

# The 11-dash-line

## ASEANs first line of Defense

a theoretical exercise in national defense



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## Introduction

This paper consists of a theoretical exercise in national defense. It is a thought paper purely conceived based on the changing security environment in ASEAN and the nations in the domain. The paper was developed for theoretically to counter the aggressive behavior of the Chinese regional ambitions. This is not designed to be pro-or against Chinese ambition but more to understand the changed narrative, mainly driven by the “top” of the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) leadership.

Two main narratives exist in the debate: First, we have 36 months until 2027, and second, the ambitions of China do not match the capability, and the goalpost must be pushed further out like 2035. However, it is not a peaceful transition. The history of the Chinese Communist Party as a clandestine and revolutionary organization has also made “political warfare” central to its *modus operandi*<sup>1</sup>. War is the stock of the times.

China’s rise and regional ambition is increasingly articulated in the political, military and economic domain. China is set to challenge the hegemonic position vis-à-vis the United States and states in the periphery of China and its neighboring countries. Our National and Defense guidance is clear: the PRC is the pacing challenge, and *Russia is an acute threat*. Both appear *to be converging*<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout history, the idea of hegemony has influenced world politics and power relations, frequently resulting in notable changes to the distribution of power. Since the end of World War II, Western hegemony—especially that of the United States—has been defined by a confluence of economic domination, cultural influence, and military power. Despite its uneven implementation, this type of hegemony was founded on liberal principles that supported democracy, human rights, and free-market economics (Ikenberry, 2011). Concerns over China’s current hegemonic aspirations are heightened by the country’s radically different growth trajectory, which mainly draws on its historical legacy of centralised rule, tributary systems, and cultural supremacy.

Historically, China’s hegemonic behavior can be traced back to the tributary system of the Ming and Qing dynasties, where neighboring states were required to acknowledge the cultural and political superiority of the Chinese emperor in exchange for economic and military protection (Fairbank, 1968). This system was less about mutual respect and more about enforcing a Sinocentric world order. The tributary system also established a precedent for China’s expectation of deference from other nations, a dynamic that echoes in its modern-day Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Clarke, 2017). The historical emphasis on dominance rather than partnership starkly contrasts with the Western model of alliance-building based on shared values and mutual benefits.

Furthermore, China’s historical experiences with humiliation during the “Century of Humiliation” (1839–1949), marked by invasions, unequal treaties, and colonial exploitation, have deeply influenced its modern approach to power. The ruling Communist Party has skillfully used this narrative to justify its assertive policies in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and other contested areas, portraying these actions as necessary to restore national dignity

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<sup>1</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xj\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xj_and_scs.pdf); Sprin 2019; last accessed on 8 October 2024

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.navy.mil/Portals/1/CNO/NAVPLAN2024/Files/CNO\\_NAVPLAN\\_2024\\_50Sat.pdf](https://www.navy.mil/Portals/1/CNO/NAVPLAN2024/Files/CNO_NAVPLAN_2024_50Sat.pdf); last accessed on 13 September 2023



(Callahan, 2010). This revival of historical grievances not only fuels nationalism but also legitimizes authoritarianism, making China's hegemonic pursuits more rigid and unyielding compared to the adaptive and often self-correcting nature of Western hegemony.

Conversely, despite its shortcomings, Western hegemony has frequently been restrained by internal criticisms and changes brought about by civil society and democratic government (Nye, 2004). Such self-control mechanisms are absent from China's hegemonic tendencies, which are rooted in authoritarianism and historical myths of superiority. China's hegemony is historically and fundamentally more hazardous than Western domination because of its strict and expansionist policies as well as its authoritarian governance form.

The theoretical exercise outlines a strategic pre-warning system applied across the ASEAN space. The system identified and determined the political challenge to the rise of China<sup>3</sup>. The Defense Posture Realignment Initiative (DPRI) is partially funded by the government of Japan and the United States<sup>4</sup>. Whereas ASEAN countries have not built on a defensive capability, China has verbalized the intention of China towards Taiwan. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs mirrors this: The People's Liberation Army aims to be ready by 2027 to absorb Taiwan. A U.S. assessment reads,

Additionally, the U.S. and our allies must develop locations that provide expeditionary airfields for dispersal and ports for distributed fleet operations. Ground forces armed with long-range weapons in the First Island Chain allow USINDOPACOM to create temporary windows of localized air and maritime superiority, enabling maneuver. Additionally, amphibious forces create and exploit temporal and geographic uncertainty to impose costs and conduct forcible entry operations.”<sup>5</sup>

The following was considered: *First*, China has drawn a defacto new border, real and sovereignty defined. *Second*, it will defend sovereignty. ASEAN has none of these features. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a strategic partnership between Japan, the United States, Australia, and India, has formed. This requires a force posture and joint force laydown properly distributed west of the International Date Line (IDL), possessing the capabilities and authorities to respond to contingencies while balancing lethality and survivability<sup>6</sup>. Without the United States and Japan, the strategic burden falls to defend Taiwan. But China does fear intervention and domestic discontent. Xi Jinping wrote,

“The **disintegration of a regime often starts from the ideological area, political unrest** and regime change may perhaps occur in a night, **but ideological evolution is a long-term process**. If the ideological defenses are breached, other defenses become very difficult to hold.”

*Third*, by design, this creates ambiguities and instabilities. For the United States and its allies, mainly the European Union, the South China Sea is an essential area of the Asia-Pacific region for three reasons: 1) it is part of a major transit route for maritime commercial traffic to and from East Asia and for the United States Navy; 2) disputes over the ownership of its many

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_tFFIZKoMM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tFFIZKoMM); 10 September 2024

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/02/u-s-indo-pacific-command-wants-4-68b-for-new-pacific-deterrence-initiative>; 2 March 2021; last accessed on 26 August 2024

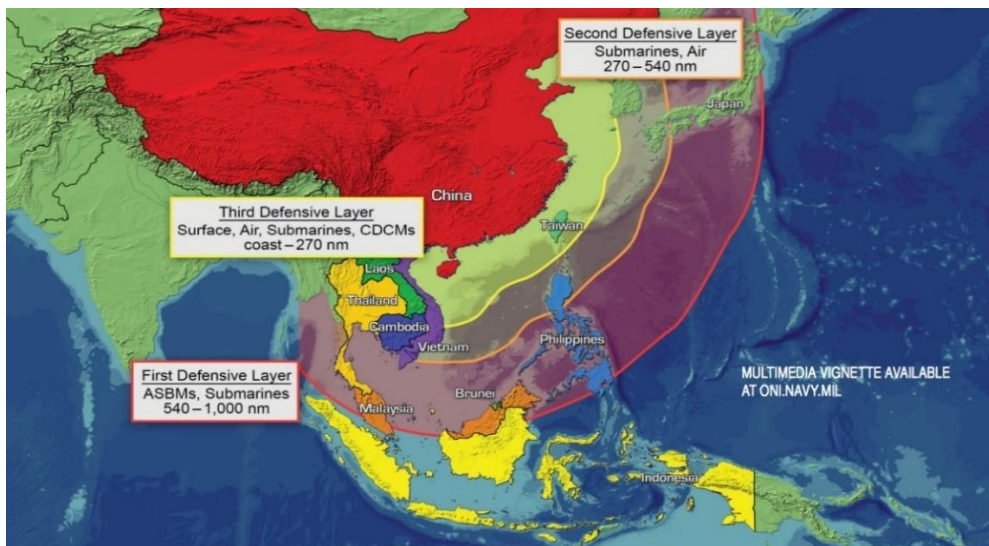
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

small islands, reefs, atolls, and rocks among China and several nearby Southeast Asian states, including one United States ally, the Philippines, generating tensions that results in conflict and instability; and 3) Beijing is using its growing influence to create a sphere of influence detrimental to the allies of the United States and ASEAN<sup>7</sup>. Officially adopted by the Central Military Commission (CMC) in November 2003 to conduct successfully such unrestricted warfare, was noted that “All boundaries lying between the two worlds of war and non-war of military and non-military” were totally removed<sup>8</sup>.

Wang Yi, China’s top diplomat, warned Jake Sullivan, America’s national security adviser, that China would not accept a Philippine presence at Sabina during their meeting near Beijing on August 27th-28th<sup>9</sup>. The message is clear: China is here to stay. Senior US military officials warned their Chinese counterparts against Beijing's "dangerous" moves in the South China Sea during the first talks of their kind between the commanders<sup>10</sup>.

The military buildup by China has created the fastest military build-up since Germany. The Chinese Navy is already acknowledged as being more significant than its American counterpart<sup>11</sup>, often referred to as the “strong enemy”<sup>12</sup>. The tremendous Asian continental power has also spent two decades investing in anti-access/area-denial weapons<sup>13</sup> to push both the American Navy and Air Force back far from its shores.



Chinese A2/AD bubble in the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean<sup>14</sup>

This paper theorizes that China will not back down and reiterate the Chinese determination to safeguard and protect their perceived Chinese sovereignty. To counter the aggressive nature of

<sup>7</sup> <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2015/07/americas-security-role-in-the-south-china-sea>; 10 September 2024

<sup>8</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xj\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xj_and_scs.pdf); January 2019; last accessed on 28 September 2024

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/09/10/the-scary-new-map-of-the-south-china-sea>; 10 September 2024

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.yahoo.com/news/senior-china-us-military-officials-040111482.html>; 10 September 2024

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/07/03/closing\\_the\\_davidson\\_window\\_784100.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/07/03/closing_the_davidson_window_784100.html); 3 July 2021; last accessed on 24 September 2024

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf); January 2021, page 11; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>13</sup> <https://missiledefenseadvocacy.org/missile-threat-and-proliferation/todays-missile-threat/china/china-anti-access-area-denial/>; 24 August 2018; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Chinese ambitions, a defensive line of detection and deterrence must be created in the interest of ASEAN. Countries in ASEAN need new defense-related communications, intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance, hypersonic, unmanned, and directed energy systems to remain ahead of the threat curve. Intelligence Enhancements and Information Sharing Programs<sup>15</sup> are part of the European PDI budget. No such complement is listed in the Pacific region in FY 2024/25. Only a deterrence system will achieve protection and keep an aggressive system in check.

The first line of ASEAN defense is aimed at strengthening the U.S. naval surveillance chain (“the First Island chain”) created by the U.S. Department of Defense. It establishes, through partnership part of the alliance in the region, strengthens the defense and builds up cohesion in the region.

## **Strategic Military Threat**

AUKUS facilitates Australia's procurement of nuclear-powered submarines, enhancing regional military deterrence. These submarines offer superior stealth, extended range, and endurance, positioning them to challenge China's dominance in vital maritime routes, especially the South China Sea—a key resource and commercial area (Lee, 2023). With China's construction of artificial islands and military assets in the region, deploying AUKUS submarines to patrol disputed waters could serve as a counterbalance to China's assertiveness. This increased military presence could undermine China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategies, which aim to restrict other nations' operational capabilities (Tan, 2022).

Furthermore, the enhanced military collaboration among AUKUS members is significant. Joint training and intelligence sharing allow Australia, the UK, and the US to effectively oppose China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. China's military modernization, particularly its naval expansion, poses a significant concern for both regional and global stability. AUKUS aims to deter Chinese aggression by fortifying military ties and exchanging advanced technologies, enabling member states to counter China's military advancements (Smith & Wu, 2024). This augmentation of capabilities empowers AUKUS nations to exert influence and uphold a rules-based international order.

## **Authoritarianism Vs Liberal Democracy**

Debates on whether China's hegemony is more dangerous than that of the West, especially the United States, have centred on China as a rising powerhouse in recent decades. For a long time, liberal democracy and Western hegemony were combined, but as China has emerged as one of the world's major powers, many people worry about what an authoritarian model will mean for the international order. They think that China's ambitions are not just regional; they think that it will soon overtake its neighbours and eventually replace US global hegemony (Nathan & Scobell, 2012).

The dangers of Chinese hegemony are at its core decidedly authoritarian, which is the polar opposite of liberal democratic values promoted across the West. In contrast to the West, where political power takes shape mainly through free elections, civil liberties, and the rule of law,

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<sup>15</sup> [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2025/FY2025\\_EDJ\\_JBook.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2025/FY2025_EDJ_JBook.pdf); 8 March 2024, page 7; last accessed on 25 September 2024

China represents one under the authoritative regime of the Chinese Communist Party. The CCP controls not only political power but also significant aspects of Chinese society, such as the media, education, and public discourse. Therefore, the western believes that the Chinese authoritarian will threaten America because it violates the human rights of a greater number of Chinese citizens (Broomfield, 2003). Although, the consolidated power allows the Chinese government to suppress dissent and maintain tight control over the population; human rights violations, censorship, and political repression are therefore a continuing concern.

While liberal democracies are by no means perfect, they nonetheless provide mechanisms of accountability, checks on power, and avenues for expressing dissent. Free functioning of political opposition, independence of the judiciary, and protection of civil rights are the hallmarks of liberal democracies. While these systems are far from perfect, they offer a level of personal freedom and political pluralism not found in more authoritarian regimes, such as China's.

China's aspirations for the world might be compelling enough to persuade other nations, particularly those in the Global South, to either embrace or absorb China's governance style. Through programs like the BRI, China has increased its economic and geopolitical might by providing nations with infrastructure development and financial assistance in exchange for economic growth and regional connectivity (Adhikari, 2023). China may thereby promote its system of administration, which prioritises national unity and state control over individual liberties and democratic rights.

Additionally, China's technology advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and surveillance have created new avenues for the spread of authoritarianism. The Chinese government has created advanced citizen monitoring systems, and as these technologies become more accessible, other governments may use them to stifle dissent and manipulate public opinion. They may also have an impact on the environment by generating recommendations based on data and inputs from either human or machine sources (Jochheim, 2021). This demonstrated how crucial the equal protection of individual liberties and privacy is to liberal democracies.

While Western hegemony has been seriously flawed in various aspects, it adheres to democratic precepts where political freedoms and human rights are generally observed, whereas Chinese hegemony as an authoritarian regime is intrinsically a far graver and more insidious threat to liberal democracy domestically and globally in the final analysis. The world has to be cautious with these competing models of governance, knowing full well that Chinese hegemony is likely to change the balance of power and the values that underpin it.

## **War By Other Means: Economic Coercion And Debt-Trap Diplomacy**

Though China debunked the West's accusation of its rising as a threat to the global stage, it is crucial to note that China was once a superpower for centuries. Therefore, China, as its name, the rise of a declining power, emerges once again in pursuit of its past glory by being an economic leader which threatens the western powers. Hence, in assessing the danger of China's rise, one of the aspects we should look at is the application of economic coercion and debt-trap in its strategy to rise.

According to Davis (2022), economic coercion is the deliberate use of economic means to accomplish political objectives, in which a business relationship is used to further a political objective and exert pressure on a nation or deter it from acting in a particular way. Regarding



Shiojiri's definition of economic coercion in 2024, Shiojiri states that since the term lacks a clear definition, it should be viewed from a different perspective. As a result, the G7 claims that economic coercion is using economic vulnerabilities and dependencies to undermine the foreign and domestic policies of G members as well as their international allies. China is more inclined to employ economic strategies to sway and convince people, particularly given its significant advantages in the economy. As China has grown on the global stage, it has become more connected with other countries, creating situations where it has more power and others depend on it. Right now, China is the biggest trading partner for over 130 countries around the world<sup>16</sup>.

China uses trade restrictions and tough tactics to pressure other countries, organizations, and companies into aligning with its economic and political interests. These pressures can include trade limits, boycotts, suspending contracts, or stricter regulations. By developing integrated supply chains, China increases its influence globally and uses market access to control or persuade other nations (Committee on Rules, 2023)<sup>17</sup>. In the context of boycott, boycotting is orchestrated through social media, press and television. A famous brand from Italy, Versace, received a warning from the Chinese Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission. The message said, "The anger of the Chinese people is not just words, it will lead to action." Media reports and propaganda stir up national pride, making it possible for China to claim that a company's actions have upset its people and should be changed (Szczepański, 2021).

To improve Chinese infrastructure and investment opportunities worldwide, Xi Jinping, the president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI encompasses two projects, the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt, which were designed to link China with other nations via land and sea, respectively (Himmer & Rod, 2022). Despite its popularity, the Belt and Road Initiative is criticised by several nations, one of which is the lack of transparency on the amount of money China provides to individual projects, the terms and circumstances of the loan, and environmental dangers. The second is China's alleged debt-trap diplomacy (DTD) through the BRI. China has come under fire for providing high-interest loans and exerting pressure on borrowing nations that they cannot afford.

The DTD meme was invented by an Indian pundit which the United States joined in the criticism and during the Trump administration, it warned that China has a plan to trap developing countries in debt, which they then use for strategic benefits (Brautigam, 2020). Debt sustainability in countries borrowing from China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a concern. In April 2018, Christine Lagarde<sup>18</sup>, former head of the IMF, warned that large-scale spending often carries the risk of failed projects and misuse of funds. She also highlighted that

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<sup>16</sup> Priyandita, G. (2023). *Chinese economic coercion in Southeast Asia: Balancing carrots and sticks*. (Working Paper No. 25). Hybrid CoE Working Papers. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/20231026-Hybrid-CoE-Working-Paper-25-Chinese-economic-coercion-WEB.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> The Committee on Rules was created on April 2, 1789, and called The Speaker's Committee because it helps with managing the House Floor. The Committee has significant power, including the ability to pass laws, add amendments, or change parts of a bill if most members agree.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank & Former Managing Director, International Monetary Fund, born in Paris in 1956, completed her high school education in Le Havre and Bethesda, USA, before earning a law degree from University Paris X and a master's degree from the Political Science Institute in Aix-en-Provence.

infrastructure financing can lead to rising debt, reducing funds for other spending and creating balance of payment issues.

“history has taught us that, if not managed carefully, infrastructure investments can lead to a problematic increase in debt. ... I have said before that, to be fully successful, the Belt and Road should only go where it is needed. I would add today that it should only go where it is sustainable, in all aspects.”

*Christine Lagarde, in Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation 2019<sup>19</sup>*

These concerns come from the fact that many countries borrowing from China have a history of needing help from the IMF due to past debt problems, and now they seem to be facing debt issues again. Almost all these countries, including China, also have weak institutions

## **Undermining The Rules-Based International Order**

Concerns have been raised regarding China's potential to undermine the rules-based international order, which is built on ideas like respect for international agreements, sovereignty, the rule of law, and peaceful conflict resolution, as a result of its ascent to global supremacy. China is challenging the established order as seen by its increasing aggression in international affairs, especially in the South China Sea and through programs like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

One of the key risks is China's selective adherence to international standards and regulations. For example, despite the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague's 2016 decision rejecting China's claims in the South China Sea, Beijing has continued to militarize manmade islands and assert control over crucial waterways. This resistance not only undermines the authority of international legal institutions, but also creates a dangerous precedent for other countries to ignore international verdicts, weakening the rule of law in global governance.

Furthermore, concerns regarding debt diplomacy and the development of dependency have been raised by China's economic aspirations, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It has been said that China has utilised debt to gain strategic advantages like control over vital resources or ports. The principles of fair competition and mutual gain, which are essential to the rules-based system, are distorted by this activity, which also undermines these countries' economic sovereignty (Johnston, 2019).

China's influence in international organisations also calls into question their neutrality and effectiveness. By leveraging its economic might, China has been able to alter the agendas of organisations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, frequently aligning them with its own national objectives. This jeopardizes the impartiality and universality of these organisations, which are intended to defend global norms and serve the collective interests of the international community (Mearsheimer, 2019).

## **Militarization And Regional Instability**

Particularly through its aggressive military and territorial actions, China's hegemonic objectives clearly threaten regional stability. China's policy is distinguished by more direct

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<sup>19</sup> Lagarde, C. (2019). BRI 2.0: Stronger frameworks in the new phase of belt and road. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.

military pressure and territorial expansion, in contrast to Western hegemony, which has historically depended on diplomatic and economic procedures. One prominent example is the South China Sea, where China has established military installations, constructed artificial islands, and made extensive territorial claims that directly jeopardise the sovereignty of neighbouring states and international maritime law (Foot, 2020).

The militarization of these contested territory marks a significant increase in regional tensions. China's military development has been swift and deliberate, with significant investments in upgraded naval capabilities, missile systems, and technology warfare powers. This military development goes beyond defensive measures, indicating a clear desire to challenge current regional power relations and assume a more dominating geopolitical position.

Furthermore, compared to Western hegemonic models, China's approach to regional influence is very different. China regularly employs more forceful tactics, whereas Western countries have historically sought to maintain peace through diplomatic agreements and international organisations. Despite its seeming economic nature, the Belt and Road Initiative has been criticised as a form of economic imperialism that uses economic instruments to increase political power and puts underdeveloped countries in a debt-trap (Saul, 2012).

China's attitude on territorial issues, notably those involving Taiwan and border regions with India and other neighboring nations, heightens the risk of regional war. Unlike Western hegemonic techniques, which normally respect international boundaries, China has demonstrated a readiness to utilize military posturing and outright conflict as political leverage. According to Amineh (2022), This strategy results in a more volatile and uncertain geopolitical climate, with a higher danger of localized or perhaps larger military conflicts.

China's hegemonic approach is unquestionably a more serious and immediate threat to global security than Western hegemony. The geopolitical environment has become more uncertain as a result of China's aggressive military growth, territorial aggressiveness, economic coercion, and unilateral approach to international affairs. China's policy of direct military pressure and strategic economic manipulation increases the risk of regional wars and the disruption of established international conventions, in contrast to Western nations that typically act through multilateral institutions and diplomatic frameworks.

## **China's rise to challenge the hegemon**

Established in September 2021, AUKUS is a trilateral security alliance involving Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This partnership seeks to strengthen stability in the Indo-Pacific amid rising geopolitical tensions, particularly due to China's assertive behavior. AUKUS is primarily focused on enhancing military capabilities, particularly through supporting Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. The alliance also emphasizes collaboration in critical fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum technology, and cybersecurity, underscoring its strategic and technological focus. Critics argue that AUKUS may intensify regional tensions and trigger an arms race in the Indo-Pacific (White, 2022).

In January 2019, the then-U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson, **reportedly warned his Chinese counterpart that the U.S. Navy would treat China's coast guard cutters and maritime militia vessels as**

**combatants and respond to provocations by them in the same way as it would respond to provocations by Chinese navy ships<sup>20</sup>.**

The ideological base for our theoretical position paper is the Chinese ambitions, aspirations, and ideological beliefs of Taiwan, is essential part of China, and the United States has no right to extend sovereign protection over Taiwan. The paradox of centralization is a key piece in institutional logic.

Historically, the formal structure of the centralization of authority was embodied in the fact that the **emperor made all major decisions**, and his authority extended from the palace to every corner of society, with **all officials acting on behalf of the emperor.**<sup>21</sup>

The question of centralization is addressed in the David M. Finkelstein doctrinal analysis titled *Guidelines on Joint Operations of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (Trial)*<sup>22</sup>. Since 2016, the military issued new doctrinal guidance to the People's Liberation Army leadership. On November 13, 2020, the Xinhua News announced that the Chinese Central Military Commission issued the new doctrine. The South China Sea, the threat of Uyghur terrorism in Xinjiang and the border conflict with India are the three security challenges for China in the coming years<sup>23</sup>. In China's case, for instance, there has been substantial analysis of the deployment of its IW concept of the "three warfares" (*san zhong zhanfa*), public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare, regarding long-standing international conflicts, such as Taiwan, the South China Sea (SCS), and territorial disputes with India<sup>24</sup>.

The decline in US naval activity contrasts with the roughly 1,700 warplanes that China sent into Taiwan's sensitive air-defense identification zone last year, almost double the number from 2021<sup>25</sup>.

The Chinese always looked at the Russian's strategy with great interest. The Russian military restructured its six military districts into just four, eliminated cadre units, converted all remaining units to Permanent Readiness Forces, drastically cut the officer corps, reorganized the command structure into a three-tier system of military district-to-army-to-brigade, and promised a massive modernization of military weapons and equipment<sup>26</sup>. In the first phase of the Ukraine conflict, PLA analysts, who have traditionally held the Russian military in high regard, will undoubtedly find Russian operations wanting<sup>27</sup>.

Michael Clarke wrote "The application of China's IW strategy in the South China Sea dispute demonstrates that, in contrast to Western understandings whereby IW is seen as an adjunct to more kinetic strategies of conflict, China's conception of IW is not just relevant in times of

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<sup>20</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>; 5 February 2024; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.prcleader.org/post/clm-insights-interview-with-xueguang-zhou>; 1 June 2020; last accessed 28 September 2024

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf); 1 September 2021; last accessed on 23 September 2021 titled *The PLA's New Joint Doctrine: The Capstone of the New Era Operations Regulations System*

<sup>23</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xj\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xj_and_scs.pdf); January 2019; last accessed on 1 October 2023

<sup>24</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/chinas-information-warfare-campaign-and-the-south-china-sea-bring-it-on/>; 16 June 2014; last accessed on 2 October 2024

<sup>25</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>; 5 February 2024; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.iar-gwu.org/blog/2018/02/22/russias-new-look-military-reforms-and-their-impact-on-russian-foreign-policy>; February 2021; last accessed on 2 October 2024

<sup>27</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/beijings-ukrainian-battle-lab/>; 2 May 2022; last accessed on 2 October 2024



conflict or crisis, but applicable across the peacetime-crisis-war spectrum. The application of aspects of the “three warfares” in Xinjiang meanwhile demonstrates China’s blurring of the lines between “national security” and “regime security.”<sup>28</sup>

Sukjoon Yoon wrote that Xi proposed 2035 as the year when the PLA reforms should be “basically” completed<sup>29</sup>. This adds eight (8) years to the calculations of the current trend line to have the PLA *combat-ready by 2027*. The RAND Corporation, as a descending voice, wrote, but *the reality is that 2027, let alone 2024 or 2023, is likely too soon for a Chinese attack on Taiwan*<sup>30</sup>. The People’s Liberation Army seeks to become a force capable of executing “integrated joint operations” in multiple battlespace domains, including information-centric warfare and future intelligent warfare.

In October 2017, the political direction was given as by 2020, the PLA should achieve mechanization, apply information technology and develop strategic capabilities and by 2035, the national defense modernization completed. By mid-century, that is, 2050, the people's armed forces should “become a world-class force”<sup>31</sup>. The conflicting dates surfaced in the Chinese papers. For the argument of this paper, we set 2027 as the date for conflict. Chinese intention is yet to emerge. U.S. Admiral Davidson states on 17 April 2018,

In short, China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea **in all scenarios short of war with the United States....**<sup>32</sup>

In general, limiting or weakening the principle of freedom of the seas could represent a departure or retreat from the roughly 400-year legal tradition of the early 1600’s<sup>33</sup> of treating the world’s oceans as international waters and consequently alter the international legal regime governing sovereignty over much of the surface of the world<sup>34</sup>. We need to point out that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), its navy and air force, is a party army *first* and a professional army *second*<sup>35</sup>. It has not been any major ground combat operation since 1979. The invasion of Vietnam ended in disaster. The PLA's inability to supply their forces and excessively high attrition rates resulted in a Chinese defeat. Again, the PLA is a *party army*. The PLA must follow the CCP’s instructions and defend its interests<sup>36</sup>.

China’s navy has never fought a combat action of any significant size, intensity, or duration, and its air force had limited aerial expertise. It struggles with the concept of joint strategic operations. It has no plans for logistical campaigns or deal with evacuation efforts for casualties or the destruction of the industrial base in the southern parts of China around Shanghai<sup>37</sup>. The amphibious and airborne landings suggest a complex campaign with uncertain outcomes in

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<sup>28</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xj\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xj_and_scs.pdf); January 2019; last accessed on 1 October 2023

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CO24144.pdf>; 1 October 2024; last accessed on 2 October 2024

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/11/xi-likely-wont-be-attacking-taiwan-anytime-soon.html>; 16 November 2022; last accessed on 2 October 2024

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/11/xi-likely-wont-be-attacking-taiwan-anytime-soon.html>; 16 November 2022, last accessed on 4 October 2022

<sup>32</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>; 5 February 2024; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/amateur-hour-part-i-the-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan/>; 18 May 2022, last accessed on 5 October 2024

<sup>36</sup> <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/Chairman-Xi/Chairman-Xi.pdf>; 2019, last accessed on 6 October 2024

<sup>37</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/amateur-hour-part-i-the-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan/>; 18 May 2022, last accessed on 5 October 2024

case of resistance. A precursor assault landing will test the Chinese joint operations and would be an indicator of Chinese intentions<sup>38</sup>.

If China really intends to invade Taiwan, it is going to have to make a massive investment in amphibious capability that dwarfs even its current buildup. While it is impossible to accurately assess the condition and organisation of their logistics and support forces using open sources, it is entirely possible to look at their capacity instead of making assessments of capability<sup>39</sup>.

Given the differing assessments of the actual correlation of forces, the PRC may well assess that they could avoid Russia's mistakes and carry out a successful assault<sup>40</sup>.

To impress Xi, commanders may be exaggerating their preparedness for war, but in doing so, they could be taking a potentially enormous risk. RAND describes this scenario as the "Five Incapables"<sup>41</sup>. Officers that cannot judge the situations understand higher authorities' intentions, make operational decisions, deploy troops or deal with unexpected circumstances<sup>42</sup>. We disagree with the assessments as the logical analysis certainly may hold, but the emotional and cultural analysis falls short of understanding the cultural aspects. The concept of "loss of face" holds steadfast within the PLA, as well as the reformation and ideological premises of Xi's pursuit of integration in Taiwan. In Xi's words,

...a "nation's backwardness in military affairs has a profound influence on a nation's security. I often peruse the annals of modern Chinese history and feel heartbroken at the tragic scenes of us being beaten because of our ineptitude." Such humiliations, in his view, should never be repeated<sup>43</sup>.

The Straits of Quemoy, also known as Kinmen and others, are contentious passageways. It is in the strategic interests of Taiwan to control these naval passages. They were meant to serve as "a stern warning" to "separatists," who, as Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said, "will be left with (...) blood flowing." The use of the letter "A" in the name of this operation has suggested that further demonstrations of force are to be expected in the future<sup>44</sup>.

*By 2027, [the] Chinese military will have the ability to effectively deal with threats brought by the hegemonism and power politics in the western pacific region, including issues relating to [the] Taiwan question and the South China Sea, as well as border tensions between China and India. – Li Jie<sup>45</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/11/xi-likely-wont-be-attacking-taiwan-anytime-soon.html>; 16 November 2022, last accessed on 4 October 2022

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/Chairman-Xi/Chairman-Xi.pdf>; 2019, last accessed on 6 October 2024

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/24/china-conducts-major-military-drills-around-taiwan\\_6672508\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/24/china-conducts-major-military-drills-around-taiwan_6672508_4.html); 24 May 2024; last accessed on 11 September 2024

<sup>45</sup> [https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI\\_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF); March – April 2023; last accessed on 13 September 2023

**Speed, deception, and coercion** will be critical to China’s strategy for a forceful unification. China will **need a swift seizure of Taiwan to decrease the potential of foreign intervention and avoid engagement with international forces...**<sup>46</sup>

The new Navy plans recognize the Chinese defacto position.<sup>47</sup> The PRC’s defense industrial base is on a wartime footing, including the world’s largest shipbuilding capacity now at the hands of the PLA Navy.

The “Three Warfares” demonstrates the IW strategy is applied to the warfighting domains of the Chinese PLA Navy. This competition, moreover, encompasses “all dimensions of power” with Moscow and Beijing pursuing “efforts short of armed conflict by expanding coercion to new fronts, violating principles of sovereignty, exploiting ambiguity, and deliberately blurring the lines between civil and military goals.”<sup>48</sup>

China put doubt on China’s assertion that it does not deliver arms to Russia. Compared to China’s rhetoric, the image that increasingly emerges is one of either incoherence, or willful deception<sup>49</sup>.

**Table 1. China’s Apparent Goals and Supporting Actions for South China Sea**

As assessed in January 2020 CNAS report

Supporting actions	Apparent goals			
	Rally support domestically	Deter U.S.	Intimidate neighbors and encourage appeasement/compliance	Tempt neighbors to cooperate in exchange for future economic benefits
PLA operations <sup>a</sup>	X	X	X	
China Coast Guard operations <sup>b</sup>	X	X	X	
Maritime militia swarming			X	
Dredging fleet and island construction team operations <sup>c</sup>	X	X	X	
Operations by state banks and state-owned enterprises <sup>d</sup>				X
State media operations <sup>e</sup>	X	X	X	

**Source:** Adapted by CRS from table on page 20 of Patrick M. Cronin and Ryan Neuhard, *Total Competition, China’s Challenge in the South China Sea*, Center for a New American Security, January 2020.

Regardless of the Chinese rhetoric the U.S. Senate report reflected in Table 1. provides conclusions leading to conflict. First, the PLA has, in every category, assumed a consistent position of *detering the United States, from intimidating neighbors and achieve compliance*. Each of the operations of the PLA is supported with *asymmetrical, hybrid state media operations* supporting the active PLA operation. This is consistent with state philosophy. The PLA is the arm of the communist party, executing its strategy.

Furthermore, each action is accompanied by a state bank or state-owned enterprise. Domestically, the operation is supporting the PLA operation. This is a war strategy and preparation for challenging the status quo regarding Taiwan by force.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> [https://www.navy.mil/Portals/1/CNO/NAVPLAN2024/Files/CNO\\_NAVPLAN\\_2024\\_50Sat.pdf](https://www.navy.mil/Portals/1/CNO/NAVPLAN2024/Files/CNO_NAVPLAN_2024_50Sat.pdf); accessed on 11 September 2024

<sup>48</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xj\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xj_and_scs.pdf); January 2019; last accessed on 29 September 2024

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2024/09/Sven-Biscop\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_358.pdf](https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2024/09/Sven-Biscop_Policy_Brief_358.pdf); Egmont Policy Brief 358, No End in Sight? The West, China, and the Russo-Ukrainian War, October 2024; last accessed on 2 October 2024

Chinese planning expanding on the Nine-(ten)-dash line, building up the radar and early surveillance capability. This “pushing” out the protective screen is built on keeping ASEAN divided and maintaining the alliance with the U.S. on a guesswork. By pushing out the issues that aggravate and test the treaty arrangement with the Philippines, for example, before striking at Taiwan.

In a war scenario, Taiwan will be starved to submission by blockade arrangement. In contrast, the United States and its allies are combatting on the fringes of the Pacific and the South China Sea, unable to support or supply the beleaguered island forces. The surveillance capability through its early detection capability on the disputed reefs will permit the PLA to respond to an approach by the allies and the United States through the Java Sea, the Malacca Straits, and the Japanese sea.

Using deception and manipulation of information, of course, has a long lineage in Chinese strategic culture, as illustrated by Sun Tzu’s oft-quoted maxim that “the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”<sup>50</sup> The history of the Chinese Communist Party as a clandestine and revolutionary organisation has also made “political warfare” central to its modus operandi<sup>51</sup>. The so-called “*salami-slicing*” or *gray zone operations* are deception operations in the hybrid war concept.

The linkage to the Russian leader accused the United States of “trying to maintain its global military and political dominance at any cost,” seeking “to inflict a strategic defeat” on Russia in its war with Ukraine and to “break the established security architecture and balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>52</sup> There is no comparable regional alliance to provide defense or integrated deterrence located in Southeast Asia to deter Chinese aggression effectively<sup>53</sup>.

To President Xi, annexing Taiwan would be particularly meaningful because it is a feat Mao could not accomplish and would affirm Xi’s reputation and iron grip on state power. Xi has several key objectives as president, including the completion of the PLA modernization by 2027, the annexation of Taiwan, the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative, and most importantly, the National Rejuvenation by 2049 (the centenary of the PRC).<sup>54</sup>

**A critical view would suggest that President Xi is unwilling to endure the potential international backlash on his reputation, in addition to the sanctions and international response triggered by a violent annexation<sup>55</sup>.**

Xi has several key objectives as president, including the completion of the PLA modernization by 2027, the annexation of Taiwan, the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative, and most importantly, the National Rejuvenation by 2049 (the centenary of the PRC). The “great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” has been

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<sup>50</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xi\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xi_and_scs.pdf); Spring 2019; last accessed on 4 October 2024

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.yahoo.com/news/russia-begins-massive-naval-drills-150027333.html>; 10 September 2024; last accessed on 11 September 2024

<sup>53</sup> [https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI\\_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF); March – April 2023; last accessed on 13 September 2023

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



President Xi's goal, marking the emergence of China as the leading global power by 2049<sup>56</sup>.

A significant redrawing of the map of the South China Sea began when Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. In the subsequent three years, China built seven new bases in the Spratly Islands, three of them with large airfields, on rocks and reefs otherwise contested by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Taiwan. These bases now play host to a significant, permanent presence of Chinese troops, ships and aircraft, as well as advanced intelligence capabilities<sup>57</sup>.

With the August deployment of H-6J, Chinese media highlighted its electronic warfare and strike capabilities, against the US.[62] When the **DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missile** was launched as part of a larger exercise, the Chinese media stated that “**the live-fire DF-26 exercises showed that the US cannot use aircraft carriers.**”<sup>58</sup>

Chinese ambitions are clear, but Beijing’s claims to sovereignty over this vast realm are far from indisputable<sup>59</sup>. It assumes if challenged, the Peoples Liberation Navy competes with the U.S. Navy in a state-to-state conflict. Thus, the budgetary constraints need to be in contrast with the Chinese ambitions. In contrast, the fiscal restraints remain challenging towards the threat.

In FY 2024 the PDI funding is 9,060,125 USD. By FY 2027, the budget will shrink to USD 5,490,955 or 39%. In other words, with a pending war scenario by FY 2027, the U.S. forces fighting with 39% less than today<sup>60</sup>.

The PLA has been cautious in its direct interactions with the US military. China has not engaged in risky brinkmanship with US platforms, and direct encounters have tended to be safe and professional<sup>62</sup>. In the past, public statements were not accompanied by an event but were increasingly belligerent. In particular the Chinese military is keen to demonstrate to the U.S. and its allies its offensive capabilities.

China’s claims have now taken on a life of their own. China is not just claiming all the water but the islands, the seabed, the resources in it, and the airspace above it, too. And in 2013, **Beijing added a tenth line—to include Taiwan**<sup>63</sup>.

Taking the Chinese sensibilities under consideration, connectivity to the Taiwan line of digital defense will integrate Taiwan into ASEAN and strengthening the defense capabilities of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/09/10/the-scary-new-map-of-the-south-china-sea>; 10 September 2024; last accessed on 11 September 2024

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.prcleader.org/post/the-pla-s-evolving-role-in-china-s-south-china-sea-strategy>; 1 December 2020; last accessed on 27 September 2024

<sup>59</sup> <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1317&context=nwc-review>; 2014; last accessed on 4 October 2024

<sup>60</sup> [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2024/FY2024\\_Pacific\\_Deterrence\\_Initiative.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2024/FY2024_Pacific_Deterrence_Initiative.pdf); page 28,

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2024/04/03/pacific-problems-why-the-us-disagrees-on-the-cost-of-deterring-china/>; 3 April 2024; last accessed on 26 September 2024

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.prcleader.org/post/the-pla-s-evolving-role-in-china-s-south-china-sea-strategy>; 1 December 2020; last accessed on 27 September 2024

<sup>63</sup> <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/south-china-sea-reveals-china%E2%80%99s-grand-strategy-188968>;

ASEAN. The information exchange will see a flurry of intelligence activities targeting the ASEAN 11-Dash-Line. Beijing must recognize that such an outcome would undermine its entire “peaceful development” policy and put at risk its relations with the West and many regional states<sup>64</sup>. It is a litmus test.

In a recent public meeting between the heads of CIA and MI6, despite the threat posed by Russia and the risk of conflagration in the Middle East, both chiefs, William Burns and Richard Moore, stressed that their biggest challenge was China’s rise.

Adm. Davidson said six years. You must ask him where he made that assessment. There are spans from today to 2045,” Aquilino said. “My opinion is this problem is much closer to us than most think.”<sup>65</sup>

During a May 2022 briefing from the US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines to the Senate Armed Services Committee, she stated that “China is watching how the nations of the world respond to Russia and considering a potential invasion of Taiwan. And President Xi is scrutinizing Putin’s playbook in the international response.”<sup>66</sup>

The rise of China is the principal intelligence and geopolitical challenge of the 21st century. However, the challenges of the past are being accelerated in the present and compounded by technological change. Beyond Ukraine, the work together aims to interrupt the reckless campaign of sabotage across Europe being waged by Russian intelligence and their cynical use of technology to spread lies and disinformation designed to drive wedges of the U.S.-led regional security architecture and thereby facilitate more significant Chinese influence over the region<sup>67</sup>.

The Russian intelligence services are increasingly seeking a coalition of convenience to pursue their tactical battlefield advantages to influence the global supply chain. Thus, Russian acquisition strategies do not incorporate traditional trading routes. Therefore, there is considerable exercise of arbitrary power by the top leaders. Indeed, the Chinese bureaucracy is institutionalized to reinforce this central characteristic<sup>68</sup> where the power to allocate personnel is under the tight grip of the higher authorities.

The creation of an 11-Dash Line of Defense (11DLD) addresses strategic movements within the zones. The information detected allows forward intelligence collection, assessment of changing intent and pre-warning for regional alert levels. Besides the apparent intelligence assessment, the 11-Dash-Line is a safety warning net that provides an alert channel for maritime safety.

The defensive line will also enhance the protection of Taiwan in the geopolitical sphere. This will result in reactions by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), but the alignment of a defensive posture will align the Japan-Philippine-Indonesia-South Korean-Taiwan

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<sup>64</sup> <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2015/07/americas-security-role-in-the-south-china-sea>; 10 September 2024

<sup>65</sup> <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/23/military-takeover-of-taiwan-is-top-concern-for-indopacom-nominee-aquilino>; 23 March 2021; last accessed on 11 September 2024

<sup>66</sup> [https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI\\_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF); March – April 2023; last accessed on 13 September 2023

<sup>67</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>; 5 February 2024; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.prcleader.org/post/clm-insights-interview-with-xueguang-zhou>; 1 June 2020; last accessed on 4 October 2024

relationship<sup>69</sup>. Through its Official Security Assistance (OSA) scheme, Tokyo has sought to strengthen the “security capacities” of like-minded states, including Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Japan also signed reciprocal access agreements (RAA) with both Australia and the Philippines in 2022 and earlier this year, respectively<sup>70</sup>.

Indirectly, the 11DLD will provide ASEAN neighbors with a network of pre-warning systems available to the more significant nations of ASEAN countries. Countries like Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia should be integrated in this new defense program. China's increasing global supremacy poses hitherto unheard-of difficulties, setting it apart from Western hegemony with its reliance on state-centred tactics. One example of its economic power is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which establishes dependencies that give Beijing considerable sway over member countries. By placing strategic control above mutual development, this strategy upends long-standing frameworks of international collaboration (Rolland, 2020; Mearsheimer, 2019).

Additionally, China's technological authoritarianism intensifies its threat. Programs like the Digital Silk Road export surveillance tools, empowering autocratic governments and undermining global human rights. Such advancements, combined with its militaristic policies in regions like the South China Sea, destabilize the rules-based order and challenge democratic governance globally (Carnegie Endowment, 2023; Kaplan, 2021).

Despite its shortcomings, Western domination frequently placed a strong emphasis on democratic ideals and accountability. China's model, on the other hand, provides a substitute that promotes authoritarian rule without any pressure for change, which could undermine democratic principles around the world (Pacific Affairs, 2024). This difference highlights the wider threats that China's imperial aspirations pose.

On the contrary, AUKUS underscores the importance of developing and sharing cutting-edge technologies such as hypersonic missiles, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance the strategic capabilities of its members and counter China's growing influence in critical military domains. In modern warfare, AI plays a vital role in improving decision-making, optimizing defense systems, and enabling autonomous operations. Quantum computing offers unprecedented encryption capabilities, crucial for protecting communication networks and safeguarding sensitive information from adversaries. Meanwhile, hypersonic missiles—capable of evading existing missile defense systems—provide AUKUS members a significant tactical advantage due to their unmatched speed and performance. Through collaboration in these high-tech fields, AUKUS aims to solidify its strategic advantages against China (Wyatt et al., 2024).

In addition to advanced technology, cybersecurity is a vital focus of AUKUS, emphasizing collaboration in tackling evolving cyber threats, particularly those from China. By pooling resources and expertise, the partnership enhances cyber defenses, enabling members to better detect and respond to state-sponsored cyber intrusions. These initiatives are critical for preventing cyber espionage and protecting intellectual property, which is often targeted by sophisticated Chinese hackers. AUKUS prioritizes quantum encryption to ensure secure communication channels and protect sensitive data from interception. By enhancing resilience against cyberattacks on national infrastructure, the alliance mitigates risks in critical sectors like banking, energy, and defense. AUKUS, by integrating advanced technology with robust

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<sup>69</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMhle4o0uk0>; 8 September 2024; last accessed on 10 September 2024

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/IP24080.pdf>; 4 October 2024

cybersecurity measures, ensures stability and security in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific landscape (Raska & Bitzinger, 2023).

## **Diplomatic Isolation of China**

The establishment of AUKUS marks a significant moment in the ongoing diplomatic encirclement of China, reinforcing existing alliances while encouraging resistance to China's assertive posture. AUKUS serves as a standalone security framework that complements and strengthens other security arrangements, including the Quad (Kahn, 2023)—which comprises the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. The Enhanced Quad, AUKUS, and NATO-Plus collectively bolster regional and international collaboration among powerful actors committed to maintaining security and norms amidst challenges, particularly from China. This consolidation of power sends a strong message opposing China's global ambitions and diminishes its influence in shaping consensus on strategic international and regional issues.

AUKUS also indirectly affects smaller nations, many of which are increasingly wary of China's economic and territorial ambitions (Kuo, 2021). These countries, caught between reliance on China's economic might and the desire for regional stability, may find strategic alignment with AUKUS appealing. AUKUS offers these nations a means to counterbalance Chinese hegemony through a partnership grounded in security and shared strategic interests.

Consequently, this dynamic encourages regional pushback, empowering smaller Indo-Pacific states to assert their autonomy and engage within a security framework that challenges Beijing's influence. The ramifications of AUKUS extend beyond its members, inspiring a broader coalition to counter China's regional ambitions and limiting its capacity to conduct unilateral operations (Li, 2022).

AUKUS presents a serious diplomatic danger to China by strengthening alliances and advocating for a regional united front. In addition to strengthening the alliances between superpowers, it also provides tiny nations with the opportunity to reject Chinese support, which eventually improves Beijing's standing internationally (Imannuridin et al., 2024). This twofold effect further demonstrates the strategic significance of AUKUS, which acts as a crucial geopolitical check on China's ascent and shapes the security climate of the Indo-Pacific region. In any case, AUKUS is a major factor in Beijing's increasingly "diplomatically encircled" calculus in addition to being a coup in the region's power dynamics.

## **Impact on Regional Military Balance**

### **Change in the Dynamics of Power**

The formation of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States security alliance, or AUKUS, has significantly changed the Indo-Pacific military balance by acting as a tactical check on China's growing power. By enabling Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines and improve its defense capabilities, AUKUS strengthens the strategic standing of states that are aligned with the United States in the region. This shift immediately challenges China's regional dominance and demonstrates a united front against its aggressive strategies, such as the militarization of the South China Sea and increasing naval actions in the Indo-Pacific (Herlihy, 2023; Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2023).



AUKUS also affects other regional powers. Japan has bolstered its security posture by cooperating with the United States and boosting military spending, citing concerns over China's actions in the Senkaku Islands (Security at the Core, 2021). Similarly, India, a Quad member, has broadened its military ties and increased maritime cooperation to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean. Despite being cautious due to its economic ties with China, South Korea has bolstered its military capabilities and joined efforts to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific (Stavridis, 2022). When taken as a whole, these responses demonstrate how regional nations have strategically adjusted to thwart China's ambition and maintain a steady balance of power.

### **Strategy of Deterrence**

Another crucial role of AUKUS is to strengthen deterrence against potential Chinese aggression. By stressing the sharing of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing and by promising to utilise nuclear-powered submarines, the treaty ensures that the region's allies can project power and preserve a qualitative edge. This trend complicates China's geopolitical calculations, particularly given its ambitions for Taiwan and disputed regions such as the South China Sea and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (Trends Research, 2021; Herlihy, 2023).

With their extensive operational ranges and stealth capabilities, AUKUS submarines make any potential aggression more costly. This credible deterrent reduces the likelihood of China acting unilaterally since a technologically advanced adversary increases the likelihood of a war escalation. Additionally, by strengthening the perception of a robust and cohesive framework for collective defense, the alliance discourages China from exploiting regional vulnerabilities (Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2023).

### **Influence on Regional Alliances**

The AUKUS alliance—formed by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia—has had a considerable impact on the dynamics of regional alliances in the Indo-Pacific. The alliance's primary objective is to strengthen defensive capabilities, particularly in light of Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. The region's overall security and deterrent posture is improved by this significant action, which enhances the Royal Australian Navy's undersea capabilities. The deployment of these state-of-the-art submarines not only improves Australia's maritime security but also shows its friends that it is committed to maintaining a peaceful and secure Indo-Pacific region.

AUKUS's strategic objective is to counterbalance China's growing influence and assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. The alliance aligns with the strategic goals of other regional blocs, including the Quad, which consists of Japan, India, Australia, and the United States. These partnerships aim to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific where international law and maritime freedom are upheld. However, the creation of AUKUS worries Southeast Asian nations, particularly those that are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). AUKUS has the potential to reduce ASEAN's influence in regional security issues because the organization's strategic goal strongly emphasizes dialogue, non-interference, and peaceful dispute settlement. Southeast Asian nations are also worried that AUKUS could result in heightened militarization and tensions in the area and are cautious about getting caught in the crossfire between superpowers.

AUKUS has important diplomatic and strategic repercussions in addition to geopolitical implications. An arms race might result from the advent of sophisticated military capabilities, such as nuclear-powered submarines, which might incite reactions from other regional countries. This situation has the potential to destabilize the area and intensify hostilities between China, India, and Japan, among other significant nations. Additionally, AUKUS adds additional elements to the current network of regional security agreements, such as the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance and the ANZUS (Australia, additional Zealand, United States Security Treaty). The potential for bloc-thinking and the increased militarization of the Indo-Pacific are worries raised by these alliances, even while they improve military cooperation and information exchange among member governments.

Other regional actors have also re-examined their defense and security plans in response to the creation of AUKUS. Nations like South Korea and Japan might feel pressured to improve their own defenses and look for stronger security connections with the US and other allies. With several alliances and partnerships existing and overlapping in the area, this change may result in a more fragmented security environment. Furthermore, the existence of AUKUS emphasizes how crucial it is to preserve the Indo-Pacific's power balance so that no one nation can take control of the area.

Navigating this new security environment while maintaining ASEAN's significance and relevance is a challenge. Through cooperation and communication, ASEAN has historically played a significant role in promoting regional stability. However, the focus may shift from multilateral engagement to more bilateral and trilateral security agreements because of the rise of AUKUS and similar alliances. To adapt to this changing environment, ASEAN needs to strengthen its own security measures, increase unity among its member states, and enhance its capacity to handle problems.

## **Counter Arguments**

The establishment of AUKUS, a trilateral security pact between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, has generated a great deal of debate in the field of international relations. Some view the alliance as a destabilizing force in the Indo-Pacific, while supporters argue it is a defensive response to China's growing aggression. Furthermore, AUKUS's significant military and economic growth raises doubts about its ability to help balance China's dominance.

## **AUKUS as Defensive Rather than Offensive**

It is common to portray AUKUS as a program intended to limit China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Supporters respond that the coalition is defensive, not offensive. AUKUS was formed because of tensions over China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, its fortification of artificial islands, and its increasing military action near Taiwan and other disputed areas (Grossman, 2021). Many have viewed these shifts as a direct challenge to the existing rule-based international order.

AUKUS can be seen as a preventative strategy from this angle. For example, the gift of sophisticated nuclear-powered submarine technology to Australia is not meant to incite aggression but rather to strengthen deterrence. Supporters claim that by giving member governments the means to successfully counter possible threats, the alliance aims to maintain regional stability. Instead of "provoking conflict,"

AUKUS aims to "enable peace and stability in our region," as former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison put it (Morrison, 2021). By portraying it as a reaction to China's assertiveness rather than a catalyst for animosity, this framing highlights the defensive character of AUKUS.

## **China's Growing Power and Its Implications for AUKUS**

Despite AUKUS's strategic objectives, the alliance's impacts might be offset by China's rapid economic and military advancement. China is currently the world's second-largest economy and a significant force in infrastructure, technology, and global supply chains. This economic leverage allows Beijing to extend influence well beyond its borders, diminishing the relative strength of long-standing Western alliances (Zhao, 2022).

China has made tremendous military modernization efforts, turning the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into a highly technologically sophisticated military force. For instance, Beijing is still investing in space capabilities, artificial intelligence, and hypersonic missiles, and the PLA Navy now has more ships in service than the US (Cordesman, 2022). These developments cast doubt on the strategic advantage that AUKUS aims to offer and may reduce the alliance's ability to effectively thwart China's aspirations.

Furthermore, through diplomatic projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has been able to strengthen its ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. By fostering multilateral cooperation and establishing economic linkages, Beijing has become a significant player in both regional and global affairs. This diplomatic strength might erode the unity and influence of AUKUS as regional actors weigh the benefits of supporting China against the risks of offending it.

Concerns about maintaining a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region are reflected in the AUKUS controversy. Although the alliance is presented as a defensive reaction to China's aggression, given China's economic and military expansion, it is unclear if it will be able to change the regional power dynamics. These rebuttals demonstrate the complexity of modern geopolitics, where coalitions such as AUKUS must balance the need to defend its intentions with the need to adapt to a quickly changing strategic environment. Whether AUKUS can successfully maintain regional peace or if China's increasing influence will continue to influence the Indo-Pacific order will depend on future events.

## **Conclusion**

In Conclusion, AUKUS undeniably stands as the most significant and multifaceted threat to China's strategic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. The pact, established in 2021, has redefined the regional power dynamics by equipping Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and enhancing the military interoperability of its member states. This development directly challenges China's dominance in critical maritime routes such as the South China Sea and creates a credible deterrent against potential acts of aggression, including territorial disputes and moves against Taiwan. Additionally, by prioritizing cutting-edge technology innovations like artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and hypersonic missiles, AUKUS gives its members a significant advantage over China's cybersecurity and military capabilities. AUKUS has equally significant diplomatic repercussions.

AUKUS isolates China on the global scene by supporting regional opposition to China's economic and territorial aggressiveness and bolstering other alliances like the Quad. The principles and security guarantees provided by AUKUS and its allies are becoming more and more popular among smaller countries in the Indo-Pacific region, which are concerned about Beijing's expanding power. While the increased military presence in key waterways jeopardizes China's access to crucial trade routes, the treaty also disrupts China's Belt and Road Initiative and increases scrutiny of its infrastructure projects.

It is impossible to overstate the wider ramifications of this trilateral security agreement, even while some contend that AUKUS is largely defensive and that China's military and economic might are still formidable. In a polarized Indo-Pacific, AUKUS signifies a change in regional alliances, promoting multilateralism and forcing countries to reevaluate their strategic alignments. AUKUS is a key component of the regional security architecture because of its ability to encourage cooperation among like-minded countries and its function in establishing a reliable deterrence framework.

Ultimately, AUKUS is more than a military pact; it is a strategic reconfiguration that challenges China on every front—military, technological, diplomatic, and economic. Its establishment signifies a collective resolve to counterbalance Beijing's ambitions, making it the most pressing and comprehensive threat to China's pursuit of dominance in the Indo-Pacific. The enduring impact of AUKUS on global power dynamics and regional stability underscores its critical importance in shaping the future of international relations in this pivotal region.

## Preparing for War

China has announced by 2027 that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) must be combat-ready and combat-ready to address the Taiwan question. Adm. Davidson stated,

“Their assessment is based on a speech by President Xi that challenged the People's Liberation Army to accelerate their modernization programs to develop capabilities to seize Taiwan and move it from 2035 to 2027... If Adm Aquilino and Adm. Davidson said that China had an intent, has decided, and intends to invade and seize Taiwan. I can't entirely agree with that. I see no evidence of that actual intent or decision-making. What I'm **talking about is capability**,” he said in response to Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Va.) during the hearing<sup>71</sup>.

“It's a capability, not an intent to attack or seize. My assessment is operational. **Do they have the intent to attack or seize in the near term defined as the next year or two?** My assessment of what I've seen right now is no, **but that could always change**. Intent is something that could change quickly.”<sup>72</sup>

The Diplomat quoting the Japanese 2022 National Defense Strategy,

It is believed that through the series of activities around Taiwan, China seeks to create a fait accompli where (the) Chinese military is continuously operating and

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<sup>71</sup> <https://news.usni.org/2021/06/23/milley-china-wants-capability-to-take-taiwan-by-2027-sees-no-near-term-intent-to-invade>; 23 June 2024; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

improving its actual combat capabilities. Moreover, China launched nine ballistic missiles on August 4, 2022, five of which landed within Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This was perceived as a threat to residents.<sup>73</sup>

The official language oscillates between “the Chinese are coming” and “no, we see no immediate attack”. The intent weighs differently in the broader Asian domain. Japan's defense is at the level of “threat”. Chinese leader Xi Jinping grew exasperated, not at the risk of war, but at the timeline in 2027 or 2025. The first year, 2027, is a fixation in Washington. It shifts the debate about war readiness and a strategic shift from long-term to short-term<sup>74</sup>. The worst-case scenario is **3 years or 36-months or maximum, next six years.**

“The threat is manifest during this decade,” Davidson said at the end of his answer, “in fact, in the next six years.”<sup>75</sup>

The comments by outgoing Admiral Davidson were matched by General Mark Milley, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, developing the capabilities to seize Taiwan from 2027 to 2025. The U.S. ambiguity does not provide confidence for ASEAN. If 2025 (a surprise attack) to strategic competition (2027 onwards) leaves ASEAN decision makers in the dark. The 2027 figure stems from the Joint Chief of Staff's own prediction, backed up by Gen. Mark Milley, that six years is the window of opportunity for China to annex Taiwan. Dubbed “wolf-warrior diplomacy,” this new approach seems popular inside China. It reinforces a presumed transition of Chinese diplomacy from conservative, passive, and low-key to assertive, proactive, and high-profile. *Wolf Warrior* and *Wolf Warrior II* are Chinese action blockbusters that highlight agents of Chinese special operation forces. They have boosted national pride and patriotism among Chinese viewers<sup>76</sup>.

Beijing could potentially choke off trade and shipments to Japan, control access to technologies crucial to U.S. economic activities, especially microchips, and project power deep into the Pacific. The economic significance of the South China Sea cannot be overstated<sup>77</sup>. Estimates suggest that 64 percent of total goods are discharged through these waters.

In *the Ambitious Dragon*, the authors wrote that China only must transit a 180-kilometre body of water, the Taiwan Strait, to reach the island-nation of Taiwan, a much smaller military objective, and can still conduct exercises as feints as a precursor to operational execution, like Russian military warfare tactics<sup>78</sup>. There is no comparable regional alliance to provide collective defense or integrated deterrence located in Southeast Asia to deter Chinese aggression effectively<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> [https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy\\_en.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy_en.pdf); 16 December 2024; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2024/05/07/how-dc-became-obsessed-with-a-potential-2027-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan/>; 7 May 2024; last accessed on 18 September 2024

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>; 15 May 2020; last accessed on 22 September 2024

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/china/commentary/why-the-south-china-sea-matters>; 8 July 2024, last accessed on 22 September 2024

<sup>78</sup> [https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI\\_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF); March – April 2023; last accessed on 13 September 2023

<sup>79</sup> [https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI\\_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/24/2003205865/-1/-1/1/07-AMONSON%20%26%20EGLI_FEATURE%20IWD.PDF); March – April 2023; last accessed on 13 September 2023

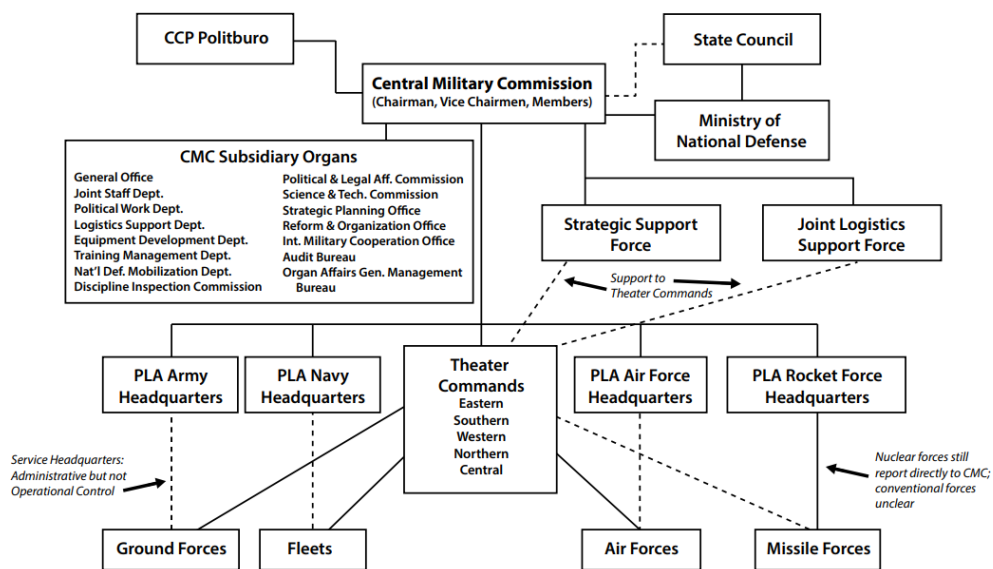


Air Force Gen. Mike Minihan, the head of Air Mobility Command, outlined a potential war strategy with China in the next few years. In the commander’s intent, his message was clear: “Drive readiness, integration, and agility for ourselves and the Joint Force to deter, and if required, defeat China.”<sup>80</sup> In this paper, the authors argue what can be done against Chinese hostility.

The reorganization of the People’s Liberation Army collectively took place in the year 2012. By 2019, the "Regulations on Military Training Supervision of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (Trial)" were promulgated, probably to codify training oversight and the roles of the officers engaged in this work<sup>81</sup>. A better trained, organized, and equipped PLA will be in a stronger position for its three primary functions: 1) winning modern wars, especially what the U.S. Department of Defense terms short-duration, high-intensity regional conflicts; 2) deterring both larger and smaller competitors; and 3) protecting Chinese interests within and beyond Asia.

Rival territorial claimants, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, and India, will face a more confident and capable adversary in the South and East China seas and across the Sino-Indian border<sup>82</sup>. Since 2019, the region has seen a more belligerent attitude by the Chinese on display. On January 11, 2016, Xi announced that the four general departments were disbanded.

**Figure 1. New PLA Structure**



Source: Chairman Xi's reform of the PLA<sup>83</sup>

Prosecuting a joint campaign would have required temporary “war zones” to be established, a process that, while useful to signal strategic intent and non-kinetic escalation, would have slowed the PLA’s ability to respond to an emerging crisis and denied it the element of surprise

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/read-full-memo-from-amc-gen-mike-miniham/>; 30 January 2023; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>81</sup> [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf), January 2021, page 25; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>82</sup> <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/Chairman-Xi/Chairman-Xi.pdf>; 2019, last accessed on 5 October 2024

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

in a campaign against Taiwan<sup>84</sup>. The current challenges at the Scarborough Reef represent such a non-kinetic temporary “war zone”.

The most symbolic evidence of China's push into the South China Sea is quite literally set in stone, transplanted from mainland China. In April 2018, 200-tonne commemorative megaliths erected on each of the three biggest island bases in the Spratly Islands were unveiled amid some secrecy. Mount Taishan is viewed as the most sacred of China's mountains, a symbol of unbroken Chinese civilization for thousands of years. All of this shows China has moved into the second phase of a calculated plan to make this great strategic waterway of Southeast Asia an irreversibly Chinese one<sup>85</sup>.

The Chinese position is increasingly questionable of their long-term intent. First, force ASEAN countries to surrender their rights and claims. Second, establish by force an irrelevant Chinese ownership of questionable territorial claims, and Third, enforce these new boundaries as de jure positions which will be defended by force if necessary.

A new dimension is the entry of the contingent of North Korean troops to the Ukrainian conflict. This escalation is aimed at destabilizing the already fragile power dynamics on the Korean peninsula, adding to the sustained tensions in both the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Their actions seek to stretch American influence and resources across multiple fronts, imposing ad hoc challenges to US global dominance at a moment of the greatest internal political vulnerability, particularly as the American presidential elections approach. It is assumed China is unhappy with the North Korean regime with the deepening ties towards Moscow<sup>86</sup>. The celebration is too early and a testcase for Moscow to fight the wars in the Ukraine.

Japan's chief cabinet secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said that escalating Russian-North Korean co-operation was “deeply concerning”<sup>87</sup>. The deployment of North Korean combat troops is a threat hence the removal from the battle space is a necessity. Jaewoo Choo, head of the China center at the Korea Research Institute for National Security think-tank in Seoul was quoted,

“Beijing may actually be secretly pleased that Russia is providing economic aid to North Korea in China's place”<sup>88</sup>

## 17-Days Pre-warning

That is *36 months* window of opportunity. Applying the Clausewitzian Short Lines of Communications approach, Taiwan, which the Chinese government considers a rogue province and has threatened to take back by force, is about 100 miles from the mainland. It's more than 5,000 miles from Hawaii, the headquarters of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. The assumption is the United States and its allies have ideally, 60 days to plan a response. Under close examination, this window shrunk down to a *17-day pre-deployment* window.

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<sup>84</sup> <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/Chairman-Xi/Chairman-Xi.pdf>; 2019, last accessed on 5 October 2024

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53344449>; 14 July 2020, last accessed on 23 September 2024

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/67faab64-6b56-41f8-917d-647f842f0705>; 25 October 2024; last accessed on 27 October 2024

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

An escalation in the South China Sea at the frontlines of the treaty partner, the Philippines, is likely. And the United States is firmly committed to upholding its alliance commitments to the Philippines. This fact alone is sufficient to question Chinese sincerity of peaceful policies in play. It would take three weeks for the U.S. to rush ships to the area from the West Coast and around 17 days to do so from Alaska. The recent pivot to Alaska and the creation of the Northern Command addresses the strategic shift. If China launched a rapid invasion, it might overwhelm Taiwan before the U.S. had a chance to react;<sup>89</sup> hence, the strategic pre-positioning of forces is convenient.

But the U.S. didn't yet have the necessary infrastructure in place. It would need to construct bases, airfields, radars and other buildings along the Pacific islands that arc around Taiwan<sup>90</sup>. It supports the 11-dash line concept. An intelligence pre-warning system, like in the Ukraine, will determine the future of Taiwan.

Whether the initiative is working depends on whether you look at the Pacific through the eyes of Ely Ratner, the assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs, or Adm. John Aquilino. Both agree war is *not imminent*, but their views are split on whether deterrence is *getting better or worse*<sup>91</sup>.

To wage a successful invasion, the Chinese PLA must assemble the elements for a successful invasion. In 2010, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was directly told by Chinese officials that they view the South China Sea as a “core interest”<sup>92</sup> for China.

**Ground forces** both Chinese Airborne, Coastal Marines and regular Army. The Chinese armed forces have 2,035,000 men under arms and 510,000 in reserve. Taiwan has 169,000 men and 1,660,000 men under reserve. Any Chinese attack on the island needs at least a 1:3 or 1:6 ratio. A fundamental force configuration would result in 507,000 men in Chinese forces. Under Xi's reform agenda, an increase of specialized forces, such as amphibious and helicopter units, that would be essential to a joint campaign are outlined<sup>93</sup>.

**Long-range artillery.** An equivalent force of PLAN cruisers and destroyers barely scrapes up a sixth of that, and **seven World War II-era destroyers alone could deliver more fire than the entire notional Chinese naval task force** despite firing a lighter-weight shell.<sup>94</sup>

**Intelligence infrastructure,** both overt and cyber capability. Psychological warfare focuses on “disseminating particular information via various channels” to influence or disrupt an adversary's decision-making capabilities and foster doubt about its abilities to degrade its will to act<sup>95</sup>.

**Airspace embargo.** Taiwan's airspace must be completely shut off by external support. A total embargo will be challenging to achieve. In the recent exercises, the impetus to achieving

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<sup>89</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2024/04/03/pacific-problems-why-the-us-disagrees-on-the-cost-of-detering-china/>; 3 April 2024; last accessed on 4 September 2024

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/the-plas-new-joint-doctrine.pdf); January 2019; last accessed on 19 September 2023

<sup>93</sup> <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/Chairman-Xi/Chairman-Xi.pdf>; 2019, last accessed on 5 October 2024

<sup>94</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/amateur-hour-part-i-the-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan/>; 18 May 2022; last accessed on 21 September 2024

<sup>95</sup> [https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc\\_crawford\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2019-05/chinas\\_app\\_of\\_the\\_3\\_warfares\\_in\\_xj\\_and\\_scs.pdf](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/nsc_crawford_anu_edu_au/2019-05/chinas_app_of_the_3_warfares_in_xj_and_scs.pdf); January 2019; last accessed on 28 September 2024

complete closure of sea and air traffic to the island was set up. Beijing is painfully aware of its lack of recent combat experience, particularly in the air and at sea<sup>96</sup>.

**Strategic deception.** The Egmont paper authored by Prof. Dr. Bart Dessein and Jasper Roctus assumes a few assumptions. The first assumption is that Chinese strategic thought is based on the same rationale as Western assumptions. This doesn't seem right. The second assumptions are based on the Chinese character to avoid confrontation with the west. Both the U.S. and Europe show, in practice, that China, too, does not see its relations with Europe as a zero-sum choice and is still willing to consider force applied as opportune<sup>97</sup>.

This also aligns with the EU's retained role as a 'partner' and 'competitor' of China. The European Union is not taking the opportunity to renew dialogue and revive mutual relations with China, and it is potentially also limiting the Europeans. Thirdly, it is assumed that China has not crossed the "red lines" on Russia. China has not outright broken the sanction regime, but the evidence is yet to be prove.

**Nuclear question.** China is watching the war in Ukraine closely and will likely use nuclear coercion to its advantage in the future. They intend to achieve the military capability to reunify Taiwan by 2027, if not sooner<sup>98</sup>. China has doubled its nuclear stockpile within two years, despite expectations it would take Beijing until the end of the decade. The biggest and most visible one is the expansion from zero to at least 360 solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile silos. China has also made significant advances in its air- and submarine-launched nuclear-capable missiles.

**Economic isolation.** The isolation of Taiwan by blockage includes banking, commercial, diplomatic and military. The condition is not yet made of isolating Taiwan diplomatically. The twelve remaining countries are minor in the world of diplomacy. A counterstrategy could be to recognize Taiwan diplomatically, which would counterweigh the Chinese ambitions. The diplomatic advantage seen at work in the Ukraine will work in the case of Taiwan.

**Blockade by sea.** An economic embargo by sea would require considerable assets to enforce. The PLA must establish an air blockade enforced by an economic sea blockade. Taking the economic viability into consideration, the Chinese People's Liberation Navy would commit considerable assets to this task. Food and goods shortages will determine the will to fight.

**Occupation by force.** An occupation by an invading force will be perceived as an occupier. Regardless of the outcome, the Chinese PLA will be perceived as the occupier. Disinformation, propaganda, and misinformation will fill the communications space. Battle space will become contested. A physical occupation of Taiwan will come at great costs to both the Chinese and Taiwan. Although the ideological leadership will define western will under the Chinese two-system-one-country narrative, the actual battle over Taiwan will systematically change society, political leadership, trade, the economy defense and national security. The occupation will be complete.

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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/11/xi-likely-wont-be-attacking-taiwan-anytime-soon.html>; 16 November 2024; last accessed on 6 October 2024

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep58049?seq=5>; February 2024; last accessed on 2 October 2024

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/05/04/us-nuclear-commander-warns-of-deterrence-crisis-against-russia-and-china/>; 5 May 2022, last accessed on 3 October 2024

## Geographics

Chinese ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) based at Sanya, on Hainan Island, reach patrol grounds in the western Pacific. To maintain stealth, SSBNs would first have to evade any adversary picket submarines lying offshore<sup>99</sup>. Once in deep water, they would cruise eastward toward the Philippines. Likely Chinese boats would exit through the Luzon Strait, the narrow sea between Taiwan and the Philippine Island of Luzon. Alternatively, the People's Liberation Navy would have to disperse its forces beyond the western Pacific outside the reach of U.S., Australian or allied forces.

Maritime geography will force them to exit through the narrow Bashi Channel<sup>100</sup>, near the northern edge of the strait. The Babuyan and Batan Islands<sup>101</sup> it was jutting out into the strait off northern Luzon. The island also overlooks and could obstruct east-west routes. Its north tip, for example, faces Yonaguni<sup>102</sup>, the southernmost point in Japan's Ryukyu Island chain. As with the rest of the Ryukyu straits, land sites adjacent to this narrow sea could be fortified to erect an east-west barrier to Chinese shipping. Actions by China's maritime forces at the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea (ECS) are another concern for U.S. observers.<sup>103</sup> Gaining control of Taiwan is a matter of immense strategic importance for Beijing<sup>104</sup>. If peaceful methods of cross-strait unification prove ineffective, military means will be "the only alternative."<sup>105</sup>

Chinese anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities intended to keep U.S. military forces outside the first island chain and thus away from China's mainland and Taiwan<sup>106</sup> and U.S. obligations under U.S. defense treaties with Japan the Philippines, and South Korea<sup>107</sup> as well as Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia<sup>108</sup>. Chinese bases in the SCS and forces operating from them would be vulnerable to U.S. attack<sup>109</sup>.

Chinese bases in the SCS and forces operating from them would be vulnerable to U.S. attack<sup>110</sup>. China has accelerated its efforts to displace U.S. power from the region by neutralizing American military strength through anti-access/area denial (A2/AD), while preventing attempts to coalesce Southeast Asia against Chinese power<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1317&context=nwc-review>; 2014; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>; 5 February 2024; last accessed on 4 October 2024

<sup>104</sup> <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1317&context=nwc-review>; 2014; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>; 5 February 2024; last accessed on 4 October 2024

<sup>109</sup> <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1317&context=nwc-review>; 2014; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>110</sup> <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1317&context=nwc-review>; 2014; last accessed on 3 October 2024

<sup>111</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2015/05/pushing-back-against-chinas-strategy-ten-steps-for-the-united-states/>; 27 May 2024; last accessed on 14 October 2024



Zone	Province	Range	Remarks
Northern Japan	Sapporo	Anchorage	
Southern Japan	Fukuoka	Taipei	
Central North Asia	Busan (South Korea)	Rebun	
Taipei	Checheng	Pagudpud	
Philippines	Vigan	Rizal	
	Luzon	Jayapura	Integration of digital space (Kolonias/Micronesia)
Brunei	Rizal (Philippines)	Bandar Seri Begawan	
Malaysia	Bandar Seri Begawan (Brunei)	Putrajaya	Integration of digital space

China's top hydrologists have announced that the water table on Fiery Cross, once little more than a rock in the sea, has been expanding rapidly and will allow water self-sufficiency within 15 years, *by 2035*<sup>112</sup>. In the meantime, artificial support is expected to be provided by the People's Liberation Army.

An intriguing technological solution might be to leverage the U.S. military's ongoing Replicator program, scheduled to become available by August 2025. A product of the Pentagon's Defense Innovation Unit, Replicator seeks to quickly produce thousands of Air and Naval drones to make up for numerical shortfalls against the Chinese military<sup>113</sup>.

The technological application for the South China Sea manifests itself as the Chinese point of view, "One China Sea", and albeit wrong, the rest of the ASEAN countries to define space and access to it's the disputed South China Sea. To Beijing, the East and South China Seas are all part of its "near seas," and China continues to take steps to assert control over this space as one unified maritime periphery.<sup>114</sup> Disputes in the East China Sea are primarily bilateral. Japan has expressly denied that China has any legitimate claims to the Senkaku Islands. The Japanese Foreign Ministry wrote,

There is no doubt that the Senkaku Islands are clearly an inherent part of the territory of Japan, in light of historical facts and based upon international law. Indeed, the Senkaku Islands are under the valid control of Japan. There exists no issue of territorial sovereignty to be resolved concerning the Senkaku Islands. Japan will act firmly and calmly to maintain its territorial integrity<sup>115</sup>.

Within the technical specifications of the 11DL concept we propose technical alternatives, management supervisions and combined range of services. The Chinese defined "near seas"

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53344449>; 14 July 2020, last accessed on 11 October 2024

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/06/how-to-respond-to-chinas-tactics-in-the-south-china.html>; 29 May 2024, last assessed on 11 October 2024

<sup>114</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2024/05/the-east-and-south-china-seas-one-sea-near-seas-whose-seas/>; 9 May 2024; last accessed on 11 October 2024

<sup>115</sup> [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku\\_pamphlet.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku_pamphlet.pdf); last accessed on 11 October 2024

from the “far seas”, creating a forward-looking surveillance system that encompasses the entire South China Sea and infringes on the rights of the ASEAN countries.



**Figure 2. – 11-Dash-Line**

The “green line” represents the 11-Dash-lines to establish an ASEAN wide collaborative network to detect and determine PLA naval and aerial activities. The 11DL are broken up into sectors. Starting from Anchorage (U.S.) to the northern tip of Japan. In each cluster consists of,

1. Management & Intelligence component
2. Sensory Unit
3. Technology & Science
4. Aerial & Naval Component

The Management & Intelligence component is in each of the clusters. It manages timely intelligence, manages resource allocation, inform national command and regional partners and commands, coordinates technical and Aerial and Naval components. The cluster collaborates with other clusters in the region, coordinates activities and informs of movements and activities of importance to the network.

The Sensory Unit deploys hydrophones, underwater cables and underwater surveillance capabilities.

The Technology & Science element addresses the AI and other technologies linking the technology and science, updating technology, advancing detection and surveillance technology and coordinating science to maintain technological edge of the clusters. Information will be shared through an open-source platform.

The Aerial and Naval Component will be deployed as necessary. A fixed allocation of aerial and naval resources should be discussed at the national command level.

Map 1. East China Sea



Data source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Marine Regions, and World Bank

## Suppression Of Universal Human Rights

China's human rights policies stand in sharp contrast to the fundamentals of universal human rights, especially when it comes to how it treats ethnic minorities like the Uyghurs. International condemnation of the Chinese government's brutal persecution in Xinjiang has been widespread. More than a million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims have reportedly been mass-detained in what the government calls "re-education camps" since 2017. Forced indoctrination, cultural erasure, and serious human rights abuses, such as sexual abuse and torture, are features of these facilities (Chinese Persecution of the Uyghurs - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.; Maizland, 2022; BBC News, 2022).

The Chinese regime employs various strategies to suppress Uyghur identity, such as enforced sterilizations, forced labor, and restrictions on religious practices. Uyghurs are often barred from speaking their language or practicing their faith freely, with severe penalties for even minor expressions of cultural identity. This systematic campaign has been described as a form of cultural genocide, aiming to assimilate Uyghurs into the dominant Han culture (*Chinese Persecution of the Uyghurs - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, n.d.; “Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots,” 2023). Reports from human rights organizations have documented that detainees are coerced into renouncing their beliefs and pledging allegiance to the Communist Party, often under duress and in conditions that resemble torture (Maizland, 2022; BBC News, 2022)

Even while Western countries have a history of violating human rights due to colonialism and military operations, their influence around the world has also helped to promote human rights standards. China's hegemonic approach, on the other hand, normalises repression and erodes international responsibility for human rights abuses. The Chinese government strongly refutes claims of mistreatment, arguing that its policies are required for stability and national security. However, data from independent investigations and survivor accounts are progressively challenging this narrative (Yeung, 2022; *Against Their Will: The Situation in Xinjiang*, n.d.).

In summary, China's treatment of the Uyghurs exemplifies a profound disregard for universal human rights. This situation not only highlights the dangers posed by China's hegemony but also raises critical questions about the global implications of such repression on international norms and the protection of human rights worldwide.

## **Counterarguments And Rebuttals**

There are several counterarguments put forth by those who disagree with the convoluted assertion that China's hegemony is more harmful than Western hegemony. First, they draw attention to the history of Western hegemony's exploitation, which includes political meddling, economic imperialism, and colonisation. Western colonial powers created exploitation mechanisms that sustain inequality around the world, according to academics like John Hobson (Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, 2012). Western-dominated organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have frequently forced structural adjustment plans on poor nations, creating debt dependency cycles (Stiglitz, *Globalisation and Its Discontents*, 2002).

Compared to this, China's policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries is seen by some as less invasive and more respectful of sovereignty.

Additionally, proponents of China's rise argue that its economic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), provide a development model that emphasizes mutual benefit over coercion. Unlike Western powers that often tie aid to political conditions, China focuses on infrastructure development and trade expansion. Some analysts contend that China provides an alternative to the historically exploitative practices of the West because, for example, Chinese investments in energy projects, roads, and railroads have benefited African countries (Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*, 2009). The claim that China's rise is more centred on economic cooperation than military dominance is further supported by the fact that its military budget is still far lower than that of the US (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2023). Critics contend that rather than being based on objective facts, worries over China's hegemony are frequently inflated and shaped by Western prejudices.

However, these counter arguments fail to account for the subtle but significant threats posed by China's hegemonic ambitions. While China claims a policy of non-interference, its actions in the South China Sea reveal a pattern of coercion. The militarization of disputed territories and its disregard for the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling demonstrate its willingness to violate international norms to assert dominance (Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*, 2014). Furthermore, the BRI, though framed as a development initiative, has often resulted in "debt traps." For example, Sri Lanka was forced to lease its Hambantota Port to China after failing to repay loans, compromising its sovereignty (Wheeler, "Sri Lanka's Debt Trap Diplomacy," *The Diplomat*, 2018).

Furthermore, democratic principles are undermined by China's global influence. A risky precedent is set by its use of economic power to stifle criticism of its policies, especially violations of human rights in Xinjiang, and to influence international organisations like the UN (Zenz, *Xinjiang: China's New Colony*, 2020). Chinese hegemony encourages authoritarianism and stifles criticism in contrast to Western hegemony, which functions within liberal frameworks that permit accountability and scrutiny. In conclusion, even while Western hegemony has unquestionably caused a great deal of harm, China's ascent, its erosion of sovereignty, its authoritarian influence, and its contempt for international rules pose particular

risks. The analogy must acknowledge China's potentially more pernicious imperial aspirations rather than discount the shortcomings of Western domination.

## **Conclusion**

China's ascent to global prominence presents special and significant difficulties that are not related to the historical supremacy of the West. China's policy places more emphasis on economic dependency, technology surveillance, and centralised control than the Western model, which frequently included democracy, accountability, and multilateralism. China is able to change international norms through projects like the Belt and Road Initiative and the transfer of surveillance equipment, strengthening its position of authority while undermining democratic values and liberties.

This change has ramifications that go beyond geopolitics. The rules-based international order is threatened by China's assertive regional actions, especially in regions like the South China Sea, and its disregard for international norms. This further undermines international efforts to promote inclusivity, transparency, and human rights by fostering an atmosphere that gives legitimacy to authoritarian administration.

In order to preserve democratic norms, addressing these issues requires a coordinated international response. In order to protect peace and prosperity worldwide, the international community can combat the dangers of a China-centric order that places a higher priority on state control over individual and collective rights by advancing accountability, freedom, and equality.

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CHINA

TAIWAN STRAIT

EAST CHINA SEA

JAPAN

TAIWAN

BASHI CHANNEL

PHILIPPINES SEA

VIETNAM

SOUTH CHINA SEA

PHILIPPINES

GULF OF THAILAND

MALAYSIA

MALACCA STRAIT

INDONESIA