomacy activities constitute an important segment of the MoD PRC portfolio. However, it has to be

acknowledged that diplomatic activities among the highest Chinese officials are being conducted only with a specific group of countries. From 2020 onwards, Chinese top-ranking military officials met with representatives of Ethiopia, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Namibia, and the UAE. Besides, there were several notable meetings with the Russian counterparts; since the COVID-19 pandemic outburst until April 2023, there were a total of four such meetings (PRC MoD, 2023a). However, there was one notable meeting with its biggest rival. On June 10, 2022, State Councillor and Defence Minister Wei Fenghe held talks with US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin during the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, where both were in attendance.

The PLA(N)

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the principal military force of China, tasked with safeguarding the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security. Understanding the organisation and hierarchy of the PLA is crucial for comprehending China's military capabilities and decision-making processes. This section will provide an overview of the PLA's structure and its hierarchy from both military and political perspectives. The PLA's organisational structure consists of several branches and departments that collectively form a comprehensive military system. At the top of this system is the Central Military Commission (CMC), which is the highest military decision-making body in China. The CMC, headed by the General Secretary of the CPC, holds ultimate authority over the PLA.

It is responsible for formulating military policies, making key strategic decisions, and overseeing the military's operations. Below the CMC, the PLA is divided into five main service branches: the Ground Force (Army), Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force (responsible for strategic missile systems), and the Strategic Support Force (focused on space, cyberspace, and electronic warfare). Each service branch is headed by a Chief of the Service, who reports to the CMC and is responsible for the overall management and development of their respective forces.

Within each service branch, the military structure is further organised into theatre commands. China currently has five theatre commands: Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, and Central. The theatre commands are responsible for the operational control and defence of specific geographical regions, providing a framework for joint operations and coordination between different branches. In addition to the service

branches and theatre commands, the PLA also encompasses specialised departments and units, including the People's Armed Police (PAP), which is responsible for internal security and maintaining social order. The PAP operates under dual civilian and military control, serving as a paramilitary force. From a political perspective, the PLA's hierarchy is closely intertwined with the CPC's leadership structure. The CPC exercises direct control over the military through its centralised and unified leadership system.

The General Secretary of the CPC, who holds the highest position within the party, also serves as the Chairman of the CMC. This dual role ensures that the Party maintains ultimate authority and control over the PLA, aligning military decision-making with the Party's strategic objectives. Within the Party, the Central Military Commission (CMC) has its own organisational structure, mirroring the military's hierarchy. The CMC consists of several departments, including the General Office, the Political Work Department, the Discipline Inspection Commission, and the Logistic Support Department, among others. These departments are responsible for managing political affairs, military discipline, personnel matters, and logistical support within the military. The political commissar system is another significant component of the PLA's hierarchy. Political commissars are party-appointed officers embedded within military units at various levels, from divisions to individual units. They are responsible for upholding party ideology, ensuring loyalty to the CPC, and maintaining political discipline within the ranks. The political commissars work in tandem with military commanders, forming a dual leadership structure that combines political guidance with operational decision-making.

It is an extremely hard effort to assess the ratio of China's military budget. There were lots of attempts by the leading global think tanks (such as CSIS), or national institutions of other countries (US DoD), or even academics (Feng, 2009; Freidman & Logan, 2012). The *China Power* project by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) claims that China's military budget is greater than the combined military budgets of the next 13 Indo-Pacific countries (CSIS, 2023).³²

China has been consistently allocating approximately 1.7% of its total GDP to its military budget over the last 20 years. In 2021, China's military

³² According to the CSIS China Power project data, India, Japan, South Korea, and Australia in total have around 200 billion USD of military budget compared to Chinese 270 billion USD (CSIS, 2022).

spending as a share of government expenditure increased to 5%, a slight rise from 4.8% in the previous year (CSIS, 2022). The US Department of Defence (DoD) has cast doubts on the accuracy of China's official military budget figures in its annual report to Congress, titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the PR China 2021". The report suggests that China's published military budget does not account for several significant categories of expenses, such as foreign weapons procurement and research and development (USA DoD, 2021). It believes China's actual military-related spending could be 1.1 to 2 times higher than what is stated in its official budget (2021: 142).

China's annual defence budget is poised to sustain its trend of single-digit growth for the eighth consecutive year, with an anticipated increase of 7.2 percent in 2023 (SCIO, 2023a). The draft budget, presented during the ongoing session of China's national legislature, reveals that the world's second-largest economy has allocated a planned defence expenditure of 1.5537 trillion yuan, equivalent to approximately 224.79 billion US dollars, for the current fiscal year (SCIO, 2023a). In comparison, the preceding fiscal year witnessed a growth rate of 7.1 percent in China's defence budget. Characterising the escalation of China's defence budget as "suitably rational", Wang Chao, the spokesperson for the inaugural session of the 14th National People's Congress, emphasised to reporters on Saturday that this increase is essential to address multifaceted security concerns and enable China to discharge its obligations as a prominent nation. China adheres to a defence policy firmly rooted in defence rather than aggression. It has consistently emphasised that, regardless of the level of investment in defence or the modernization of its armed forces, China has no intentions of pursuing hegemony, expansionism, or the establishment of spheres of influence (SCIO, 2023a).

Over the course of the last couple of years, China has jointly held numerous military drills across the globe. In January 2022, China, Russia, and Iran jointly conducted the Belt 2022 Exercise, a military drill spanning 17,000 square kilometres in the Indian Ocean. The exercise was held under the title "Together for Peace and Security" and was significant due to the three straits of Bab al-Mandeb, Malacca, and Hormoz playing a key role in international trade. The three nations collaborated to maintain security in these critical waterways to preserve their national interests (IRNA, 2022). Military drills are being held not only for pure defensive reasons. The PLA participates vastly in civilian humanitarian activities and has participated in joint international drills over the last several years. One of such was the

multinational Cobra Gold 2023 exercise, which initiated the humanitarian assistance and disaster reduction (HADR) component in Thailand with participation from military units from nine countries, including China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (PRC MoD, 2023m). The tabletop drills conducted on February 24 and 25 were attended by seven experts from various military and civilian organisations, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Red Cross, and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (PRC MoD, 2023m). Prior to the exercise, the teams had completed intense training in over ten specialised courses, such as aerial rescue, water rescue, shaft rescue, medical service rescue, and engineering construction. The Chinese military's participation in the exercise marks the 10th consecutive year since they were invited to participate in 2014.

One of the paramount issues pertaining to the PLA is unequivocally its deployment beyond national borders. Apart from its established military presence in Djibouti, China's PLA possesses the capability to engage in peacekeeping operations under the United Nations. Over the past three decades, the Chinese armed forces have been actively involved in 111 engineering units, deploying a contingent of 25,768 troops across eight UN missions. These missions were notably conducted in regions such as Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, Liberia, Lebanon, Darfur, South Sudan, and Mali, as indicated by The State Council Information Office of China (2020). Moreover, Chinese military personnel have actively participated in the reconstruction of civilian infrastructure in areas affected by conflict and post-conflict scenarios. Their contributions encompass the construction of over 300 bridges, spanning 17,000 kilometres of roads, as well as the disposal of 14,000 landmines and unexploded ordnance, as documented in the same source (2020: 12). In a broader context, the PLA has played an instrumental role in providing medical assistance, having rendered aid to more than 246,000 wounded individuals through nearly 2,000 hours of combat flight operations across 1,600 sorties (2020: 12). Cumulatively, since the commencement of its involvement in UN peacekeeping missions in 1990, the PLA has actively participated in 25 such missions, with eight missions currently ongoing. These missions include UNTSO, MINURSO, UNIFIL, UNAMID, MONUSCO, UNMISS, MINUSMA, and MINUSCA, as detailed in the aforementioned source (2020: 38).

China in International Organisations

China's multilateral engagement through its membership in international organisations and its associated policies play a crucial role in shaping its foreign relations and global influence. Over the years, it has strategically engaged with various international bodies, such as the UN, the BRICS, the ASEAN, the SCO, and others, using them as platforms to advance its political, economic, and security interests. According to the Chinese MFA website, China is currently a member state of 74 international and regional organisations (MFA PRC, 2023v). Beyond the UN, China is a member of a plethora of international organisations, ranging from regional groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to global institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO). On October 25, 1971, the 26th United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 2758, which acknowledged the restoration of all legal rights of the People's Republic of China within the United Nations. This resolution officially recognises the representatives of the PR China government as the sole legitimate representatives of China in the United Nations. This extensive participation reflects China's recognition of the importance of multilateralism in addressing global challenges, as well as its desire to shape international norms and institutions to better align with its interests and principles. Under its permanent membership within the UN Security Council, as of March 2023, China has participated in nearly 30 United Nations peacekeeping operations authorised by the Security Council, sending more than 49,000 peacekeeping officers and soldiers and more than 2,700 police officers (MFA PRC, 2023v). Currently, China has a total of 2,227 peacekeepers performing peacekeeping missions in 8 mission areas, ranking 10th among peacekeeping troop-contributing countries and first among the five permanent members of the Security Council. From 2023 to 2024, China's MFA assumes that it will be the second largest contributor to United Nations peacekeeping assessments among all member states (MFA PRC, 2023v).

China has assumed the role of chairmanship in the BRICS group on three distinct occasions. In April 2011, the third summit of BRICS leaders took place in Sanya, marking a significant milestone. During this summit, South Africa was invited to join, expanding the BRICS mechanism to encompass five member states. This expansion reflected the group's commitment to inclusivity and cooperation among emerging economies. In September 2017, the ninth BRICS leaders' meeting convened in Xiamen, initiating what was dubbed the second "golden decade" of BRICS cooperation (MFA PRC,

2023v). This phase was characterised by a multifaceted approach referred to as the “three-wheel drive”, encompassing economic, trade, and financial cooperation, as well as political security and people-to-people and cultural exchanges. The Xiamen meeting introduced the innovative “BRICS+” model, facilitating dialogue between emerging market countries and developing nations. This dialogue aimed to foster a broader partnership and stimulate enhanced development and prosperity within the group and beyond. In June 2022, the 14th BRICS leaders’ meeting was conducted virtually from Beijing. During this meeting, the leaders of the five BRICS countries engaged in substantive discussions centred around the theme of “building a high-quality partnership and jointly creating a new era of global development” (MFA PRC, 2023v). Their deliberations covered a spectrum of pressing issues of shared concern, leading to the establishment of comprehensive consensus and the formulation of pioneering and institutional outcomes. This meeting marked the commencement of a fresh journey towards advancing the high-quality development of the BRICS group. The BRICS forum is recently being observed as a “Chinese tool to promote new multilateralism in international affairs” through dialogue with other rising economic, but also political, powers in the non-Western world.

Moreover, China holds the distinction of being a founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Throughout its membership, China has consistently prioritised and actively engaged in a wide spectrum of initiatives within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This commitment extends to fostering mutually advantageous collaborations with fellow member states, observer states, and dialogue partners (MFA PRC, 2023v).

China attained the status of a comprehensive dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1996. As part of its engagement, China exhibited a proactive role by becoming a signatory to the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2003, thereby forging a strategic partnership dedicated to peace and prosperity with the ASEAN. The year 2006 marked a significant milestone in the history of Sino-ASEAN relations, as it represented the 10th anniversary of their dialogue partnership. To commemorate this occasion, both parties successfully organised a commemorative summit held in Nanning, Guangxi. Subsequently, in 2011, the two sides celebrated the 20th anniversary of their dialogue relations with a series of exchange activities, including commemorative summits and receptions. Notably, 2013 saw the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-ASEAN strategic partnership,

marked by significant events such as the China-ASEAN Special Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the Special Ministers' Meeting on Connectivity and Transport, and the China-ASEAN High-Level Forum. In October of that year, President Xi Jinping's visit to Southeast Asian nations led to a pivotal proposal: the collaborative construction of a more interconnected China-ASEAN community, sharing a future vision, and the joint establishment of the 21st century "Maritime Silk Road". On the international and regional fronts, cooperation and coordination between the two entities have deepened. China has consistently affirmed its support for the ASEAN's central role in East Asian cooperation. The two parties maintain open lines of communication and collaboration in various cooperative mechanisms, including the ASEAN's partnerships with China, Japan, and South Korea, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, among others (MFA PRC, 2023v).

Concerning China's involvement in multilateral engagements, it is apparent that the nation steadfastly upholds its commitment to the UN system when pursuing its international initiatives, especially in the realm of security policy and collaboration with other international partners. Prominent Chinese officials have consistently emphasised their unwavering commitment to eschew hegemony and have pledged to align their actions and undertakings with the institutional framework established by the UN and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. A recent noteworthy illustration of this commitment is China's promotion of its Global Development Initiative through the UN's institutional framework, which has been acknowledged for its significant contributions to the "2030 Agenda".

CHAPTER IV

CHINA'S SECURITY POLICY IN THE EYES OF THE UNITED STATES

CHALLENGING THE HEGEMON

Chapter IV examines the perception of China as an emerging superpower in the global security arena from the standpoint of the challenged hegemon, the United States. This chapter offers qualitative insights into the Pentagon's perspective on China's foreign and security policy shifts spanning a two-decade period, as conveyed to the US Congress and analysed through a hawkish lens. The analysis is based on twenty-one consecutive reports titled "Military and Security Developments in the People's Republic of China", which are mandated by the US S.1059–National Defence Authorisation Act for Fiscal Year 2000 (US Bill, 2000, Sec. XII). Furthermore, this chapter highlights the reverse prism of perception by examining the latest reports released by the Chinese government in late 2022 and early 2023. These reports provide condemning perspectives on the developments occurring within the United States and on the global stage, attributing them to the actions of the aforementioned superpower.

Over the past decade, the United States has closely monitored China's military and security policies, which have undergone significant transformations. As China seeks to assert itself regionally and globally, the US's perception of China's military and security policies has evolved accordingly. The following analysis aims to present this evolution, exploring key factors that have shaped US perceptions, the underlying concerns, and the resulting policy responses. China's military modernization has drawn considerable attention from the United States. The US views China's advancements in areas such as naval capabilities, missile systems, and cyber warfare as potential challenges to its military dominance. Concerns have arisen regarding China's expanding anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities and their implications for regional security. China's assertiveness in territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea, has raised alarm bells in the US. China's construction and militarization of artificial islands, as well as its increased naval presence, are seen as threatening regional stability and challenging the rules-based international order. These actions have led to heightened tensions and prompted the US

to reinforce its presence and alliances in the region. China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region has also influenced US perceptions. The BRI and China's expanding influence through economic and military partnerships have been viewed with caution by the US. On the other hand, the US perceives these actions as attempts to shape the regional balance of power, potentially undermining American interests and alliances. Furthermore, China's rapid advancements in emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, space capabilities, and cyber capabilities, have caught the attention of the US. These technological developments are perceived as potential threats to US military superiority and technological leadership. Concerns over intellectual property theft and China's military-civil fusion strategy have further influenced US perceptions. The evolving perceptions of China's military and security policy have had significant implications for US policy. The US has responded by bolstering its military presence in the Indo-Pacific, enhancing defence cooperation with regional allies and partners, and increasing investment in research and development to maintain a technological edge. US policy has also emphasised the importance of international norms and a rules-based order to counter China's assertiveness.

China's Security Policy and Military Strength Perception by the Pentagon

Since 2001, the US Department of Defence has been releasing annual reports titled "Military and Security Developments in the People's Republic of China". These reports aim to provide a comprehensive overview of China's foreign and security policy, as well as the activities of the PLA(N), military leadership, and other aspects of China's military policy throughout each calendar year. The research deployed the *nVivo* software, which incorporates various text analysis techniques, specifically theme identification, sentiment measurement, and cluster analysis, for this study. The software utilises the complete linkage (farthest neighbour) hierarchical clustering technique to group the items into clusters based on the similarity index between each pair of items (nVivo, 2022). For example, the software assigns labels such as "neutral", "positive", or "negative" to each sentence, constituting them as references.

Over time, the quantity of indexed and categorised references increased with some periodic oscillations. Specifically, the years 2001, 2007, and 2012

had the fewest references, while 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 had the highest number of references. Starting in 2018, there was a prevalence of negative tone frequencies, reaching their peak in 2020 and 2021. Notable examples of negative references can be found in the 2018 Pentagon Report, which highlighted China's potential use of military force and advanced capabilities for aggression, including military activities towards Taiwan such as a blockade or amphibious invasion. Similarly, a report from 2019 discussed China's use of propaganda, deception, threats, and coercion as part of its warfare strategy (Stekić, 2022). The report also mentioned China's efforts to utilise academia, think tanks, and state-run media to advance its soft power campaign. Additionally, a 2014 report highlighted how the Communist Party of China exploits nationalism to bolster its legitimacy, deflect domestic criticism, and justify inflexibility in dialogues with foreign counterparts. However, throughout the 21-year period studied, there were no significant differences observed in the percentage share of indexed references across the different categories.

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of sentiments across all reports, 2001-2021

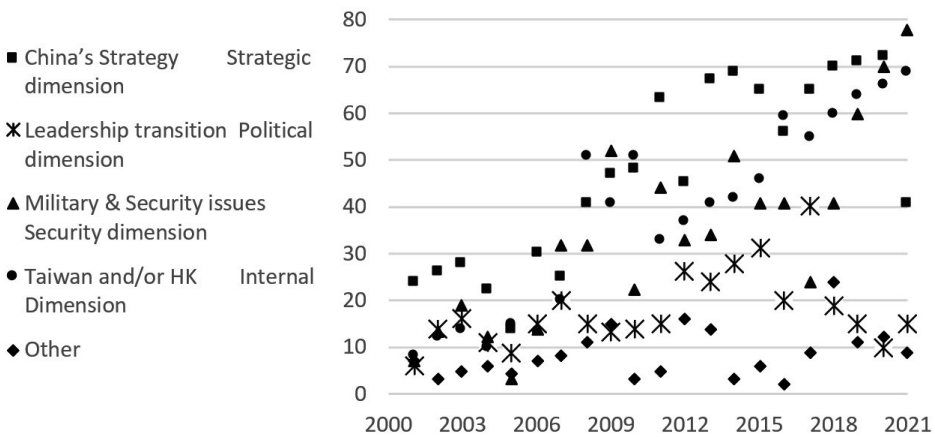
■ A : Very negative ■ B : Moderately negative ■ C : Moderately positive ■ D : Very positive

2021	17,08	38,42	35,79	8,71
2020	19,6	34,18	36,66	9,56
2019	20,86	36,98	35,85	6,31
2018	17,32	36,68	37,85	8,15
2017	20,05	36,85	31,97	11,14
2016	18,16	37,88	36,3	7,66
2015	15,67	40,36	35,03	8,94
2014	19,86	36,81	36,4	6,93
2013	16,87	38,38	35,51	9,23
2012	26,76	36,66	31,35	5,23
2011	24,11	32,87	34,42	8,6
2010	19,78	35,34	36,15	8,73
2009	22,25	34,98	34,54	8,22
2008	22,78	37,62	33,56	6,05
2007	16,83	45,79	30,3	7,08
2006	19,99	41,69	30,85	7,47
2005	14	42,95	31,44	11,6
2004	17,4	36,83	37,71	8,05
2003	18,02	33,51	38,44	10,04
2002	20,7	35,34	35,04	8,92
2001	18,28	33,25	38,15	10,32

Source: Stekić, 2022: 43

Stekić (2022) found that reports from 2006, 2007, and 2012 exhibited the most negative sentiments, surpassing 60% in each case. Among all the reports, only the 2001 Report had an equal percentage of “very positive” and “moderately positive” sentiments, while negative sentiments prevailed in all other reports (Figure 2). Notably, the reports from 2011, 2012, 2019, and 2020 displayed the highest levels of “very negative” sentiment, whereas the reports from 2004, 2005, and 2013 had the lowest. In the years 2005, 2007, 2015, 2021, and, to a lesser extent, 2008, 2011, and 2012, the reports predominantly featured a “moderately negative” sentiment. Conversely, the years 2001, 2003, 2004, 2012, and 2018 received the highest scores for “moderately positive” sentiment, while the lowest scores were observed in 2006, 2007, and 2012 (Figure 2). Furthermore, the computer analysis identified five primary dimensions that the reports focused on: China’s Grand Strategy, Political Leadership, Military and Security Issues, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and Other Issues.

Figure 3: Distribution of references across identified dimensions over the reporting period



Source: Stekić, 2022: 44

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of references across different dimensions in the reports. The Chinese Grand Strategy dimension dominates the majority of the reports, particularly in the earlier reporting periods. This dimension represents approximately half of the total

references between 2001 and 2005, and it remains significant in 2011 and 2013-2015 (Stekić, 2022). However, since 2017, the Chinese Grand Strategy dimension has gradually decreased, accounting for only 19% of references in 2021 (Figure 3). The political elements and leadership turnover dimension consistently occupy around 10% of the reports, with notable consistency across numerous reporting years, except for 2002 and 2017, when the percentages are lower. For example, the 2002 Pentagon Report highlights the robust defence and security relationship between China and Russia, including bilateral policy consultations and military exchanges (Pentagon, 2002: According to: Stekić, 2022). It also emphasises China's non-lethal coercive alternatives, such as political/diplomatic, economic, and military measures, aimed at influencing Taiwan's decision-making process, which is influenced by public opinion (2002, p. 47). Similarly, the 2017 Report focuses on the political dimension of China's aggressive efforts to advance its sovereignty and territorial claims, its rhetorical assertiveness, and the lack of transparency regarding its military capabilities and strategic decision-making (Pentagon, 2017, p. 42: According to: Stekić, 2022). These actions have prompted some countries in the region to strengthen their connections with the United States.

According to Stekić (2022), several key themes emerged consistently across the reports, including military capabilities, modernization, military power, the military modernization programme, and the military budget. These themes were heavily emphasised in all the cases examined. Notably, extreme clusters of references observed in the 2018 and 2021 reports focused on force deployment, particularly naval forces, in relation to Taiwan (Stekić, 2022: 45). Moreover, technology has garnered significant attention in recent reports, with clusters highlighting dual-use technology and China's importation of technology from other countries. Reports published in 2018, 2019, and 2020 specifically discussed the capabilities and advanced technology employed by the PLA in their operational techniques. Additionally, clusters related to international and overseas adversaries were prominently featured in reports from 2018 onward, suggesting their perceived significance by the Pentagon. Furthermore, Stekić (2022) argues that national and systemic clusters were also deemed crucial to China's tactical advancements during the same period.

Stekić (2022) draws the conclusion that there has been a shift in the focus of dimensions over time, indicating a passive stance in US policy that can now be examined through case studies. The Pentagon's attention has moved away from China's strategic dimension of seeking supremacy and

instead concentrates on several prominent defence concerns, along with internal political turmoil surrounding Taiwan and Hong Kong. By comparing computer-automated and manually conducted analyses, the study reveals that the institutional viewpoint has transitioned from strategic and political aspects to the realm of security and military, as well as internal political issues. Therefore, it is not surprising that the recent foreign policy agenda of the United States towards China has revolved around countering China's global military dominance and addressing its domestic vulnerabilities by securitizing the Taiwan issue (Stekić, 2022).

For the first time ever since these reports were issued, China's officials responded to them in 2022. In response to the report, Tan Kefei, spokesperson for China's MoD, highlighted that the United States "persistently distorts China's national defence policy and military strategy, propagating groundless speculations about China's military development" (Kefei, 2022). Additionally, he emphasised that the United States excessively interferes in China's internal affairs, particularly concerning the Taiwan question, employing a longstanding tactic of exaggerating the alleged "Chinese military threat" (Kefei, 2022). By reminding us that throughout its nearly 250-year history, the United States has experienced a mere 16 years of peace, Kefei (2022) further suggested that the United States, driven by its self-serving interests, has contributed to global unrest by instigating conflicts and nurturing division and confrontation, which has frequently resulted in turmoil and catastrophe in various regions around the world.

The Pentagon's Perception of China's Security Policy Layers, 2020-2022

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pentagon has published three annual reports as of April 2023. These reports share a common structure and address consistent themes. The topics covered include force modernization, US-PRC defence contacts and exchanges, the PRC views on strategic stability, the PRC views on information and information dominance, the PLA's expanded military diplomacy, and appendices providing data on the PRC and Taiwan forces, defence contacts and exchanges, as well as the selected PLA bilateral and multilateral exercises. This section presents the Pentagon's perception of China's security and military policy by examining the three layers outlined in this monograph: spatial-hierarchical, functional, and institutional.

The Report for 2021 was focused on two special topics: the PRC-India border standoff and the PRC's evaluation of its 13th Five-Year Development Plan. The report claims that "the PRC has expressed its aim to prevent the standoff from worsening into a wider military conflict with India" (Pentagon, 2021). Additionally, Beijing has voiced its intent to return bilateral relations with New Delhi to a state of economic and diplomatic cooperation it had perceived to be improving since the 2017 Doklam standoff" (Pentagon, 2021: 160). The thematic focus on the area of China's dispute with India over the border is probably an expression of the partial effort of the US to persuade India to become a firm partner of the global West in the containment of China. Furthermore, this report denounces China's defence policy as significantly influenced "by the way its leaders assess the prevailing threats and opportunities in the context of the country's comprehensive development" (Pentagon, 2021). It claims that in the region of Asia-Pacific, China is shedding light on its defence policy and military strategy in the manner that the global environment is undergoing profound changes of an unprecedented nature in a century (Pentagon, 2021).

The Report for 2022 states that the PRC's strategy involves a concerted effort to accumulate and leverage all aspects of its national power to establish a dominant position in an enduring competition among systems. It recalls the US 2022 National Defence Strategy, which clarifies that the PRC poses the most significant and comprehensive challenge to US national security and the free and open international system (Pentagon, 2022). Furthermore, the Report notices that in 2021, the PRC increasingly employed the PLA as an instrument of statecraft, adopting "more coercive and aggressive measures in the Indo-Pacific region" (2022: 1). With the purported achievement of its modernization goal in 2020, the PLA now shifts its focus to 2027, aiming to accelerate the integrated development of mechanisation, informatization, and intelligentization within the PRC's armed forces. If realised, the Pentagon argues, this objective could enhance the PLA's capabilities by 2027, making it "a more credible military tool for the CCP to employ in pursuit of Taiwan's unification" (2022: 1).

The 2022 Pentagon Report enumerated the most notable military drills the PLA participated in during 2021. The first one was "Peace 2021/Aman 2021", a multinational joint naval exercise that brought together Russia, Pakistan, Turkey, the United States, and 41 additional nations. The exercise aimed to enhance naval cooperation, interoperability, and readiness among the participating countries. By conducting joint training and exercises, it contributed to strengthening maritime security and stability (Pentagon, 2022:

169). The Joint Naval Drill was another important exercise conducted in Singapore and focused on enhancing naval capabilities and cooperation among participating nations. The exercise provided an opportunity for joint operations, tactical training, and knowledge sharing to improve maritime security in the region (2022: 169). The Pentagon (2022) further identified the Joint Maritime Training Exercise held in Indonesia, which aimed to strengthen naval cooperation and interoperability among the participating nations. It focused on joint maritime operations, including search and rescue, maritime interdiction, and disaster response. Another similar drill, Cobra Gold, was a multinational exercise centred on humanitarian and disaster relief training. Besides China's PLA forces, it involved Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, India, and the United States. The exercise aimed to improve coordination and response capabilities in managing humanitarian crises and natural disasters, emphasising the importance of regional cooperation in such critical situations, and was held at the end of 2021. Zapad/Interaction-2021, conducted by Russia and participated in by the PLA, was a joint military training exercise that focused on enhancing operational readiness and coordination among the participating nations. The exercise aimed to strengthen defence capabilities, promote mutual understanding, and build trust among the participating countries. Additionally, Shared Destiny 2021 was a multinational peacekeeping exercise involving Pakistan, Mongolia, Thailand, and the PLA forces. This exercise aimed to improve peacekeeping capabilities and cooperation in complex peacekeeping operations, emphasising the importance of shared experiences and best practices in promoting stability and security (Pentagon, 2022).

The Pentagon has also closely observed and analysed internal political developments in China, providing a valuable assessment of the security and military dimensions of the CCP Congress. The Report from 2022 discusses the outcomes of the 20th Party Congress focused on the intensification and acceleration of the PLA modernization goals. The objectives outlined by the 20th Party Congress aimed to deploy PLA forces regularly and in diverse ways, with the goal of achieving the PLA's centenary goal by 2027. Among many set objectives, the Pentagon included in its report the following: providing new military strategic guidance, establishing a robust system of strategic deterrence, increasing the proportion of new-domain forces with advanced combat capabilities (such as cyberspace and space), expediting the development of unmanned and intelligence combat capabilities, and promoting the development and application of the network information system (Pentagon, 2022: 5).

Xi Jinping, reappointed as Chairman of the CMC for the third time, assembled a six-man CMC to lead the PLA towards the achievement of its centenary goals. As the Report claims, such CMC composition “ensures political continuity, technical expertise in military modernization and space-related matters, and operational experience focused on Taiwan” (2022: 5). Furthermore, the 20th Party Congress provides new insights into the CCP’s evolving perception of the PRC’s external security environment. Unlike previous reports, the Pentagon claims that the Party Congress report did not reiterate the notion of the PRC operating within a “strategic window of opportunity for development” or assert that “peace and development remain the keynote of the times”. Instead, it acknowledged the existence of drastic changes in the international landscape and emphasised the need for greater vigilance towards potential dangers and preparedness to deal with worst-case scenarios (2022: 5).

In the realm of spatial and hierarchical dynamics, the United States views China’s security policy as highly dynamic across multiple regions. An examination of the Pentagon’s “post-COVID-19” report reveals the US assessment that China is poised to become more assertive militarily in the near term. Specifically, the 2022 report asserts that China is actively pursuing the “accelerated development of a comprehensive military footprint” guided by the “Three Warfares” principle (Pentagon, 2022).³³ The Pentagon claims that Beijing and the PLA “likely seek to couple digital influence activities with the concept to demoralise adversaries and influence domestic and foreign audiences during conflict” (Pentagon, 2022: 138). According to the 2022 Pentagon report, China deploys a well-coordinated framework of influence operations conducted at a high level of strategic planning. These operations are executed by various entities that the Pentagon enlists: the PLA Political Work Department, the United Front Work Department (UFWD), the International Liaison Department, the Ministry of State Security (MSS), and the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF). The report furthermore suggests that the “Communist Party is likely endeavouring to shape international institutions and public sentiment in a manner that aligns with the PRC’s key narratives” (Pentagon, 2022: 139). These narratives include the perceived “inevitable rise” of the PRC as a

³³ According to the Pentagon, this principle is actually a concept that depicts “the coordinated use of public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare” (Pentagon, 2022).

major global power; Beijing's stance on the "one China principle" concerning Taiwan reunification, the Belt and Road Initiative, the exertion of political control over Hong Kong, and territorial as well as maritime assertions in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.

Apart from the Pentagon's reports, China's security policy perception could be analysed from the perspective of the US national strategic framework, especially through its national security strategies. Such a strategic perception of China has transitioned over the last two decades from viewing it primarily as a potential partner to a more complex and competitive relationship. This shift is rooted in a confluence of economic, geopolitical, and ideological factors. There are in total seven topics around which the institutional perception of China is being shaped within the national security strategies of the US: competitive dynamics, the PLA military modernization, geopolitical ambitions of China, US economic concerns, ideological clash between the US and China, as well as countering China's arising global influence, and multilateral engagement. In its 2022 National Security Strategy, the United States explicitly recognises China as the primary competitor uniquely positioned with the intent and increasingly substantial economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capabilities to potentially reshape the international order (White House, 2022). To navigate this evolving landscape, the strategy outlines three core guiding principles of US policy towards China: first, to focus on enhancing domestic strength through investments in competitiveness, innovation, resilience, and democratic institutions; second, to forge stronger alliances and partnerships, fostering collective action and shared objectives; and third, to engage in responsible competition with China aimed at safeguarding US interests and promoting its long-term vision (White House, 2022). These principles, according to the NSS, underscore the essential role of strengthening domestic foundations and collaborating with allies to effectively compete with the PRC across various domains, encompassing technology, economics, politics, military affairs, intelligence, and global governance. It is worth noting that in the "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance" document adopted a year prior, China was characterised as a considerably more prominent adversary of the United States than portrayed in the 2022 NSS. Furthermore, the 2021 document provides more detailed steps and activities concerning US foreign policy towards China compared to the 2022 Strategy. In the 2021 document, there is a commitment to supporting China's neighbouring nations and trade partners in safeguarding their ability to make independent political choices, free from

coercion or undue foreign influence. The emphasis is placed on advancing locally-driven development to counteract external manipulation of local priorities. The document also underscores support for Taiwan, recognising it as “a prominent democracy and a vital economic and security ally, in alignment with longstanding American commitments” (White House, 2021). Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of US companies adhering to American values when conducting business in China and asserts the US’s commitment to “advocating for democracy, human rights, and human dignity, especially in regions like Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet” (White House, 2021). In all these areas, the aim is to collaboratively craft a shared approach with like-minded nations.

REVERSED PERCEPTION: CHINA WATCHES THE HAWKS

China has emerged as a prominent participant in the realm of global security under the new international circumstances, actively engaging in criticism of US global dominance over the last several decades. The Chinese MFA has released a series of official and extensive documents illustrating the negative impacts of US hegemony on the global community. Notable among these publications are “Reality Check: Falsehoods in US Perceptions of China”, published in June 2022; “Drug Abuse in the United States”, published in February 2023; “US Hegemony and its Perils” released in February 2023; and “Gun Violence in the United States: Truth and Facts”, released in March 2023. These documents provide a comprehensive examination of the detrimental consequences stemming from US hegemony, as identified by the Chinese MFA.

US Hegemony and its Perils encompasses a comprehensive analysis of critiques directed towards official Washington, categorised into five thematic areas. These areas of concern provide a framework for examining the perceived shortcomings of the United States in its global role. The first thematic area revolves around political hegemony, specifically the accusation that the United States throws its weight around and seeks to exert dominance in international affairs. This critique highlights instances where US actions are perceived as overbearing and interfering in the affairs of other nations. The second area of critique focuses on military hegemony, with concerns raised about the wanton use of force by the United States. Instances where military interventions are perceived as excessive or lacking sufficient justification are scrutinised, reflecting a broader criticism of US

foreign policy decisions. Economic hegemony constitutes the third thematic area, encompassing allegations of looting and exploitation by the United States. Critics argue that the US exercises undue influence in global economic systems, benefiting itself at the expense of other nations (MFA PRC, 2023y). This critique includes issues such as trade imbalances, resource extraction, and unfair economic practices. The fourth area pertains to technological hegemony, where the United States is accused of monopolistic control and suppression. Critics contend that US dominance in technological advancements allows it to maintain an unfair advantage and stifle competition. Concerns may revolve around intellectual property rights, access to technology, and the impact of US policies on global innovation. Lastly, cultural hegemony addresses the dissemination of false narratives and the alleged spread of US cultural dominance. Critics argue that American cultural influence, particularly through media and popular culture, shapes global perceptions in a way that disregards diverse perspectives and reinforces American-centric narratives.

Under political hegemony, the report introduces political interference and intervention in other states' sovereignty, double standards on international rules, the formation of exclusive alliances, and the fabrication of divisive narratives as four segments of the US's "aggressive policy" (MFA PRC, 2023y). It states that the US has a "long history of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries under the guise of promoting democracy and human rights" (MFA PRC, 2023y) and enumerates examples that include the "Neo-Monroe Doctrine" in Latin America, "colour revolutions" in Eurasia, and orchestrating the "Arab Spring" in West Asia and North Africa. Such interventions have often resulted in chaos and instability in these regions, raising concerns about the true motives behind US actions (MFA PRC, 2023y). The frequent display of double standards when it comes to international rules and organisations is another point that this report introduces. The Chinese MFA claims that the US has withdrawn from various treaties and organisations, prioritising its self-interest over global cooperation. Examples include cutting off funding to the United Nations Population Fund, quitting UNESCO, leaving the Paris Agreement on climate change, and withdrawing from the UN Human Rights Council (MFA PRC, 2023y). This behaviour undermines the credibility of international institutions and fosters an environment of unilateralism. Furthermore, through initiatives like the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" and the formation of exclusive alliances such as the Five Eyes, the Quad, and the AUKUS, the United States aims to shape regional dynamics and compel countries to choose sides (MFA PRC, 2023y). These

efforts contribute to regional divisions, confrontation, and the erosion of peace. The US “alliance system”, as the report refers to it, seeks to consolidate its influence and counter the rise of other global powers, potentially exacerbating geopolitical tensions. In these efforts, the US judges the democratic processes of other countries and perpetuates a false narrative of “democracy versus authoritarianism” (MFA PRC, 2023y). This narrative fosters estrangement, rivalry, and confrontation between nations, hindering constructive dialogue and cooperation. In this instance, the report claims that the “Summit for Democracy”, organised by the United States, has faced criticism for undermining the spirit of democracy and further dividing the international community.

In the domain of military hegemony, the report (2023y) enlists Historical Expansionist Tendencies, Extensive Military Interventions, Humanitarian Tragedies and Casualties, and the misuse of methods and weapons of warfare. According to the MFA PRC, US military hegemony has had significant humanitarian consequences. The wars and military operations launched in the name of fighting terrorism since 2001 have resulted in a staggering loss of life, with over 900,000 people killed, including approximately 335,000 civilians (MFA PRC, 2023y). Millions have been injured, and tens of millions have been displaced. Specific conflicts, such as the Iraq War, have led to hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and the displacement of millions. The United States’ military actions have also contributed to the creation of approximately 37 million refugees worldwide. Civilian casualties in conflicts such as Syria have included significant numbers of women and children (MFA PRC, 2023y).

It further elucidates that the United States has engaged in an extensive number of military interventions globally. Tufts University research indicates that between 1776 and 2019, the United States undertook nearly 400 military interventions, with significant involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa, and Europe. The country’s military interventions in the Middle East, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa have been particularly notable in recent years. The United States has been criticised for blurring the lines between diplomacy and war, employing tactics such as proxy warfare, low-intensity conflicts, and the use of drone strikes.

The MFA PRC also argues that the United States has employed controversial methods and weapons in its wars. Chemical and biological weapons, cluster bombs, fuel-air bombs, graphite bombs, and depleted

uranium bombs have been utilised in conflicts such as the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the aggression against Yugoslavia, the War in Afghanistan, and the Iraq War. The use of these weapons has caused immense damage to civilian infrastructure, resulting in countless civilian casualties and long-lasting environmental pollution (MFA PRC, 2023y).

The MFA PRC (2023y) report highlights several key issues in the high-tech domain, including the solidification of the United States' technological monopoly, abusive cyber activities and surveillance, suppression of intellectual property, and the politicisation and weaponization of technological issues. Under the pretext of protecting democracy, the United States has solidified its technological monopoly by forming alliances and initiatives such as the "chips alliance" and "clean network" (MFA PRC, 2023y). These efforts, labelled under the rhetoric of democracy and human rights, have transformed technological issues into political and ideological ones. By convening conferences like the Prague 5G Security Conference and promoting the "5G clean path", the US has sought to exclude China's 5G products and build technological alliances based on shared ideology, i.e., measures that fundamentally serve to maintain US technological hegemony (MFA PRC, 2023y). The United States weaponizes technological issues, using them as ideological tools under the guise of national security concerns. By stretching the concept of national security, the US has suppressed Chinese company Huawei through measures such as market restrictions, cutting off chip and operating system supplies, and pressuring other countries to ban Huawei from participating in local 5G network construction. Furthermore, the US has targeted numerous Chinese high-tech enterprises, imposing sanctions on over 1,000 companies and implementing controls on biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and other advanced technologies (MFA PRC, 2023y).

Ma Hanzhi contends that leaders of developing countries, including Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, and Venezuela, have recently publicly criticised the United States as their expressions reflect the shared aspirations of most developing countries, which aim to reject American hegemony (Hanzhi, 2023). Hanzhi (2023) believes that the United States has additionally "orchestrated the so-called Summit for Democracy", which has openly fostered confrontation and division on a global scale. In light of multiple challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, developing countries urgently require consensus-building to facilitate shared development. However, the United States has shown a tendency to "selectively ignore" these demands, preferring to employ the cards of "values", "democracy", and

“human rights” to “fortify the international order in line with its hegemonic interests, which is the approach that evidently contradicts the aspirations of developing countries” (Hanzhi, 2023).

In March 2023, the Chinese MFA released a report titled “The State of Democracy in the United States: 2022”. This document marks its second edition, following the initial publication by the MFA PRC in the previous year, which assessed the state of democracy in the US during 2021.

On December 5, 2021, China published its first report evaluating the United States’ approach to international affairs, highlighting internal challenges and flaws in its political institutions and democratic processes. The 2021 Report recognises that the determination of whether a country is democratic should be made “by its own people rather than a self-righteous minority of outsiders” (MFA PRC, 2021b). It further emphasises China’s stance that there is no flawless system of democracy worldwide and no political system that can be universally applied to all countries (MFA PRC, 2021b). This report identifies three key issues and challenges pertaining to democracy in the United States: 1. the existence of deep-rooted problems within the system; 2. chaotic and disorderly democratic practices; and 3. the detrimental consequences resulting from the US exportation of its particular brand of democracy (MFA PRC, 2021b). This report primarily discusses the quality of democracy in the US case and its political regime type. It states that the American model of democracy has transformed into a system characterised by the influence of money in politics. It has become a game that primarily benefits the wealthy and is fundamentally distinct from a democracy representing the interests of the people (MFA PRC, 2021b). The reality faced by the American populace is that the presence of money in politics has permeated every aspect of the electoral, legislative, and administrative processes. Consequently, the ability of individuals to participate politically is limited, as economic inequality has translated into political inequality.

China’s MFA argues that those with sufficient capital can fully exercise their democratic rights as guaranteed by the Constitution. Although the principle of “one person, one vote” is upheld in theory, the reality is that a minority of elite individuals hold the reins of power (MFA PRC, 2021b). Political pluralism serves as nothing more than a façade, as a small group of elites dominate political, economic, and military affairs. They exercise control over state institutions and the policymaking process, manipulate public opinion, wield influence over the business community, and enjoy

numerous privileges. The democratic process in the United States is fragmented and protracted, featuring numerous points where individual veto players can impede collective action, while the concept of “checks and balances”, originally intended to prevent abuses of power, has been distorted in the American political landscape (MFA PRC, 2021b). Moreover, political polarisation continues to intensify as the two major parties drift further apart in their political agendas, resulting in a significant reduction in areas of consensus between them.

The American-style democracy can be likened to a carefully orchestrated scene in Hollywood movies, where a group of affluent individuals publicly profess their commitment to the people while engaging in undisclosed dealings behind the scenes. This form of democracy is marred by political infighting, the influence of money in politics, and a prevalence of vetocracy, rendering the delivery of effective governance as desired by the general public virtually impossible. As a result, there is a growing sense of disillusionment among Americans regarding US politics, coupled with a pessimistic outlook on American-style democracy. The shortcomings of democracy in the US are evident not only in its system design and overall structure but also in its practical implementation. The US falls short of being an exceptional student of democracy and certainly does not serve as a role model for other nations (MFA PRC, 2021b). The events of gun violence and the theatrical spectacle that unfolded on Capitol Hill have exposed the underlying realities hidden beneath the seemingly pristine facade of American-style democracy. Moreover, the tragic death of George Floyd, an African American, has laid bare the deep-rooted systemic racism that has persisted in American society for an extensive period, sparking widespread protests that have reverberated throughout the nation and beyond (MFA PRC, 2021b). The report highlights the US’s tendency to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries under the guise of promoting democracy, often seeking regime change to install governments aligned with its own interests. Furthermore, the MFA PRC asserts that the imposition of the US brand of democracy has resulted in humanitarian crises and tragedies (MFA PRC, 2021b).

While the report for 2021 drew attention to the US’s foreign and security policy through the analytical prism of observing democracy, the report for 2022 claims that American democracy is “in further decline” (MFA PRC, 2023s). It stipulates that American democratic institutions may appear lively on the surface, but they “fail to address critical long-standing issues, exposing a sense of lethargy” (MFA PRC, 2023s). The silent civil war brewing

in the United States has damaged democracy and requires a collective sense of national interest, which is currently lacking. The country's inclusion on the list of regressive democracies by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance further highlights the deepening crisis. Interestingly, the report deals with internal turmoil that occurred in the Capitol. These riots and the subsequent political violence, according to the report, "underscore the difficulty of learning lessons and addressing systemic issues" (MFA PRC, 2023s). The Chinese MFA believes that political polarisation has reached unprecedented levels in the United States. The traditional inter-party balance based on policy compromise is increasingly difficult to sustain due to rising radical factions within both the Democratic and Republican Parties. The two parties view each other as threats rather than political opponents, resulting in a deepening divide between "the two Americas". Partisan battles and self-interest take precedence over the national interest, hindering policy decision-making and legislative progress. In this process, the MFA PRC believes that money plays a significant role in American politics, often overshadowing the democratic principles of fairness and justice (MFA PRC, 2023s). The 2022 midterm elections set a record-breaking spending spree, with a price tag exceeding \$16.7 billion. Wealthy donors and interest groups wield significant influence over the political process, outspending small individual donations by a wide margin. The concentration of wealth among a few individuals and the subsequent control over politics exacerbate income inequality and erode the public's faith in the system. The report claims that "freedom of speech" is only an expression in the US. Despite the United States' proud history of freedom of speech, "reality falls short of the ideal" (MFA PRC, 2023s). China perceives that the US government imposes "extensive regulations on media and technology companies, manipulating public opinion to serve its own interests" (MFA PRC, 2023s). Instances of censorship, disinformation campaigns, and collusion between social media platforms and government agencies have eroded the public's trust in freedom of speech and the media's independence. The polarisation and division within American society have also infiltrated the judicial system; as per the report, the Supreme Court, intended to uphold the Constitution, has become deeply divided along partisan lines (MFA PRC, 2023s). Judicial decisions increasingly reflect the ideological divide between conservatives and liberals, turning the court into a battleground for political warfare. Public opinion and political considerations are influencing the court's rulings, undermining its impartiality and diminishing its credibility as a guardian of justice.

When it comes to “misuse of democracy” as China believes, the report claims that the US has long monopolised the definition of “democracy”, using it as a pretext to “incite division, confrontation, and undermine the UN-centered international system and the international order based on the rule of law” (MFA PRC, 2023s). The Ukraine crisis, which erupted in early 2022, has had devastating effects on the country’s economy and the well-being of its people. A report released by the World Bank in October 2022 estimated that Ukraine would require at least US\$349 billion, equivalent to 1.5 times its total economic output in 2021, to rebuild after the war (MFA PRC, 2023s). Exploiting the crisis for their benefit, the US seized the opportunity to profit from the war business, as the Chinese MFA posits, including the arms and energy sectors, rather than actively pursuing measures to end hostilities. Justifying their actions as support for “democracy versus authoritarianism”, the US supplied arms to Ukraine. The US’s pursuit of democracy has been hijacked by interest groups and capital, leading to global instability and chaos. In August 2022, then US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi undertook a provocative visit to China’s Taiwan region, disregarding China’s firm opposition and serious representations.

“In August 2022, then US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made a provocative visit to China’s Taiwan region, disregarding China’s firm opposition and serious representations. It was a major political provocation that upgraded official contact between the US and Taiwan and aggravated tensions across the Taiwan Strait. Yet, Pelosi argued that the visit “honours America’s unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan’s vibrant democracy”. The crux of Pelosi’s provocative visit is not about democracy but about China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The US action was by no means defending or preserving democracy, but challenging and violating China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pelosi’s fallacy was unbearable, even to some US politicians” (MFA PRC, 2023s).

Pelosi justified the visit by claiming that it honoured America’s commitment to supporting Taiwan’s vibrant democracy. However, the crux of Pelosi’s provocative action lies not in promoting democracy but in challenging and violating China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Even some US politicians found Pelosi’s fallacy intolerable. Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Greene criticised Pelosi’s obsession with power and accused her of defending a fake notion of “courage” in the “name of democracy” (MFA PRC, 2023s). The international community is increasingly recognising the true nature of the US’s approach. Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy

Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, described the US as a self-proclaimed “high priest” that wreaks havoc worldwide, disguising its actions as the promotion of “true democracy” while crudely imposing its will through money, allies, and advanced weaponry. An article published on Ahram Online, an Egyptian news website, argued that the US has weaponized liberalism and democracy, destabilising countries, delegitimizing governments, and intervening with socio-political engineering that often leads to disastrous consequences. These actions have nothing to do with the genuine promotion of liberalism, democracy, and freedom the US claims to uphold.

Under the pretext of human rights and democracy, the US has long employed unilateral sanctions and exerted “long-arm jurisdiction” over other countries based on its domestic laws and values (MFA PRC, 2023s). The MFA PRC claims that over the past decades, the US has imposed unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction on countries such as Cuba, Belarus, Syria, Zimbabwe, and others. It exerted maximum pressure on nations like the DPRK, Iran, and Venezuela and unilaterally froze \$130 million in military aid to Egypt, citing the country’s alleged lack of progress in human rights. Such actions have inflicted significant harm on economies and livelihoods (MFA PRC, 2023s).

One of the last points of this report was that the US administration has propagated a narrative of “democracy versus authoritarianism” with the aim of suppressing other countries and advancing its own geostrategy under the guise of democracy (MFA PRC, 2023s). This narrative has drawn criticism both within and outside the US. The US held the first “Summit for Democracy” in 2021, attempting to divide the international community based on ideology and values (MFA PRC, 2023s). However, it failed to achieve unity among democratic countries and faced criticism for its representation issues. China repeatedly states that the US’s promotion of democracy lacks a clear goal and is slow in implementation, since holding a democracy summit while democracy within the US itself is in turmoil is unlikely to boost democracy worldwide and may instead create geopolitical crises (MFA PRC, 2023s). Labelling oneself as a democracy while branding others as autocracies contradicts the principles of democracy. The “democracy versus authoritarianism” narrative does not align with the realities of the world or current trends. The MFA PRC believes that the US cannot monopolise the definition and interpretation of democracy or dictate what democracy should look like for others. The US should recognise that its own democracy has lost its former reputation and is no longer the sole

standard. There is no fixed model of democracy, and the US should reassess its diplomatic methods to focus on cooperation rather than confrontation. Despite the declining ratings of US democracy at home and abroad, the US continues to export its democracy and values aggressively. It has formed values-based alliances and attempted to disrupt international cooperation in various fields by drawing ideological lines and promoting a Cold War mentality. The US's insistence on acting as a global democratic leader while its own democratic system faces distrust has raised suspicions. It is suggested that the US should hold a domestic democracy summit to address issues such as injustice, inequality, voting rights, and disinformation. The US's credibility has been questioned, and its ability to spread democracy or serve as an example for others is undermined by its internal democratic challenges. China believes that the narrative surrounding the democracy summit reflects two myths about US democracy: first, the global advancement of democracy is declining and needs the US to reverse it; and second, the US is the most important democracy in the world, and its global leadership is crucial for other countries. These myths, according to the MFA PRC, overlook the democratic backsliding within the US, the rejection of the majority of countries being influenced by the US's hypocritical concept of democracy, and the aspirations of developing countries to improve their economies and living standards (MFA PRC, 2023s).

On March 23, 2023, China's State Council Information Office published the "Report on Human Rights Violations in the United States in 2022". This comprehensive report consists of seven sections, addressing various aspects of human rights issues in the United States. It points out a dysfunctional civil rights protection system, the erosion of American-style electoral democracy, escalating racial discrimination and inequality, deepening subsistence challenges among the US underclass, a notable backslide in women's and children's rights, unrestrained infringements on other nations' human rights, and a discussion on covert manipulation of US elections through "dark money" contributions, exacerbated by political polarisation and societal fragmentation, which hinder the country's ability to reach a democratic consensus. The report underscores a growing "disillusionment" among the American public regarding American-style democracy (SCIO, 2023), with significant percentages expressing concerns about its potential collapse and acknowledging severe threats to its stability. Additionally, it highlights the rise in racism and widespread discrimination against ethnic minorities, as evidenced by a significant increase in racially biased hate crimes between 2020 and 2022. A tragic racist attack at a Buffalo

supermarket, resulting in the loss of 10 African-American lives, has sent shockwaves globally. Furthermore, the report claims that 81 percent of Asian Americans report a surge in violence against Asian communities (SCIO, 2023). The report employs robust language to characterise the United States as a nation rooted in “colonialism”, marked by a “history of racist slavery and labour disparities”, as well as economic inequality in resource possession and distribution. It asserts that the country has increasingly grappled with a range of challenges, including systemic failures, deficiencies in governance, racial divisions, and social unrest. These issues have been exacerbated by a polarised economic landscape, a social fabric marred by racial conflicts, and a political system influenced by powerful capital interest groups in recent years (SCIO, 2023).

CHAPTER V

WILL CHINA CONTINUE TO BE A HESITATING LEADER?

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Inquiry from three scenarios

Each of the layers of China's security policy presented in this book implies a clear determination of China towards foreign political phenomena, processes, regions, and actors in world politics. Based on the analysis presented in the previous part of the book, this chapter will offer three alternative scenarios that show China's position in the next decade of international relations until 2030. Scenario I depicts China as a *status quo* power. It bears the assumption that China will implement its policies in the form of several decades-long continuation, while the pandemic and post-pandemic occurrences only temporarily diverted its course without a substantive impact on future actions.³⁴ Scenario II assumes that China started to develop its "security policy with Chinese characteristics"; likewise, it developed the nation and its society internally through "communism with Chinese characteristics". Scenario III analyses the role of China under the assumption that it will adopt a strategy similar to that of the US during the unipolar era, i.e., using force to maintain the international order. Although less probable than Scenario II, this (third) scenario offers alternative perspectives on the layers of China's security policy, particularly regarding its expanding military presence beyond its borders and the potential for redefining the justification for unilateral use of force in international relations.

³⁴ The timing of the writing of this monograph largely influenced the marginalisation of the first scenario. As the writing of the book began in the second half of 2022, some of China's foreign policy activities, first of all involvement in mediation processes (between Saudi Arabia and Iran), then numerous tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, mediation in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the increasing growth of China's defence capabilities, but also the re-election of Xi Jinping to his third presidential term, contradict this scenario. However, the author of the book decided to keep it as a possible direction for Chinese policy in one of the future Grand Strategies.

It should be emphasised that these scenarios are not mutually exclusive but that it is possible for one dominant scenario to manifest itself with smaller oscillations or with the presence of smaller specificities in one of the remaining two scenarios. While the first scenario assumes that China will continue its current foreign policy, the other two scenarios suggest more assertive and potentially aggressive approaches. Ultimately, the direction of China's foreign policy will depend on a variety of factors, including its domestic development, its relations with other major powers, and its perceptions of security threats, while some arguments favouring a more assertive China will be presented in the following text.

In this monograph, it has been previously mentioned how Barry Buzan examined the concept of China's peaceful rise as an integral part of its Grand Strategy, emphasising the inherent logic and contradictions. According to Buzan (2014), China's strategic policy is characterised by its intricate and comprehensive nature. He suggests that this policy grants China the flexibility to pursue either a "Cold Peaceful Rise" or a "Warm Peaceful Rise" strategy, depending on the prevailing security dynamics in the international relations system. Ultimately, this choice will shape the level of assertiveness manifested in China's future foreign strategy (Buzan, 2014: 404-409). Each scenario will place particular emphasis on analysing the variables that change within the three main groups of layers presented in this book, namely spatial-hierarchical, functional, and institutional. The primary objective of this endeavour, and thus of the Chapter, is to offer a more comprehensive and well-founded response to the inquiry of whether China will sustain its role as a hesitant leader concerning the implementation of its security policy by 2030.

Scenario I: China as a Status Quo Power

Chapter II of this book delves into the evolutionary component of China's Grand Strategy. The key outcome of this chapter, summarised in Table 2, highlighted a significant finding regarding the nature of China's GS. Throughout its recent history since its founding in 1949, China can be characterised as a predominantly *status quo* power, particularly in its actions within the realm of security policy within the international relations system. China's commitment to its core principles is evident in various aspects, including its voting in the UN Security Council and other global international organisations. It strictly adheres to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of any country, and it has refrained from challenging the

status of any country as a global hegemon, both during the Cold War and the era of unipolarity.³⁵

Considering the aforementioned reasons and the historical context of China's passive participation in international relations over the past seven and a half decades, Scenario I anticipates a continuation of this trend in the future. The *status quo* scenario compounds China's continuing to maintain its current approach of avoiding direct involvement in security matters and abstaining from taking on a leadership role in international affairs. This approach is rooted in China's historical preference for non-interference in the affairs of other countries and the belief that it should focus on its own domestic priorities. Furthermore, in this scenario, China will continue to strongly adhere to its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which it successfully applies in its foreign policy without any modifications. China would continue to prioritise economic development and seek to maintain a stable regional and global environment that is conducive to economic growth. This would involve engaging in diplomatic efforts to manage tensions with other major powers, such as the United States and Japan, and participating in multilateral institutions and initiatives aimed at promoting economic cooperation and development. In the spatial-hierarchical group of layers, China's security policy would probably be consistent in terms of human security and national security matters. Its stances towards China's most pressing issue of Taiwan's status would probably not be changed due to systemic reasons. The international community remains preoccupied with other phenomena that might arise in the future.

In terms of regional security issues, China would continue to play a role in promoting stability on the Korean Peninsula but would refrain from direct involvement in conflicts in other parts of Asia. China would also seek to maintain a stable relationship with India but would remain cautious about engaging in security cooperation that could be perceived as encircling or threatening China. At the same time, China would continue to expand its military capabilities, particularly in areas such as maritime and space domains, in order to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This would involve increasing investments in research and development and pursuing a more assertive posture in defending its territorial claims in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. If China sustains its *status quo*

³⁵ For a more nuanced and detailed analysis of how China voted in the UN during the early phase of the Cold War, consult Chai, 1979.

power status, it will maintain a relatively low-profile approach to international security affairs while seeking to potentially build its economic power and military capabilities in order to protect its interests and ensure its place as a major global player.

The first group of layers, spatial-hierarchical, would greatly remain the same out of all three groups of layers in this scenario. At the international security level, China will rely solely on its Global Security Initiative from 2022 (and 2023), which will serve as its cornerstone in its security policy guidance over the next decade. Following its GSI agenda, China would highly likely adhere to participating in some key entities like the BRICS collaboration, the SCO, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the “China+Central Asia” framework, and advancing security cooperation efforts with the aim of attaining parallel or congruent objectives, such as in the Gulf region. Similarly, in Xinjiang, a *status quo* approach could mean the continuation of policies aimed at maintaining social control and combating perceived threats to national security. The situation might involve ongoing strict security measures, surveillance, and re-education efforts targeted at Uighur Muslims. Concerns about human rights violations and tensions with the international community might persist, potentially resulting in diplomatic challenges for China. At the level of human security, Beijing will continue to tailor its policies through the Five-Year Development Plans, which would envisage many factors and attributions for its societal development while also paying attention to implementing its Global Development Initiative without any further active steps to enrich its goals or agenda.

In the domain of the functional layer in this envisioned scenario, China would maintain its *status quo* as a superpower in international relations until 2030 through a combination of factors and an unchanged role of its foreign and security policy agenda in practice. The Indo-Pacific *locus* response ensures stability in the region, while successful mediation of Ukraine’s conflict and active engagement in addressing the Afghan security vacuum would bolster China’s diplomatic influence. China’s investments in soft power projections, technological advancements, and its strategic arms trade and foreign aid policies would contribute to its continued dominance on the global stage, albeit strictly in the economic sphere.

If this scenario comes true, the functional domain of Chinese security policy, particularly highlighted through its activities in the Ukrainian crisis, mediation efforts, response to the security vacuum in Afghanistan, and

shifting global security landscape, can be seen as *ad hoc* actions lacking systematic planning. China is not expected to exhibit similar assertiveness in the future, reverting instead to its previous framework as a neutral and closed power. The activities undertaken by China since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic until March 2023 can be viewed as deviations from China's inherent nature and the primary objective of maintaining its previous *status quo* position. Another hypothesis might be that China's economic and, to some extent, technological growth has raised concerns in the Western world, leading to attempts to contain China through geopolitical means. In response, China has been compelled to employ military and diplomatic measures to counter potential external threats that, otherwise, it would not deploy. Consequently, China has maintained and will continue to uphold its status quo position within the international relations system, regardless of prevailing structural dynamics.

The CPC's ability to maintain its *status quo* in China's political life largely relies on the stability of the Chinese state. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the CPC has taken steps to consolidate power within the party. Xi's status as the core leader of the CPC has further solidified his external authority. It is probable that the CPC will continue to centralise power around the party's top leadership to maintain control. The CPC has long tied its legitimacy to economic growth and the improvement of living standards for the Chinese population. To maintain its grip on power, the Party will likely prioritise economic stability and development. This includes investments in infrastructure, technological advancement, and efforts to reduce poverty and inequality. Economic prosperity contributes to social stability, which is essential for the CPC's continued rule. The CCP has a highly centralised and well-structured system that extends from the central government to local party committees. This institutional structure allows the Party to maintain control at all levels of governance. Additionally, the CCP has a history of adaptability and has evolved to address changing circumstances. It will continue to adjust its policies and strategies to preserve its authority. The PLA, including the PLAN, would remain a crucial pillar of CPC control. The military's loyalty to the Party is enshrined in the Chinese constitution, and the CCP maintains a tight grip on the military's leadership. The PLAN, as a branch of the PLA, will also be subject to party control and will serve the CPC's strategic goals. It is expected that the CPC will continue to modernise and expand its military capabilities, including the PLAN, to protect its interests and project power in the region.

If China were to maintain its *status quo* stance in international relations by 2030, the perceptions of the United States towards China would likely be shaped by a combination of geopolitical dynamics, economic competition, and ideological differences. The US would likely perceive China as a strategic competitor in terms of global influence and power. China's status quo approach might be viewed as a means to solidify its position within the existing international order, potentially challenging American dominance beyond the 2030 timeframe. This could lead to a slight alleviation of Sino-American relations in the coming years, but with a strong continuation of a competitive and potentially confrontational relationship between the two countries by 2030 and even afterwards. What is sure is that the Chinese economy is going to continue with its overall growth throughout this period. This would likely sustain its economic growth and position as a major global player. The United States may perceive China's economic prowess as a threat to its own economic interests, particularly in key sectors such as technology and manufacturing. Concerns about unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and market access could persist, contributing to a sense of economic rivalry. What will make the two sides vie in the future, beside the economy, is that their ideological differences, particularly with regard to governance, human rights, and individual freedoms, will likely continue to shape perceptions. The US may view China's status quo approach as reinforcing its authoritarian model and challenging the values of democracy and human rights that the US upholds. This could further exacerbate ideological tensions and impact bilateral relations. The perceptions of the United States towards China would also be influenced by China's interactions with neighbouring regions. If China continues to assert its influence in the South China Sea, for example, the US may perceive this as an expansionist move that threatens regional stability and challenges American interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, China's *status quo* approach may also be seen by the United States as a bid for global leadership and influence. If China maintains stability and avoids challenging the existing global order, it could gradually gain more support and alliances from countries seeking an alternative to the US's leadership. This has already happened with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, while a similar pattern is observable in Central Asia, where China securely places its security agenda for Afghanistan. Furthermore, Ukraine's officials do not exclude China from endeavours to maintain peace in the wake of its conflict with the Russian Federation. This perceived rise of Chinese influence could

be viewed by the US as a challenge to its own global standing and as a potential threat to its alliances.

***Scenario II: Assertive China:
Security Policy with Chinese Characteristics***

Scenario II posits that China has already begun to pursue a “security policy with Chinese characteristics” based on its unique model of internal state and social development. Unlike the era of unipolarity or the hard coercive efforts of the United States to subjugate “disobedient and oppressive” regimes, China is now expected to pursue a softer approach until 2030. This approach is in line with the concept of concentric circles, in which China is located at the centre of the system of international relations, as reflected in the country’s name in its own language (中國, *zhōng guó*). Other units of the international system will experience changes that emanate from this centre. This scenario suggests that China will take an assertive stance in pursuing its security policy, but not at the expense of the existing international order. Instead, China will leverage its economic and political influence to shape the rules of the international system in a manner that aligns with its own interests. This approach will involve efforts to expand China’s sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in areas where it has territorial disputes with neighbouring states, such as the South China Sea and Taiwan.

China’s security policy with Chinese characteristics will also likely involve closer cooperation with other countries in the region, particularly those that share China’s vision of a multipolar world order. This will include countries such as Russia and Iran, which are seen as potential allies in China’s efforts to counterbalance the United States and its allies. At the same time, China will seek to build deeper economic and political ties with countries in Africa and Latin America as part of its broader Belt and Road Initiative. One of the main challenges that China will face in pursuing this scenario is managing the potential backlash from other countries that may perceive China’s rise as a threat to their own security and interests. China will need to engage in strategic communication to reassure its neighbours that its rise is not intended to undermine the existing order but rather to promote a more equitable and peaceful world order. Despite these challenges, Scenario II is a plausible direction for China’s future Grand Strategy.

As China continues to rise as a major global power, it is likely that it will seek to play a more assertive role in shaping the international system. Whether it will adopt a more cooperative or confrontational approach remains to be seen, but China's security policy with Chinese characteristics will undoubtedly have significant implications for the future of global politics.

Denoon (2021) believes that one of the main preconditions of China's GS to be implemented is the absence of major international wars and an effort to resolve the militarily allying of the US, Japan, Australia, and South Korea against China in its neighbourhood (2021: 239).

This scenario does not negate China's achieved hegemony. On the contrary, a hesitant hegemon would be most evident if this scenario were to come true. Evolving geopolitical dynamics by 2030 will play a crucial role in shaping China's assertiveness. Its increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific region and its aspirations for regional dominance may lead to a more proactive approach to addressing territorial disputes, such as those in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Additionally, growing tensions with major powers, particularly the United States, could further fuel China's assertiveness as it seeks to protect its national interests dominantly over Taiwan and project power. Domestic factors also contribute to China's potential assertiveness. As China continues to pursue economic development and safeguard national security, its leaders may face pressure to adopt a more assertive foreign policy to satisfy domestic expectations and maintain social stability. Nationalism, public sentiment, and the desire to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity will be the key considerations that could drive a shift towards a more assertive stance. China's ongoing military modernization efforts are an essential factor in shaping its assertiveness. As its military capabilities strengthen, China may be more inclined to protect its interests through a proactive and assertive security policy. This could involve an increased presence in strategically important regions, the establishment of military bases abroad, and the development of advanced weapon systems, reinforcing its ability to project power and influence. The implications of a more assertive China in foreign and security affairs would reverberate globally. It could lead to heightened regional tensions, particularly in disputed areas, potentially escalating conflicts and challenging the established international order. This scenario may also trigger countervailing responses from other major powers, leading to an intensification of strategic competition and potential arms races. Moreover, China's assertiveness could have ramifications for global governance, trade, and diplomatic relations as other nations recalibrate

their policies in response to China's evolving posture. In the scenario of China's "security policy with Chinese characteristics", several potential alternatives can be envisioned for how China may address various security challenges in the next decade. Firstly, regarding the Afghan security vacuum, China could play a role in stabilising the situation by engaging in diplomatic efforts and providing humanitarian aid to support the Afghan government and promote peace and stability. Alternatively, China may adopt a cautious approach, primarily focusing on safeguarding its own interests and investments in Afghanistan without actively intervening in the security dynamics. Collaboration with regional partners, such as Russia and Pakistan, could also be pursued to collectively address the security challenges and work towards a comprehensive solution. In response to Indo-Pacific security threats originating from the United States, China could choose to adopt a cooperative approach, seeking dialogue and cooperation to manage and mitigate tensions in the region. Alternatively, a defensive posture might be adopted, involving the strengthening of military capabilities and establishing strategic alliances with regional powers to counterbalance perceived threats. Emphasising diplomacy and soft power initiatives to promote multilateralism and regional economic integration could also be a strategy to build trust and reduce security competition. Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, China's role could vary. A neutral position might be maintained, advocating for peaceful dialogue and diplomatic negotiations between Ukraine and the relevant parties. Alternatively, China could leverage its diplomatic influence and economic ties with Ukraine and Russia to play a behind-the-scenes role, facilitating dialogue and promoting a peaceful resolution. In a more active role, China could engage as a mediator, utilising its diplomatic leverage and proposing innovative solutions to de-escalate tensions and restore stability. Stekić (2018) contends that if the democratic peace theory postulates are applied to the Arctic region, it would initially raise doubts about the Arctic region as a "naturally peaceful and stable zone". This scepticism stems from the observation that the key states involved exhibit heterogeneous political regimes, encompassing Western democracies on one end of the spectrum and autocratic regimes represented by Russia and China on the other. Such significant disparities in political systems are deemed sufficient conditions for the potential emergence of armed conflicts in the region in the future (Stekić, 2018: 29).

If this scenario comes true, China will highly likely get deeply involved in mediation in territorial disputes. It is a general principle that China demonstrates a strong commitment to upholding the territorial integrity of

nations within the framework of international relations. Using the dispute surrounding the final status of the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija as an illustrative case, Aleksandar Mitić (2022) identifies three key reasons for China's refusal to recognise the declared independence of Kosovo. Firstly, China's stance is influenced by the recent trend of several countries retracting their recognition of both Taiwan and Kosovo over the past few years. Secondly, China faces external pressure, particularly regarding issues related to Xinjiang and Hong Kong, which further shapes its position on international matters. Lastly, China's status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council plays a pivotal role in its decision-making, as Kosovo's acceptance as a UN member requires the approval of this influential UN body (Mitić, 2022).

In projecting its soft power globally, China has several options. Enhancing cultural and educational exchanges could promote understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. Investing in public diplomacy initiatives, hosting international events, supporting global development projects, and addressing global challenges like climate change and poverty could also contribute to projecting soft power. Additionally, China's focus on building strong economic partnerships through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative offers opportunities for infrastructure development and economic cooperation, further augmenting its global influence.

The United States is likely to respond to China's assertiveness by intensifying its geopolitical competition. The US may strengthen alliances and partnerships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region to counterbalance China's influence and promote a regional order aligned with its interests. Additionally, the United States may invest in diplomatic efforts to foster multilateral cooperation, particularly with countries affected by China's assertive policies, to present a united front against any potential challenges posed by China's rise. A more assertive China could raise significant national security concerns for the United States. As China enhances its military capabilities and expands its regional influence, the United States may perceive a greater threat to its own security interests. In response, the US could strengthen its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, reinforce alliances with regional partners, and engage in joint military exercises to maintain a balance of power. It may also increase intelligence sharing and surveillance activities to monitor China's activities closely. Recognising China's growing technological capabilities, the United States is likely to respond by bolstering its own innovation and technological competitiveness. The United States may invest heavily in research and development, particularly in emerging

technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and 5G networks, to maintain a technological edge over China. Additionally, the United States may strengthen regulations and export controls to prevent the transfer of sensitive technologies to China and protect intellectual property rights.

On a declarative level, the US NSS recognises that the current decade is crucial for both the United States and the global community, as it will shape the dynamics of geopolitical competition among major powers (NSS, 2022). In response to this, the NSS outlines a three-fold strategy towards China. Firstly, the strategy emphasises the need to invest in strengthening the foundations of American power, including enhancing competitiveness, fostering innovation, bolstering resilience, and safeguarding democratic values. These domestic efforts are seen as vital for ensuring long-term strength and maintaining a competitive edge in various domains, such as technology, economics, politics, military capabilities, intelligence, and global governance. Secondly, the NSS underscores the importance of aligning efforts with a network of allies and partners. By acting with shared objectives and a unified purpose, the United States seeks to forge stronger relationships and collaborative frameworks with like-minded nations. This approach aims to harness collective strengths, enhance cooperation, and address common challenges posed by China's rise. Lastly, the strategy highlights the need to compete responsibly with China (NSS, 2022). While defending US interests, the United States intends to engage in competition that is guided by responsible and ethical practices. This entails safeguarding the rules-based international order, protecting human rights, promoting fair trade, and advocating for democratic principles. By doing so, the United States aims to both protect its own interests and contribute to shaping a future that aligns with its vision. The first two elements of the strategy—investing in domestic foundations and aligning efforts with allies and partners—are crucial components that underpin the United States' ability to outcompete China. By focusing on enhancing domestic strengths and leveraging collective capabilities, the United States seeks to establish a competitive advantage over China across various domains (NSS, 2022).

Scenario III: China as a Dominant Unipol of the International System

Throughout history, the world has been witnessing a single hegemon almost continuously. The global throne has always been controlled by the strongest superpower(s), while their mutual cycles of governance have been

shifting from one to another. The most recent hegemon, the US, has been in a state of complete global power for more than 30 years, ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall and its emergence as the only superpower. However, numerous events testify in favour of the decline of US power and the reduction of global influence in political and security affairs. Chaotic military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, inability to impose itself as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran, failure to involve and resolve the war in Ukraine, political dissonances with the most important transatlantic partner, the European Union, de-dollarization of global trade, loss of influence in Africa and the Middle East, and even internal political turmoil are witnesses in support of this claim. Scenario III envisions a future in which China becomes the dominant global power, akin to the United States during the post-Cold War unipolar era. This scenario assumes that China will continue to build up its military capabilities, projecting power beyond its borders and reshaping the international order in its own image. Under this scenario, China would seek to expand its sphere of influence and exert greater control over international organisations and norms. This could involve efforts to promote Chinese values and institutions, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as alternatives to Western-led institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. China's rise as a dominant unipolar power would likely lead to greater geopolitical competition and conflict as other major powers like the United States, Russia, and India seek to balance against China's growing influence. This could manifest in various ways, from military brinksmanship to economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure. Furthermore, the rise of China as a dominant unipolar power would have significant implications for regional and global security. China's neighbours, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, would be forced to adjust their security strategies and alliances in response to China's growing power. Other great powers, such as the United States, would need to decide whether to accommodate or resist China's rise, potentially leading to a new Cold War-style standoff.

It may be assumed that if China becomes the dominant unipole by the end of this decade in the international system, it will not be motivated to further accumulate its hard power. Therefore, China's foreign and security policies in the next decade will be shaped by its pursuit of economic interests with a slight desire for regional stability, and, for sure, a quest for global influence. While China will probably seek to assert itself as a global superpower, it will also strive to avoid unnecessary conflicts and maintain a balance between assertiveness and cooperation in its engagement with

the world. Managing these complexities will be essential for China as it navigates the challenges and opportunities of its new role on the global stage. China's BRI agenda will continue to be a central element of its foreign policy in the next decade. China will work to expand its influence in the BRI partner countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond. What will constitute a specific difference from today's would be the fact that none or a very small number of units in the international system would oppose the Initiative and open economic (and even security) cooperation with China. Economic development, infrastructure projects, and trade agreements will be the primary tools through which China advances its interests. However, China will also face challenges related to debt sustainability, political instability, and concerns about its influence. It may adapt the BRI framework to address these issues and improve its image as a responsible global player.

China's interest in the Arctic will persist, primarily driven by its quest for natural resources and new trade routes. As the Arctic ice is certain to further melt due to climate change, China will seek to expand its presence in the region, both economically and geopolitically. China may pursue partnerships with the Arctic Council member states and invest in infrastructure projects such as Arctic shipping lanes and resource extraction. While China's activities in the Arctic will likely face scrutiny, it will maintain its status as an observer in the Arctic Council to engage with regional stakeholders.

Even if China manages to emerge as the unipole of the system, its stance on Taiwan will remain a highly sensitive and potentially contentious issue. While China may continue to assert its territorial claims over Taiwan, it is likely to employ a combination of diplomatic pressure, economic incentives, and military deterrence rather than immediate military action. Cross-strait relations may experience periods of tension, but an all-out conflict is not in China's best interest, given the potential global repercussions. China will also seek to consolidate its influence in East Asia through regional economic initiatives and alliances, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It will probably try to make kind of a new "hub and spokes" system with the countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia, as the US did during the last 50 years in this region.

If the third scenario comes true, over the next decade, China's approach to the Afghan security vacuum is likely to experience China's militarily involvement. China has a vested interest in maintaining stability in

Afghanistan due to its concerns about terrorism, separatism, and extremism spilling over into its Xinjiang region. That is why Beijing is expected to engage in diplomatic efforts to promote peace and reconciliation among various Afghan factions, but military means are not to be excluded. It may also increase its economic investments in Afghanistan, contributing to infrastructure development and supporting local governance initiatives. Furthermore, China may seek to cooperate with regional partners, such as Pakistan and Russia, to address security challenges in Afghanistan and promote stability in the region.

Regarding Indo-Pacific security threats from the United States, China is expected to adopt a cautious and strategic approach. China recognises the importance of maintaining stability in the region for its own economic and geopolitical interests. It will likely employ a combination of diplomatic engagement, economic partnerships, and military modernization to counterbalance perceived US influence. If it becomes the undoubted world superpower, China will for sure engage the PLA(N) in defending its ADIZ in the Eastern and South China Seas. It may also strengthen its regional alliances, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and actively promote its vision of a “community of common destiny” to enhance regional cooperation and mitigate potential conflicts. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, China is likely to adopt a cautious and non-interventionist stance. China’s primary focus is on maintaining stable diplomatic relations with both Russia and Ukraine to protect its economic and energy interests. China may advocate for peaceful negotiations and support diplomatic efforts led by international organisations such as the United Nations. However, China is unlikely to directly mediate the conflict or take a prominent role in resolving the crisis.

In terms of projecting soft power globally, China will continue to invest in cultural diplomacy, education, and media to enhance its global influence. The promotion of the Chinese language and culture, through initiatives such as Confucius Institutes, will play a key role in this endeavour. China will also seek to expand its economic influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to enhance connectivity and economic cooperation with countries across different regions. China will use its economic clout to forge strategic partnerships and shape global institutions, presenting itself as a responsible global leader and an alternative to Western dominance.

In a hypothetical scenario where China ascends to the throne of the global system as the sole superpower by 2030, several transformative

changes can be envisioned within the Chinese institutions, especially the CPC and the PLA(N). The CPC, in maintaining its grip on power, is likely to intensify efforts to consolidate its authority, potentially elevating the role of the General Secretary as the paramount leader. While domestic control remains a priority, the Party may adapt to a more transparent international posture to bolster its global image. Economically, China would emphasise innovation, technological advancement, and economic reforms while extending its economic influence through global development initiatives. Within the PLA(N), modernization and expansion would be pivotal, with investments directed towards advanced naval technology, such as aircraft carriers, submarines, and missile defence systems. The PLAN's global presence would expand, potentially involving the establishment of naval bases and logistics hubs worldwide to secure crucial sea lanes and resources. Strategic partnerships with other naval forces might be developed to maintain global stability and manage potential conflicts. On the foreign policy front, China's role as the only superpower would likely promote a more multilateral world order, advocating for international organisations and diplomacy. Economic dominance and investment would be expanded through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), strengthening economic ties and global influence. China would assume a more prominent role in conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts worldwide. Domestically, the government would foster patriotism to maintain public support for its global role while maintaining stringent domestic surveillance and control measures to quell dissent. Continued investments in research, education, and attracting top global talent would be priorities to remain technologically competitive.

But will the US's stance towards China undergo significant changes if China is to emerge as a global superpower in international relations by 2030? In geopolitical terms, the US would likely perceive China's rise to global superpower status as a fundamental shift in the geopolitical landscape. China's dominant influence and power could be seen as a direct challenge to American century-long dominance and could potentially lead to a re-evaluation of the global balance of power. The US would highly likely strive to regain its position, with or without the military power it possesses. Its strategy for regaining global dominance would be twofold: on the one hand, it will focus on further strengthening transatlantic relations through political cooperation with leading European nations, as well as through a potential reconfiguration of NATO's role and its Treaty. On the other hand, the US will strive to rely on the values-promotion strategy across the world

in its effort to break ties with China as an opposite, illiberal partner. With its superpower status, China's military capabilities would likely expand and modernise. The 2022 National Security Strategy of the United States aligns closely with the key elements outlined in the previously described third scenario. Adopted in 2022, the NSS reflects the strategic priorities of the United States. Most significantly, the NSS underscores the importance of fostering an environment of openness and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region, recognising its significance in shaping global affairs.

It emphasises the deepening of alliances in Europe, highlighting the value of strong partnerships in addressing shared challenges and advancing common interests. Furthermore, the NSS stresses the promotion of democracy and economic prosperity in the Western Hemisphere, aiming to strengthen stability and cooperation among nations in this region. In the Middle East, the United States seeks to support de-escalation efforts and foster integration, recognising the need for regional stability and cooperation. Additionally, the NSS underscores the importance of building partnerships between the United States and Africa, aiming to forge strategic alliances that promote development, security, and shared prosperity. Lastly, the NSS acknowledges the importance of a peaceful Arctic, recognising the region's increasing geopolitical significance. The United States seeks to preserve stability and security in the Arctic region, emphasising the importance of cooperation and peaceful engagement (NSS, 2022: 37-44).

The United States would view this development with heightened concern, perceiving China as a main military threat. There could be an increased focus on military deterrence, alliances, and potential conflicts in regions where American and Chinese interests intersect, such as the South China Sea, Indo-Pacific locus, and probably Central Asia. The ideological clash between the United States and China would become more pronounced if China attains global superpower status. The US's values of democracy, human rights, and individual freedoms would continue to clash with China's authoritarian model. The US would perceive China's global influence as a means to promote its own governance system, potentially leading to ideological confrontations and a battle for hearts and minds on the global stage. Concerns in the military, security, and ideology domains would probably spill over into the sphere of ideology. As a global superpower, China's economic strength would pose a significant challenge to the United States. The US would perceive China as a major competitor across various economic sectors, including technology, trade, and investment. Economic rivalry would intensify, potentially leading to trade

disputes, protectionist measures, and efforts to maintain economic supremacy. China's emergence as a global superpower would inevitably lead to competition for global leadership with the United States. Washington would perceive China's rise as an attempt to reshape global norms, institutions, and alliances in its favour. The United States may seek to rally its traditional allies and partners to counterbalance China's influence and maintain its own leadership position. Furthermore, perceptions can vary among different stakeholders within the United States, such as policymakers, analysts, and the general public.

Towards a less hesitant Hegemon

This book has examined China's foreign and security policy through a systematic analysis of its layers by deploying the sequencing method, providing a new perspective on the country's development of a potential Fifth Grand Strategy. Through case studies and a multi-year scientific study, the book has demonstrated how specific events and processes inherent in the current international order, i.e., ongoing armed conflicts, sanctions, social-related problems, the global environment, and others, have changed China's foreign policy preferences and what would be China's potential place in the international system in the years to come. In their paper published in 2019, considering the nature of China's engagement with the international system, Stekić and Obradović posit that China resembles a form of benevolent hegemon. This perspective takes into account that China, despite its considerable economic and political capabilities, has not yet demonstrated significant military assertiveness (Stekić and Obradović, 2019). While the rise in interest in the Grand Strategy has led to an overabundance of literature on the subject, this book has made a contribution to the study of Chinese Grand Strategy texts for several reasons.

- a. Firstly, this book is a pioneering effort to sequence China's security policy based on the fundamental academic premises of Security Studies. It highlights the importance of analysing the various sub-policies that form China's coherent foreign policy agenda. This inductive approach provides a holistic understanding of the researched phenomenon and emphasises the value of the obtained findings. However, it is important to note that this monograph focuses on providing a scientific analysis of China's current security policy towards specific states, regions, and objects based on available information. While China does engage with various regions, such as Latin America and Central America, this

monograph does not explicitly cover these interactions. This decision was based on the fact that there is no comprehensive, clearly formulated, and publicly available Chinese policy specifically targeting these regions that would warrant academic examination. It is worth mentioning that the United States serves as China's primary competitor on the global stage. However, this monograph did not delve into China's policy towards the North American continent or the United States, as it would deviate from the underlying logic of the concentric circles approach rooted in Chinese philosophical tradition. China aims to establish a hegemonic position primarily in Eurasia, followed by East Africa, Southeast Asia, the Arctic region, and other strategically significant areas. While I do acknowledge that Sino-American relations and rivalry are probably the most important academic topic within the scholarly literature on IR at the moment, it should be reiterated that Chinese policy towards the US as a sole entity is not as equally relevant. While China's relations with the United States are undeniably significant, they are not the primary focus of this monograph, which aims to track the evolutionary development of China's security policy and its efforts to construct a "harmonious multipolar world" in other dimensions. It is imperative to underscore that the delineation of China's security policy into three distinct layers—namely, functional, spatial-hierarchical, and institutional—should not be regarded as the sole and universally applicable framework. Rather, it stands as a pioneering endeavour put forth by the author of this monograph, open to potential refinements and adaptations. This framework serves a dual purpose: first, as a catalyst to inspire international security scholars to align their methodological and research approaches at an analytical level. This becomes especially pertinent in light of China's escalating prominence within contemporary academic discourse. In this regard, it is firmly posited that this book constitutes a partial contribution to a substantial and vital corpus of research endeavours dedicated to the examination of modern-day China.

- b. Another reason why this study's findings represent a productive addition to the knowledge gap is the intersection of China's security policy layers with the perception of the United States. By examining the categories of security phenomena over several years, patterns of regularity emerge, which take on different forms in the post-COVID-19 period. This results in the creation of new US strategies for a Cold War-like containment of China, which in turn produces an innovative Chinese

response. Throughout 2021 and 2022, a notable development emerged as China introduced a series of publications, marking a novel departure from its established diplomatic stance. These documents aimed to assertively highlight domestic political events transpiring within the United States, which stands as its principal international rival. This represents a noteworthy shift in the landscape of unilateralism, characterised by an emphasis on comprehensive analysis and dissemination of information pertaining to states acknowledged by *Unipol* as competitors, with such findings being made accessible to the global public. It is noteworthy, however, that these publications issued by the Chinese government invariably constitute a responsive measure to analogous reports originating from the United States. This is also one of the new and potentially growing issues that should be analysed by the scientific community in the future in order to understand Beijing's assertive actions in the near future.

- c. In spite of these two reasons, there are still numerous areas of Chinese foreign policy that require further research, and the author has identified these as well as the most pressing concerns that need to be addressed. This is the third reason why this monograph contributes to closing the knowledge gap. It has opened up a wealth of new avenues for studying China's security policy and strategic thinking.

By analysing the numerous layers of China's security policy, the findings confirmed the existence of repeating patterns independent of layer. In each of the mentioned cases, China, not only declaratively but also at the level of practical activities (where there are any), shows restraint and calls for a peaceful settlement of disputes. This outcome can have two-fold explanations. The book presented two potential explanations for China's hesitancy to assertively pursue its security policy. One explanation is rooted in the idea of China's benevolence, which is seen as a product of its civilizational evolution and unique philosophy that differs from the Western-centric perspective. This is exemplified by the differences in strategic thinking discussed in Chapter II. The second explanation is that official Beijing is buying time to strengthen its hegemony in the areas it wants to dominate, leading to a "calm before the storm" scenario. The book's scenarios suggest that the second explanation is more likely and that a new security assertiveness with Chinese characteristics will be realised to a greater extent.

China's modern response is based on the historical and traditional roots of China's culture and civilization. Triad ancient philosophical thought, which enshrined the rules of internal governance as noted by Hegel, together with what China has been experiencing throughout modern history, especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries, with the willingness not to harm any other country and to achieve to remain the superpower aiming to provide its own wellbeing to the nation, has resulted in today's international security policies of Beijing.

Has the Fifth China's Grand Strategy already developed?

In the concluding inquiry of this monograph, aimed at brevity, I contemplate the genesis of China's nascent Fifth Grand Strategy. There is a strong indication that this strategy has not only been formulated but also extensively operationalized for several years, suggesting its potential endurance is akin to that of its four predecessors. Bearing in mind that the proclaimed goal of "rejuvenating" and strengthening the Chinese nation is set for the year 2049, i.e., the middle of the 21st century, it is plausible that this strategy, with minor modifications, will remain relevant until that time, after which significant changes in China's strategic outlook regarding international relations and its place in the global order may occur. Therefore, it would be challenging to predict how the Chinese Grand Strategy will evolve, considering that the idea of China as a hegemon is a relatively new development in its near history.

Initiating a discourse on whether China's Grand Strategy has already reached a definitive formulation is undoubtedly a challenging endeavour, given the divergent perspectives within the academic community, not solely confined to the Western sphere but extending globally. If, as Rush Doshi posits in his 2021 publication, the core tenet of China's Grand Strategy entails the displacement of the American order, then the endeavour, which this author terms "the Long Game", has achieved a measure of success. This prompts consideration of the emergence of a novel, the Fifth Grand Strategy for China. Nevertheless, while it remains premature to assert that China's Grand Strategy represents the culmination of a coherent foreign policy agenda, it is possible to discern its inchoate contours, which began to take shape amidst the backdrop of the pandemic induced by the coronavirus. Given China's prominent role on the global institutional stage, particularly within multilateral frameworks such as the BRICS and BRICS+, one can anticipate that, in response to the intricate geopolitical landscape, China

will further refine and delineate its security policies *vis-à-vis* external entities in the ensuing decades. For a multitude of reasons, the characterization, as delineated in the title of this book section, depicting China as a “more hesitant entity” should come as no surprise, considering that this ascending global power has only recently embarked on its evolutionary trajectory in the international arena. As a result, the coming years and decades will offer ample opportunities for research on China’s foreign and security policy, while hopefully this book has offered at least a small impetus to contribute to these efforts.

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