

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY



Competing for Advantage:

The Chinese Communist Party,
Statecraft, and Special Operations

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Dr. David C. Ellis

JSOU Report 24-2

On the cover: The front cover represents the fact that domestic tensions often have international linkages. Recognizing how domestic networks intersect with international ones leads to new and novel forms of special operations – ones that look very different from current doctrine, operating concepts, and Special Operations Forces formations. Source: Adobe Stock

Back cover: The back cover symbolizes special operations in strategic competition. Unlike in counterterrorism operations where special operations seek to degrade and destroy adversary networks, strategic competition requires bringing together diverse elements of national power to grow local population support for U.S. and partner nations over time while improving local network resilience against malign actors. Source: Adobe Stock

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JSOU PRESS

Cameron Cobb, *Editor in Chief*

Melanie Casey, *Editor* | Eric Hughes, *Editor*

Book layout and design by Laura Tindall

This work was cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

March 2024

ISBN 978-1-94175-67-3



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DR. DAVID C. ELLIS



JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida | February 2024

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“When dealing with external relations, ancient China’s foreign strategies emphasized diplomatic maneuvering rather than military confrontation...In his masterpiece—The Art of War, China’s ancient military strategist Sun Zi put forward his famous idea that it was better to attack the enemy’s mind than to attack his fortified cities. He stated, ‘To gain a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; to subjugate the enemy’s army without doing battle is the highest of excellence. Therefore, the best warfare strategy is to attack the enemy’s plans, next is to attack alliances, next is to attack the army, and the worst is to attack a walled city.’”¹

“During the application of the art and science of warfare, campaign planners must take into account the ‘will’ of the adversary, competitor, or ally. The joint force must design and conduct campaigns to establish and maintain legitimacy of U.S. and partner actions while simultaneously discrediting, subverting, and/or attacking adversaries’ efforts to establish their legitimacy...Integrated campaign design seeks to align military and non-military activities to combine actions over time to overwhelm and/or exhaust the adversary, competitor, or population.”²

“To build national well-being, preserve domestic tranquility, and ensure freedom from coercion by other states, statesmen must accumulate power for their state...To magnify power’s effects, statesmen must be able to maneuver their state into positions of strategic advantage. To apply power to other states and peoples, they must be able to use warriors, spies, and diplomats with skill.”³

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Foreword

It is with great enthusiasm that I present this edited volume, a work that delves into the complex realm of strategic competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Spearheaded by the editorial prowess of Dr. David Ellis, this collection of insights and analyses emerges as a beacon of thought leadership.

In his introduction, Dr. Ellis underscores a deliberate choice in nomenclature—the substitution of ‘China’ with ‘the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’—a nuanced decision aimed at emphasizing a critical distinction. While ‘China’ might seem an insurmountable entity, ‘the CCP’ invites a closer examination of the internal dynamics, vulnerabilities, and interests at play. This choice sets the stage for the overarching theme of the volume: to spotlight the key challenges the CCP encounters during its rise, and to contextualize how Combined-Joint Special Operations Forces (C-JSOF) can play a pivotal role in competing for advantage based on the CCP’s vulnerabilities.

Competing for advantage, as elucidated in this volume, involves a strategic dance of power, capabilities, and the shrewd maneuvering of one’s own national interests against those of a competitor. It’s a matter of shaping the balance of power to one’s advantage, be it by amplifying national potential through business, development, and diplomacy, or by strategically employing soft-balancing techniques in the cognitive domain. The chapters that follow expound on these principles, offering a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of strategic competition.

The role of SOF in this intricate dance is not only acknowledged but accentuated. As Dr. Ellis and Dr. Charlie Black assert in the conclusion, SOF’s contribution extends far beyond countering tangible threats. In the

realm of strategic shaping, influence, resilience, and resistance, SOF emerge as a potent force, predominantly operating in the cognitive domain. The chapters within this volume meticulously outline how SOF, with their unique capabilities, can be instrumental in reshaping political perceptions, engaging in soft balancing, and contributing to adaptive statecraft.

As readers engage with the diverse chapters, they will find detailed examinations of specific challenges—from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing to resistance potential in Taiwan, and from the CCP’s control over religion to the intricate dynamics of China’s rural economy and urbanization. Each chapter adds a layer to the comprehensive understanding of the strategic competition landscape, offering actionable insights that resonate with the current geopolitical realities.

A crucial caveat accompanies this foreword: the volume’s production timeline places its date of information in the fall of 2021. The world has witnessed significant events since 2021, and observations from those events have not been incorporated. This caveat ensures that readers approach the text with the awareness that it reflects a snapshot in time.

In conclusion, this edited volume serves as a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on strategic competition in the shadow of the dragon. It challenges conventional mindsets, urging a paradigm shift in how we perceive and approach statecraft in the face of a rising global power. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Ellis and the contributing authors for their thought-provoking analyses, and I hope that this work sparks further inquiry, debate, and, most importantly, informed action in navigating the intricate dance of strategic competition with the PRC.

— **Scott Simeral**

Academic Chair

Joint Special Operations University

December 2023

About the Authors



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Dr. David C. Ellis is a former Resident Senior Fellow at Joint Special Operations University (contractor 2016–2022) and is President of Ellis Analytics, Inc. He holds a PhD in International Relations and Comparative Politics from the University of Florida. Dr. Ellis's research on democratization and development in identity conflict spans over three decades. His interests

in peacekeeping, conflict resolution, development, and atrocity in ethnic conflict led him to focus his doctoral research on identity, social movements, organizational and social learning theory, and economic growth theory. Dr. Ellis served as an intelligence analyst in the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) J2, where he deployed to Afghanistan in support of Special Operations Forces (SOF) from 2010–2011. Dr. Ellis joined JSOU in 2016, with his current research focusing on the intersection of complexity,

organizational learning within the SOF community, and integrated campaigning. Dr. Ellis is co-author or editor of such books as *Complexity, Organizational Blindness, and the SOCOM Design Way* (JSOU Press, 2018); *Iranian Proxy Groups in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen: A Principal-Agent Comparative Analysis* (JSOU Press, 2020); and *Big Data for Generals...and Everyone Else over 40* (JSOU Press, 2021).



Dr. Justin Conrad is the Gary K. Bertsch Director of the Center for International Trade and Security (CITS) and Professor of International Affairs at the University of Georgia. He is also jointly appointed to the Savannah River National Laboratory. Dr. Conrad's research focuses on international conflict, terrorism, nuclear security, and energy security. Dr. Conrad's work has been

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Dr. Shale Horowitz is Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His research has examined international and ethnic conflict, with an emphasis on East and South Asia and on the post-communist world, the politics of international trade and finance, and the politics of market transition and institutional change in the post-communist countries and East Asia. He taught

for a year at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, and he has conducted research in many Eastern European countries as well as the former Soviet Union, India, China, Taiwan, and South Korea. His research has appeared in *Asian Survey*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Economics and Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and other outlets. His current research interests include leadership preferences in ethno-territorial civil wars and the causes and consequences of foreign and domestic policy change in China.



Dr. Min Ye is Professor of Political Science at Coastal Carolina University. He holds a doctorate in International Relations and Comparative Politics from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Ye's research interests include international conflict and crises, foreign policy analysis, East Asian politics, and formal theory. He is the author of the book *China-South*

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Dr. Lawrence C. (“Chris”) Reardon is Professor of Political Science at the University of New Hampshire and is known internationally for his research on China’s political and economic development and religious policies. Initially focusing on Europe, he received diplomas from the University of Vienna and SAIS Europe and a bachelor’s degree in International Studies

from the Johns Hopkins University (1979). After the U.S. Army granted an academic delay, he took intensive Mandarin Chinese at Columbia University, Middlebury, and the Stanford Center at National Taiwan University, where he also taught at the National Defense Language Institute. After completing his master’s degree at Columbia University, he received a fellowship from the Committee for Scholarly Communications with the People’s Republic of China (Fulbright) to study economics at Peking University from 1984–1986. He became a foreign expert teaching economics at Shenzhen University and a special researcher at Jinan University (Guangzhou). Dr. Reardon returned to northern Virginia in 1988, where he taught courses on Taiwan and Hong Kong at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute while completing his PhD at Columbia University. He joined the faculty at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) in 1991, where he teaches courses on international relations theory, international political economy, Asian and Chinese domestic and foreign policies, and human rights and religion in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). He cofounded and coordinates the UNH Asian studies minor and is an associate in research at Harvard University’s Fairbank Center for East Asian Research. As the 2001–2002 Luce Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars/George Washington University, he completed *The Reluctant Dragon: The Impact Of Crisis Cycles on Chinese Foreign Economic Policy* (University of Washington, 2002), which analyzed elite debates concerning China’s development from 1949–1978. With the support of UNH professorships and fellowships, he completed a follow-up study entitled *A Third Way: The origins of China’s Current Economic Development Strategy* (Harvard, 2020), which focused on China’s coastal development strategy in the 1980s. He collected, translated, and published two volumes of Chinese foreign

economic policy documents in *China Law and Government* and authored book chapters and articles on China's foreign economic policy for *China Quarterly*, *The Journal of Contemporary China*, *China Business Review*, and *The Journal of Shenzhen University*. While conducting fieldwork in the 1980s, Dr. Reardon became fascinated by the communist party's decision to allow limited religious practices. Seeking a new research focus between book projects, he organized a roundtable at the New England Political Science Association meeting that eventually resulted in his co-edited volume, *The Vatican, and the Nation-State in Comparative Perspective* (Georgetown, 2006) and his chapter on the Chinese Communist Party's attitudes toward religion. He applied his research on elite decision-making to analyze the Roman Catholic Church and religion in China, which have been published in *The Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, and *The Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism*. He is currently working on a new book on China's religious policies and a co-edited volume on China's approach to cyberwarfare.



Mr. Will Irwin is a former Resident Senior Fellow at Joint Special Operations University (contractor, 2011-2022). Since his retirement as a U.S. Army Special Forces officer, he has worked as a defense analyst, researcher, historian, instructor, and writer. His career included assignments throughout the United States, Europe, Central and South America, the Near and Far East, and Southeast and

Southwest Asia. He is a subject matter expert in strategic intelligence and policy, special operations, resistance, and political and irregular warfare. Mr. Irwin culminated his 28-year military career at USSOCOM, where he was a weapons, munitions, and countering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) requirements officer. Since his retirement from active duty, he has served USSOCOM as a contractor supporting the Command's advanced technology program and later as a future concepts developer. He then supported the Command as a countering WMD terrorism analyst and planner in the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, USSOCOM support cell. Upon his return to the Tampa, Florida area, he served as an intelligence analyst at the United

States Central Command (USCENTCOM) prior to joining the faculty at JSOU. Mr. Irwin holds a master of military arts and sciences degree from the United States Army Command and General Staff College and a bachelor's degree in history from Methodist University. He has done additional graduate study at the University of Kansas and the University of Southern California and has served as an Arroyo Center research fellow at the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, California. He is the author of *Abundance of Valor: Resistance, Liberation, and Survival, 1944-1945* (Ballantine Books, 2010) and *The Jedburghs: The Secret History of the Allied Special Forces, France 1944* (Public Affairs/Perseus Books, 2005), as well as several classified and unclassified monographs, reports, and articles. Mr. Irwin's previous JSOU monographs include *Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness, How Civil Resistance Works (And Why It Matters to SOF)* (JSOU Press, 2020), and *Decision-Making Considerations in Support to Resistance*. (JSOU Press, 2020). Mr. Irwin has served as a guest lecturer on unconventional warfare at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Liberty, North Carolina.



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Dr. Charles N. Black Dr. Charlie Black is the Co-Founder and Managing Partner at Xundis Global, which specializes in helping commercial, government, and private organizations navigate complexity and change. He holds a PhD in Humanities from Salve Regina University and is a retired Marine Corps Infantry and special operations officer with over three decades of diverse experience.

He served as a Non-Resident Senior Fellow 2018-2022 at the Joint Special Operations University conducting research, writing, and teaching about the future of special operations, human security, strategic competition, and integrated statecraft. Dr. Black is the co-author of *Complexity, Organizational Blindness, and the SOCOM Design Way* (JSOU Press, 2018) and contributed chapters to *The Network Illusion: How a Network-Centric Special Operations Culture Impedes Strategic Effect* (JSOU Press, 2022) and *Special Operations Transformation in the Future Operating Environment* (JSOU Press, 2022). As a professional member of the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, he provides asymmetric capabilities and innovation expertise to national priority projects. He also serves as a board advisor to several private sector corporations.

Introduction: Competing against the Chinese Communist Party through Statecraft

In the 1960s, some analysts and scholars were convinced that the Soviet Union was on a trajectory to overtake the U.S. in industrial production and material satisfaction. In the 1980s, Japan's efficient manufacturing prowess and high-profile purchases of U.S. real estate and entertainment companies caused concern about the end of American hegemony.⁴ In the 2020s, the fear is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will chart a course to global dominance that displaces the U.S.-backed Western Liberal International Order (WLIO) by 2049 or earlier. Although the CCP could be successful in its efforts, the previous two examples indicate there is nothing preordained about the Chinese communist 21st century. World politics and economics are rooted in complex adaptive systems (CAS) dynamics, and this plays to the strengths of the West—not to centralized political and economic systems like those of the CCP.

If viewed solely as a unitary actor in military and economic terms, China seems like an indomitable kraken, spreading its tentacles around the world with coordinated, strategic purpose (see Figure 1.1). Or, in strictly military terms, the correlation of forces appears to favor the rising power at the expense of a declining U.S.—a seemingly hopeless and depressing scenario (see Figure 1.2). Yet, when perceived as a series of interacting networks and social systems, China, led by the CCP, has many tensions, stressors, and internal challenges to manage. In short, there are many things keeping the leaders of the CCP up at night, and most of them emanate from their own people (see Figure 1.3).

It is the purpose of this edited volume to highlight key challenges the CCP faces in its rise and contextualize the potential contribution of special operations to “competing for advantage”⁵ based on the CCP's interests and vulnerabilities. Special operations' main benefit to the Joint Force will likely be—as the epigraph from Sun Tzu suggests—“to attack the enemy's strategy.”⁶ Special Operations Forces' (SOF)

COMPETING FOR ADVANTAGE

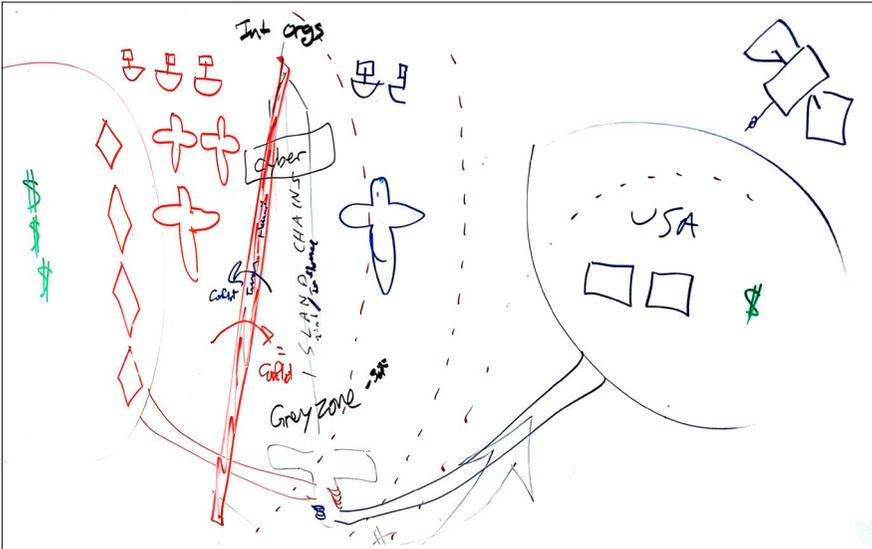
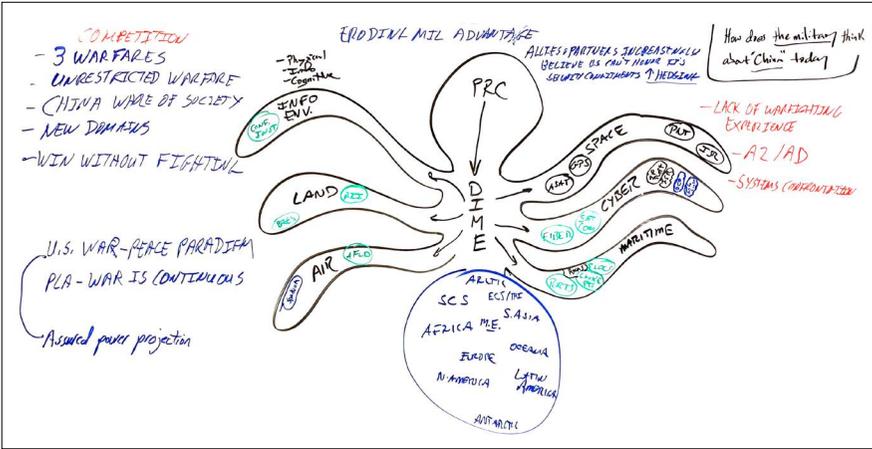


Figure 1.1. This graphic represents a metaphoric drawing co-created by a mixed team of military, interagency, and academic participants with an emphasis on the military lens of competition. The illustration is the PRC kraken spreading its diplomatic, information, military, and economic tentacles around the world. It lists differences in U.S. and CCP thinking about peace and war, types of competition activity, and concerns that U.S. allies and partners fear that the U.S. cannot meet its security obligations to them. Source: Author

Figure 1.2. This graphic represents a metaphoric drawing co-created by a mixed team of military, interagency, and academic participants with an emphasis on the military lens of competition. It depicts a traditional correlation of forces with the PRC achieving numerical superiority over the U.S. in terms of money, ships, airplanes, and infantry. While there is a red line for both parties that must not be crossed, both countries wrestle in the “gray zone” for positional advantage. Source: Author

actions on the ground will certainly draw from the range of core activities, but most of their effects will need to be overtly political. Competing for advantage below armed conflict to “overwhelm and/or exhaust the adversary, competitor, or population”⁷ requires a special sensitivity to political effects—the accrual of national power through allies and partners, amplifying the natural headwinds faced by the CCP, encouraging complexity and unexpected problems in its plans, and frustrating its attempts to solidify diplomatic influence. In short, SOF in strategic competition is essential for shaping—not countering others in—the future operating environment.

Strategic competition is fundamentally about seizing the initiative to change the incentive structures that drive behavior in the international system. The U.S., its allies, and its partners benefit from the residual hegemony of the post-World War II political and economic order, and while the CCP currently benefits as well, in the long-term, it knows that “socialism with Chinese characteristics” has to transform the international order for the regime’s survival.⁸ Behavioral change among states depends upon risk-reward calculations of opportunities as they arise in the system, and these opportunities include elements of cooperation, competition, and conflict. It is entirely feasible that SOF support to strategic competition might entail contributing to opportunities for cooperation with Chinese counterparts in one

Strategic competition is fundamentally about seizing the initiative to change the incentive structures that drive behavior in the international system.

area of responsibility and, in the process, complicate the calculations of the CCP on the risks and rewards of problematic actions in others. It is also entirely feasible that SOF’s main contribution could be in supporting Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multilateral, and Commercial (JIIM-C) efforts to generate networks across the Global South that are resilient to the

negative political, economic, and environmental effects of CCP activity and thereby diplomatically interrupt a core CCP strategic interest in consolidating control over its periphery.

Competing for advantage, broadly speaking, means accruing power and influence in such a way that the adversary's or competitor's plans cannot be realized. To do so first requires two elements: (a) an appreciation of the adversary's worldview, interests, and political culture and (b) a positive strategic vision for the future that is more compelling than the one put forward by the adversary or competitor. This volume focuses principally on the former, though it adds to the discussion about SOF's support to the latter. More important, however, is the mindset underlying how the special operations enterprise imagines itself contributing to strategic competition. In the future operating environment, SOF will need to reinterpret their value from providing a military effect to providing a political effect through military means. Amplifying national power for strategic advantage entails much more than eliminating enemies and networks from the battlefield. How SOF imagines itself and its activities in support of the JIIM-C in integrated campaigning will bear directly on the ability of the U.S. Government (USG) to seize the strategic initiative.

HOW CONTENT IN THIS VOLUME ASSISTS

"Attacking the enemy's strategy" first requires a theory of the adversary's core national interests and a theory (or set of assumptions) about its grand strategy for securing them.⁹ "Strategy" in this sense constitutes the *ways*

through which the adversary marches over time toward its national interests, or *ends*. As a key component of the military, it would be natural for the special operations enterprise to focus on the People's Liberation Army (PLA), PLA-Navy (PLAN), PLA-Air Force (PLAAF), and their

respective components, but doing so would be a matter of attacking only a portion of the CCP's *means* and, arguably, the least important ones to its strategy.¹⁰ Instead, this volume demonstrates how SOF

In the future operating environment, SOF will need to reinterpret their value from providing a military effect to providing a political effect through military means.

can contribute to strategic political effects by concentrating on the systemic challenges the CCP faces during its rise.

Reduced to its simplest form, the CCP's strategy hinges on two main factors: (a) the general perception of its benevolence and (b) its ability to control complex adaptive systems. This volume begins to explore for SOF the intrinsic weakness in both factors of its plans. Importantly, neither of these main factors is military in nature; rather, they are principally cognitive, economic, and bureaucratic at the global level—but regionally, the CCP's military does play an important supporting role. While frustrating its plans consequently requires some hard-balancing efforts, the majority of “attacking the strategy” requires what is called “soft balancing”—using diplomatic, reputational, and economic initiatives to achieve a political balancing effect against a competing power. The U.S. has extensive experience employing hard power in diplomacy and has proactively used its economic weight for diplomatic initiatives. However, it does not have much experience employing soft balancing despite having been subject to it. Of the elements of military power, the special operations enterprise is best aligned with the concept of soft balancing, and its purpose, methods, and effects are discussed in Chapter 1. Although the U.S. has focused predominantly on hard power in its overt balancing initiatives since World War II,¹¹ attacking the CCP's strategy cannot occur without rebalancing toward soft balancing for competition below armed conflict.¹²

Additionally, competing along the lines of perception and complexity relies on immediate responses to emergent, fleeting opportunities. For instance, revealing the truth being hidden by propaganda to affect perception and introducing complexity to frustrate CCP initiatives to control the environment are critical vulnerabilities that require devolving control to locally aware and socio-culturally sensitive personnel through a JIIM-C approach. In this way, seizing the initiative and shaping the system strike at the CCP's ability to fully realize its plans to secure its place as the main pole of the international system. In CAS terms, China is trying to create a global system of incentives whereby countries experience “increasing

returns” to outsourcing industrial manufacturing to it as “the world’s workshop” and, therefore, become “path dependent” on its place in the market.¹³ Currently, the U.S. and the West more broadly enjoy the path dependence of hegemony, though the CCP’s plans can feasibly displace it over time. For the CCP, almost everything relies on the perception of the inevitability of the emerging transformation in the relative balance of power over the coming two decades. Credibly demonstrating the falseness of the CCP’s inevitable and benevolent rise requires working in concert with partners and allies and prioritizing strategic communications from the beginning of every campaign to attract more partners over time while reinforcing their resolve to better secure their own freedoms and futures. It is, as the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (JCIC) asserts in the epigraph, about willpower. As with the rises of the Soviet Union and Japan, nothing in a relative balance of power equation is inevitable, including the maintenance of the WLIO. Choices by all actors matter.

Diverting the trends toward increasing returns accruing to the CCP and path dependency growing upon CCP-centric institutions can only occur through dedicated political effects that change the “attractors” in the current system. This demands a new way of thinking that moves beyond traditional military reductionist, analytical tools like PMESII-PT (political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, time), DIMEFIL (diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, law enforcement), ASCOPE (areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, events), IGIVO (issues, goals, influence, vulnerabilities, and opportunities), and the Joint Planning Process. These tools have value in the right context, but they are wholly insufficient as starting points in strategic competition. Instead, this volume offers a “statecraft” perspective as a more productive mindset for competing for advantage because the term evokes a synthesis of capabilities directed toward an effect instead of a mere deconfliction of professional specialties. The future is proactively designed—not stabilized—and the USG has been behind the power curve of the CCP for well over a decade.¹⁴

How, then, do special operations contribute to designing the future as part of the USG? This volume combines the baseline content necessary for imagining how to raise the costs of and delay the CCP's efforts at undermining the WLIO. Containment of the Soviet Union as implemented by the USG during the Cold War is no longer possible against the CCP. China is now the largest international trading country in the world, it enjoys the world's second-largest economy, its consumer market drives economic opportunity across much of the Global South, Western allies covet its market for advanced industrial machinery, and it will continue to be an important trading partner to many countries across the globe for the foreseeable future. SOF's contribution to competition below armed conflict, therefore, must be rooted in an appreciation of the CCP's perspective to perceive its national interests, strengths, and vulnerabilities.

Specifically, this volume explains the CCP's grand strategy underlying its generation-long "Peaceful Rise" or "Peaceful Development" narrative; highlights the internal challenges faced by the CCP despite its external show of strength; and illustrates how vulnerabilities in its geo-economic, geopolitical, and domestic behavior can inform SOF's contribution to achieving strategic political effects. The CCP claims to be a benevolent alternative to the U.S. as a potential hegemon and a champion of the Global South based on its history as a previously colonized, impoverished country. It sees itself, quite understandably, not as a rising power but as a returning power with international prerogatives coming due as such. However, its outward-facing strength belies critical domestic weaknesses. Poverty among its population still numbers in the hundreds of millions, it still relies on Western markets and export-led industrialization to drive its economy, Western investment capital and technology remain important to its economic growth, it must maintain upward of a 6 percent annual economic growth rate to maintain domestic tranquility, and any slowdown in industrial production could cause ripples of discontent across the entire country.¹⁵ On top of all this, China's population is far more diverse than the CCP wants to admit, with identity conflict constituting a persistent potential threat to the political center.

In other words, the CCP believes it must continue another decade or more of high economic growth rates to avoid the classic guns-versus-butter dilemma, whereby the government must choose whether to spend its resources internally on social services to ensure domestic tranquility (butter) or shape its external environment by generating hard power (guns). To this point, it has enjoyed all factors to avoid this dilemma, but raising the costs of business and diplomacy will work against its economic growth rate, reverberate from the industrial centers to the rural areas, and force the dilemma. One of two effects is likely from such a situation: either the CCP will have to change its behavior externally as it focuses inward to meet domestic political needs, or it will become more aggressive externally to guarantee its access to cheap commodities and markets for its excess capacity and belie its Peaceful Development narrative. Already, the CCP has demonstrated willingness to undermine its Peaceful Development narrative to meet domestic requirements, such as with predatory loans and incursions into weaker countries' exclusive economic zones.

There is every reason to believe countries around the world could balance against this behavior if they become confident that success is possible through large, well-coordinated international regimes designed to prevent bilateral repercussions from the CCP. Indeed, the entire premise of the CCP's Peaceful Development narrative was based on its fear in the early 2000s of a balancing coalition forming against a "rising China."¹⁶ The main barriers to many developing countries working with the U.S. and other Western countries are a lack of trust due to the legacy of colonization and a comparative shortfall in investment by the West. Fortunately, building relationships and trust are foundational concepts within the special operations enterprise, as are operating in the human and cognitive domains. Competing for advantage against the CCP consequently demands more than achieving military effects. Statecraft as a concept is best suited for campaigning for influence in complexity environments and, in so doing, seizing the strategic initiative.

SEIZING THE INITIATIVE THROUGH A STATECRAFT MINDSET

Restoring, strengthening, or stabilizing the WLIO in the future will not work—the fundamental structure of the international system has already transformed. Whereas containment occurred within a bipolar system (1947–1991) and the entrenched WLIO coalesced within a unipolar system (1991–present), the emerging international system bears the hallmarks of a multipolar system with a few great powers and many capable secondary powers.¹⁷ And unlike during the past 70 years, the West will not likely have the ability to fully control choke points or cut points in trade, finance, manufacturing, and diplomatic outcomes.¹⁸ Instead, the U.S., its allies, and its partners will have to navigate and co-create new relationships in real time.¹⁹ This will require trust, established networks, and more importantly, the perception of utility that only comes from regular, substantive interaction across the JIIM-C. This is where SOF excel and the CCP lags.

Statecraft is defined here as the application of all elements of national power to achieve a strategic political effect. As Charles W. Freeman, Jr. notes, “Statecraft translates national interests and concerns into national goals and strategies. It accumulates and applies the power of the state to other states and peoples to achieve these goals and strategies. Statecraft is the strategy of power.”²⁰ Competing for advantage is thus a matter of accurately assessing the relative balance of power, capabilities, and potential of one’s own country versus those of the adversary or competitor—and then acting in such a way as to improve the actual balance in one’s own favor or mask weakness by favorably improving the balance of perceived power.²¹ Freeman continues, “It is, however, not enough for statesmen merely to assess the balance of perceived power and of power itself. They must act to enhance both. They thereby expand their options for strategy.”²²

Statecraft, in this view, is intrinsically forward-learning, adaptive to new circumstances, and cognizant of the perpetual ebb and flow of the relative balance of power. This perspective is mirrored perfectly in the Joint Staff’s recognition of complexity dynamics in the JCIC.²³ There is no stasis or stability in international politics, no “countering”

to maintain the current condition, just perpetual re-crafting for the “new” since all actors perpetually seek to enhance their positions through advances in technology and expanded relationships. Power in statecraft is:

...the capacity to direct the decisions and actions of others. Power derives from strength and will. Strength comes from the transformation of resources into capabilities. Will infuses objectives with resolve. Strategy marshals capabilities and brings them to bear with precision. Statecraft seeks through strategy to magnify the mass, relevance, impact, and irresistibility of power. It guides the ways the state deploys and applies its power abroad. These ways embrace the arts of war, espionage, and diplomacy.²⁴

Power is, unfortunately, situationally dependent, and it varies with each actor’s vulnerabilities or, more correctly, each actor’s perception of its own vulnerabilities versus the strengths of the adversary. The only true test of power is through war,²⁵ but this tool is mainly useful for coercion and often results in fear and resentment as others assess their own vulnerabilities. During times of peace, diplomacy should be the center of strategy in statecraft, relying on the non-military elements of power including political, economic, cultural, and commercial capabilities.²⁶

Indeed, the JCIC was written to inculcate the Joint Force with “the mindset and approach required to prevail in the future security environment...” and corresponds with this concept of statecraft.²⁷ It states,

Military action should shape favorable psychological, political, and logistical dynamics and conditions—in coordination and cooperation with, and in many cases in support of, non-military activities...The military instrument can rarely achieve sustainable strategic outcomes alone and is most effectual when applied in concert with non-military instruments in pursuit of clear political objectives.²⁸

Freeman further notes that “Diplomacy is the profession of persuasion,” designed to secure a country’s strategic interests.²⁹

In turn, such "strategic interests include those arising from the strengthening or weakening of adversaries and allies; shifting international alignments and patterns of influence; the discovery of new resources and technologies; changes in the international state system and in regulatory regimes established under it; the emergence of new patterns of economic development and trade, as well as of new doctrines and ideologies; and challenges to the status and treatment of citizens and their property abroad."³⁰ Once again, the conceptual continuity with the JCIC is noteworthy. It, too, states,

Renowned military theorist B.H. Liddell Hart observed that effective commanders recognize that "the aim in war is to weaken resistance before attempting to overcome it." With this aim in mind, military leaders should align their efforts with non-military partners to degrade an adversary's alliances, partnerships, and sources of support, while safeguarding and strengthening those that enable the friendly campaign. The goal is to limit an adversary's freedom of action and resiliency, while increasing U.S. and partner nation options and support. Non-military partners may enable economic sanctions against adversaries, develop new alliances, secure access to ports and overflight routes, and facilitate economic and military aid for state and non-state partners.³¹

The validity of this statement is palpable for every member of the military who now recognizes the strategic complications the CCP has masterfully designed over the past two decades.

The main elements of national power include:

- 1. National will, which depends on a country's propensity to risk military, economic, and political resources and whether adversaries believe its rhetoric along with its national fortitude to sustain the risk and its obstinacy in its demands;***³²
- 2. National strengths, which include diplomatic and political acumen in foreign policy, a country's breadth of coalitions and alliances, its cultural prestige and ability to engage in***

*persuasive diplomacy (necessary geopolitical lubricants though not useful for coercion), its economic strength and patterns of interdependence, its population size, its natural resources and physical location, its level of technology and education, and its military strength;*³³ and

3. National potential, which includes the mass, relevance, impact, irresistibility, and sustainability of aligning national will with national strengths.³⁴

Although the military is certainly an important factor in the equation of national power, it is not necessarily the most important at all times. Statecraft in the modern era relies increasingly on the commercial and non-profit sectors to assert influence abroad, but harnessing them as national potential is a difficult task due to the classic political science problem of the principal-agent (P-A) dilemma.³⁵ Although the CCP appears to have effectively overcome the dilemma from the outsider perspective, it will be shown later that there are vulnerabilities in its approach as well. Even for the CCP, the P-A dilemma is alive and well.

Competing for advantage in competition below armed conflict requires a statecraft mindset that amplifies the “attractors” of national potential, such as business, development, and diplomacy. All these elements of national power are more consistent with the concept of geo-economics, which Robert Blackwell and Jennifer Harris define as “the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations’ economic actions on a country’s geopolitical goals.”³⁶ In other words, geo-economics improves national strengths and national potential or erodes the adversary’s, thereby attacking the strategy of the adversary. As Freeman notes,

National potential also reflects the strategic attributes of a state’s national territories and footholds abroad. National potential is enhanced by a state’s ability to rally powerful allies and auxiliaries, joining the strength of others to its cause. It is weakened by isolation or association with the weak and the vulnerable. These factors help determine the

extent to which a state can apply its strengths to counter and reduce the national potential of an opponent, compelling that opponent to yield and accommodate it.³⁷

It is evident through this discussion that in issuing the JCIC, the Joint Staff has intrinsically directed the Joint Force to engage in integrated campaigning with a statecraft mindset with the intent to improve national potential. In this way, SOF can more clearly conceptualize their role in strategic competition and seize the initiative.

THE DUAL MEANING OF STATECRAFT

In designing and co-creating the future, one might perceive a kind of craftsmanship—envisioning how raw materials like wood, metal, or clay can be manipulated *over time* to yield some novel contribution to the world. So it is with the term “statecraft,” though the material manipulated over time in this arena is power. Statecraft as discussed thus far has focused on the ability of a country to generate capability and influence with respect to other states. This is a crucially important aspect of statecraft since the external environment creates the conditions that are either favorable or harmful to a regime’s survival. The “crafting” of the state is all about the persistence of change. Although the American mind is most comfortable with concepts of stability in politics, the truth is that change is perpetual. Once again, Freeman insightfully writes,

States wax and wane, coalesce, and cleave asunder. As change proceeds, the national interests of a state conflict or coincide in varying degrees with those of other states. Relations between states, even those closest to each other in culture and temperament, are at once competitive and cooperative. States compete or cooperate to secure territory, strategic advantage, resources, economic privilege, deference, prestige, influence, and ideological ascendancy.³⁸

In this succinct passage, there are two meanings inherent to the term “statecraft.” The first is with respect to the changes in interest between and among states that “are at once competitive and cooperative” to

varying degrees. This is the stuff of foreign policy of which the military is a part and toward which it is principally directed.

Arguably, the more important aspect, though, is the internal meaning of statecraft. A “state” is not a naturally occurring entity—it is always contingent on and daily reproduced in the minds of its people, who either willingly accept the legitimacy of its sovereignty over them or who must be compelled by force to accept it. In noting the fact that, as quoted above, “states wax and wane, coalesce, and cleave asunder,” there is a recognition that daily reproducing the state is the most basic element of statecraft in which politicians, certainly, but all citizens and businesses necessarily must engage. It is not easy to cobble together coherent states out of the myriad interests, subcultures, ethnicities, religions, tribes, and intellectual traditions characteristic of most societies. Yes, path dependence makes the “regularity” of the state seem like the natural condition to most Americans today, but that is only because “the state” was well crafted by the time they were born. Seeing the strains in American society today, it is not difficult to imagine the stresses that

Americans felt in the 1850s in the years prior to the Civil War when the internal crafting of the state broke down.

So it is with all states. External statecraft is first and foremost a function of the interests and stressors generated from internal statecraft. Whether a third country decides to cooperate or compete with the U.S., the CCP, or both depends upon its own internal statecraft

dynamics, and this is where the analytical unit of analysis matters for SOF. Typically, the impulse in foreign policy is to focus on the government at the national level where sovereign prerogative

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matters most—an external statecraft perspective. This is natural given the realities of international politics where states are the main players. Conventional forces are restricted mainly to this unit of analysis due to their formations and capabilities. SOF, however, enjoy other capabilities that enable them to also focus on the internal perspective of statecraft, resulting in the opportunity to build trust and relationships at the building-block level of society. Importantly, the CCP mainly works at the national level to generate influence. It can certainly be effective at this level given the investment capital it is willing to leverage. However, it is ultimately constrained in the breadth and depth of influence it can muster for the long term.

Where SOF can contribute best to strategic competition is in enhancing national potential by, per the JCIC's mandate, limiting an adversary's freedom of action and resiliency while increasing U.S. and partner nation options and support at the level of internal statecraft. Such activity requires supporting the broader JIIM-C in many, if not most, cases, which also means thinking systemically about resources, effects, processes, and timing. A statecraft approach is effective. All one needs to do is appreciate for a moment the CCP's use of statecraft over the past 30 years to gain a sense of how geo-economics and diplomatic influence have altered the perceived balance of power and structure of the international system.

THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S APPROACH TO STATECRAFT

Core “Chinese” national interests are often said by expert China watchers to be those of the CCP, not of the broader citizenry. Readers will have noted by now the conscious substitution of “China” in this introduction with “the CCP,” which was a purposeful decision to emphasize the distinction. “China” appears insurmountable. “The CCP” does not. In the U.S. system, the regime of government is the Constitution, and political parties compete for influence over the government bureaucracy and policy within the rules established by the Constitution. Conversely, in the Chinese system, the CCP is the regime, and the government bureaucracy is a direct outgrowth of the party

itself. Political scientists often refer to the CCP as a “party-state.” In the case of the U.S., it is possible to differentiate Republican and Democrat interests from larger national interests; in the case of China, the CCP’s interests *are* the national interests. So, what are the CCP’s core interests toward which it directs grand strategy and national potential?

Secure the Chinese Communist Party’s Survival through Economic Growth

First and foremost, the CCP is dedicated to its political survival. Few Chinese dynasties fell as a result of external shock; rather, they typically degraded from within and collapsed under their own weight. Under Mao Zedong, the CCP enacted the horribly destructive policies of The Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), resulting in economic devastation and tens of millions of deaths. After Mao’s passing, his successor Deng Xiaoping recognized, as with previous dynasties, Maoist economic policy threatened the CCP’s position in the world and the revolution itself, so he introduced new internal production incentives in the mid-1970s and tepidly engaged the international market starting in 1978. William J. Norris notes that since then, and as a result of extraordinary economic performance, “maintaining the CCP’s control of China, in turn, rests on legitimacy. Since the Reform and Opening Up Period began in 1978, the CCP’s basis for domestic legitimacy has shifted away from revolutionary Maoism toward economically oriented pragmatism. Economic growth has come to replace communist ideology as the chief legitimizing dynamic underpinning the CCP’s popular credibility.”³⁹ Accruing political legitimacy through economic growth has been possible for the CCP the past three decades because the Chinese population started out at such a low point on the development ladder, and even minor efficiency gains could lead to outsized economic and political satisfaction.

But as the economy approaches a condition closer to full growth, economic growth rates will slow down, and the inherent inefficiencies in the centralized CCP system will exacerbate that trend (see Figure 1.4).⁴⁰ Norris further notes that the CCP has turned to notions of Chinese

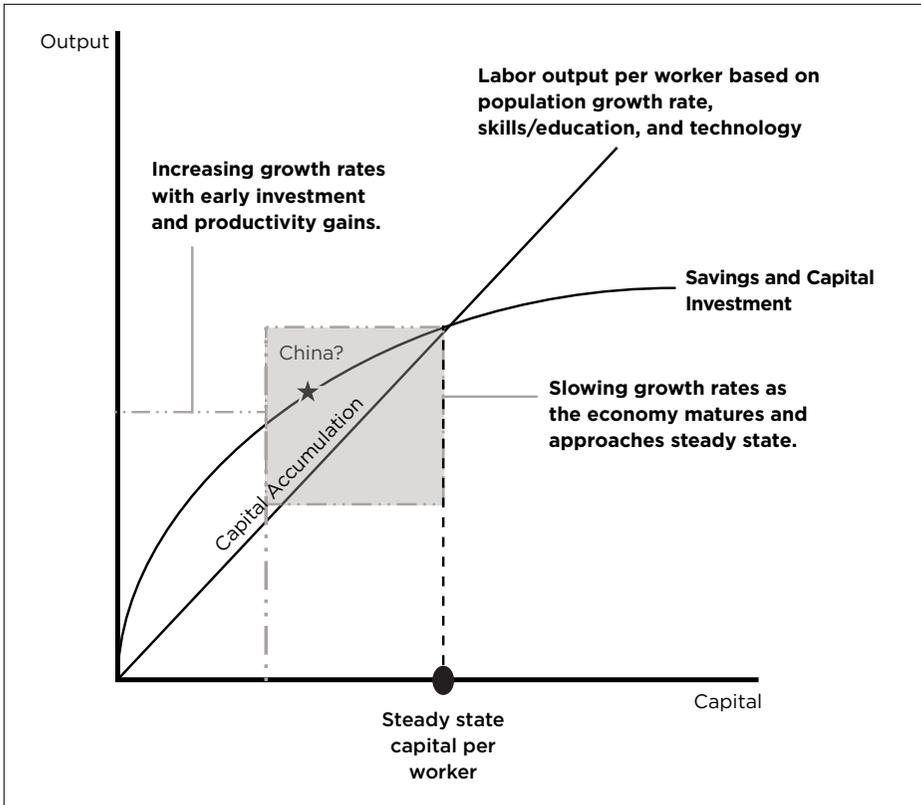


Figure 1.4. Solow Model of Economic Growth. Countries are rich because they have high investment rates in physical capital, spend a large fraction of time accumulating skills ... have low population growth rates, and have high levels of technology.” (in Jones, Introduction to Economic Growth, 57.) Underneath the Savings and Capital Investment arc is increasing wealth per person, which initially grows very rapidly, but inflects, slows down, and levels off over time. This model helps contextualize China’s burst of extraordinary growth over the past thirty years, and possibly forecasts slower growth depending on where it sits along the arc. If the CCP’s domestic tranquility relies on Western investment, technology transfer, inexpensive manufacturing inputs, and skills development continuously leading to higher steady state capital per worker, then geoeconomic statecraft should stress these factors of economic growth to achieve behavioral changes more conducive to cooperation or mild competition. Impeding the growth factors above could contribute to a guns-versus-butter dilemma for the CCP and refocus its national resources from external statecraft to internal statecraft. Source: Author.

nationalism as a legitimizing ideology as economic growth rates have slowed, concluding, “to the extent that the party will seek to substitute nationalism in place of economic growth in its legitimating narrative, the region could be headed for some turbulence.”⁴¹ Although the CCP retains its communist roots and Xi Jinping appears to remain rooted in Marxist-Leninism, it is worth noting that the socialist, corporatist trend in CCP economic policy, in combination with a strong Han nationalist ethic, is beginning to bear some resemblance to German Fascism of the 1930s.

Divert and Mitigate Domestic Tensions through Development

Despite boasting the highest sustained economic growth trajectory in human history, the CCP still must meet the growing expectations of hundreds of millions of citizens living in abject poverty in the country’s rural interior. Moreover, with rapid economic growth has come an extraordinary, unmistakable wealth gap in a supposedly Marxist, egalitarian society. Corruption, poor healthcare, unemployment, bad working conditions, pollution, and potential ethnic and religious unrest are perpetual challenges the CCP faces, but, for the most part, the perception of rising opportunity through continued economic growth has soothed the open sores. Through the strategic placement of industry and subsidies to state-owned enterprises in key regions, the CCP has been able to project the aura of steady, practical, and skillful control over the economy sufficient to placate domestic grievances.⁴² For this trajectory to continue and to achieve a commanding position in geopolitics and in the international economy, the CCP requires another 10 to 15 years of growth rates above 6 percent per year along with continued domestic stability.⁴³ As noted above, the natural headwinds are starting to turn against the CCP’s growth trajectory, with possibly negative domestic effects becoming increasingly plausible.

Craft a New, Post-Mao, Confucian National Identity

Since the early 1980s, the leadership of the CCP has recognized the need to fill the void left by jettisoning Maoist ideology. Recognizing the cultural affinity for and utility of Confucian traditions—despite

the decade-long attempt to expunge them during the Cultural Revolution—the CCP began to revive them as a system of ethics underlying communal harmony. Because restoring the traditions gained acceptance over the course of the 1990s, the CCP turned to applying Confucian principles as a foundation for its foreign policy to assuage fears of its growing power in the international system. The Confucian identity has both an internal statecraft function in terms of solidifying a cultural ethic that supports a highly empowered, centralized political system and an external statecraft function in terms of presenting an attractive international image of a harmony-seeking, community-oriented great power. This self-image achieves a dual effect: it provides the nation a key point of cultural pride in the projection of a nationalist, Chinese identity while signaling directly to the Global South its intention of being the champion of the “global periphery” as a developing country whose development path provides an alternative to Western, individualistic, democratic norms.⁴⁴ This is a key aspect of its grand strategy because it is in the Global South—not the industrialized West—that growth rates are highest and the specter of colonialism still resonates.⁴⁵ Confucian principles, consequently, are attractive for many countries as long as the CCP is not perceived to be developing its own hegemonic and unequal system of trade. The CCP has played with a number of narratives stemming from Confucian principles, such as (in order of their unveiling) the CCP’s Benign Rise, Peaceful Rise, Peaceful Development, and Community of Common Destiny. All these narrative frames were designed to perpetuate Deng’s warning to downplay or hide the CCP’s relative power for as long as possible under the Lying Low policy.⁴⁶

Restructure the International System to Support the Chinese Communist Party’s Approach to Governance

As mentioned previously, the CCP recognizes that the existing WLIO rooted in norms of democracy presents a potential threat to the regime’s survival or, at a minimum, presents obstacles against which national power must regularly be directed. This is punctuated by Western neoliberal international relations theory, which predicted the CCP would have to change the character of the regime to conform

to the pressures of the system as it became more embedded in international markets and international organizations.⁴⁷ Instead, after securing the regime domestically by the early 2000s, CCP statecraft has endeavored since the 2008 global financial crisis to transform the international system to more comfortably reflect its own values and political norms and, therefore, its national interests.⁴⁸ Under the rubric of the “China Dream,” Xi Jinping announced in 2016 to the Politburo that the CCP should embark upon a policy of proactively shaping global governance and playing a more pronounced role in international organizations, such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other regional institutions. After analyzing his speech, Angela Poh and Mingjiang Li write, “Xi also emphasized that China should proactively participate in shaping international rules on emerging global issues such as those in the maritime domain, cyber security, outer space, nuclear safety, polar issues, anti-corruption, and climate change...These are all signs of China attempting to gradually transform itself from a passive recipient of rules to becoming an active player in shaping global norms and rules.”⁴⁹

CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY ECONOMIC STATECRAFT

Despite its notable increase in military capability, the CCP’s main foreign policy instrument for securing its national interests remains economic statecraft, which Norris defines as “the state’s intentional manipulation of economic interaction to capitalize on, reinforce, or reduce the associated strategic externalities. Considering externalities are generated by commercial actors that are subject to incentivize structures that are at least partly determined by states, states can seek to influence the behavior of commercial actors in an effort to achieve the state’s strategic objectives.”⁵⁰ Like geo-economics, economic statecraft reflects the intention to improve national power, but it is more focused on the principal-agent dilemma. The CCP’s P-A dilemmas arise because commercial actors, who are the agents interacting in the international system, often have different interests than the CCP itself (the principal, in this situation). Economic statecraft requires a system of incentives, or carrots and sticks, to ensure that

companies' decisions and behaviors enhance the government's national interests.⁵¹ In adopting economic statecraft and geo-economics as the centerpiece of its grand strategy, the CCP has essentially acknowledged its greatest vulnerability: the perception of a rising threat. Although to date it has adopted soft power as the foundation of its international influence and generated a few narratives supporting this foundation, its growing willingness to restructure the international system presents significant challenges ahead.

Use Peaceful Development to Avoid Balancing Coalition/Perception of Threat

The origin of the CCP's decision to stress economic statecraft in the early 1990s derives directly from the international isolation the CCP experienced following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 and its subsequent determination to avoid a "China Threat" narrative from gaining hold before its economic revitalization.⁵² The CCP's leadership recognized that international isolation was a drain on generating national power, so managing the perception of a more capable, active China was the most important factor in facilitating its rise. In *The Origins of Alliances*, Stephen Walt asserts that states balance against perceived power and threat, not absolute power *per se*,⁵³ and this is a matter of strategic communications and manipulating the cognitive domain to the greatest extent possible. He writes, "An imbalance of threat occurs when the most threatening state coalition is significantly more dangerous than the second most threatening state or coalition. The degree to which a state threatens others is the product of its aggregate power, its geographic proximity, its offensive capability, and the aggressiveness of its intentions."⁵⁴ States consequently seek to reduce their vulnerabilities to the strongest, most threatening power by changing trade patterns, forming military coalitions, and adopting more bellicose discourse with respect to it.⁵⁵ This Realist theory of international relations appears to have been influential on the CCP's leaders based on their own experiences because it formed, for over a generation, the intellectual logic for its "global reassurance" plan to accrue national power.⁵⁶

Whereas the definition of power above, “the capacity to direct the decisions and actions of others,” biases toward the notion of hard power, the CCP’s conscious decision to avoid the perception of becoming a rising threat resulted in a decision to focus on soft power.⁵⁷ Keohane and Nye describe soft power as:

...the ability to get desired outcomes because others want what you want; it is the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. It works by convincing others to follow or getting them to agree to norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one’s ideas or culture or the ability to set the agenda through standards and institutions that shape the preferences of others...If a state can make its power legitimate in the eyes of others and establish international institutions that encourage others to define their interests in compatible ways, it may not need to expend as many of its costly traditional economic or military resources.⁵⁸

For a government whose legitimacy was (and continues to be) dependent upon high economic growth rates, preventing a balancing coalition that could divert emerging trade and investment patterns was the single most important element of foreign policy in the larger grand strategy.

Emphasizing economics as the main element of power had many benefits: it was less threatening to wary partners, especially regional ones; it diluted military-related bureaucratic interests; and it offered the possibility of creating favorable, win-win situations that could bind economic partners together and make them dependent on the Chinese market.⁵⁹ Hence, Deng’s policy of Lying Low and the rhetorical avoidance of the term “great power” and experiments with “responsible big power,” “multipolarity,” Peaceful Rise, Peaceful Development, Harmonious World, and Community of Common Destiny sought to reinforce the CCP’s claim to reject hegemony in search of mutually beneficial, harmonious relations among equal states.⁶⁰ Once solidified through decades of strong economic growth and broad

dependence on China as the “the world’s workshop,” latent national power could be overtly transformed into coercive economic and military power, which is the policy Xi has apparently opted for during his tenure.⁶¹ Restructuring global governance as part of a larger trend toward multilateralism has thus been a foreign policy initiative to entrench its place in the international system and generate new path dependencies upon China instead of the West.

Restoring China’s place regionally is key to the CCP leadership’s calculus, and to this end, it sees establishing regional hegemony through economic interdependence as a necessary condition for achieving its traditional Harmonious World or Community of Common Destiny. As Hoang Thi Ha notes, preventing regional resistance would most optimally occur,

...not because they are under pressure or coercion but because in their strategic calculus, resisting the transition would be futile while embracing it would be natural. The notion of shi, or the propensity of things, in Chinese traditional statecraft helps us gain a better understanding of the [Community of Common Destiny] proposal. According to François Jullien, shi is ‘the potential of a situation that can be made to play in one’s favour’ by ‘setting out to illuminate the progress of things [and] elucidating its internal coherence in order to act in accordance with it.’⁶²

Ha further assesses that the CCP seeks to reestablish the regional imperial system wherein China benevolently leads the region as each state comports to, as in Confucian tradition, its subordinate role in the hierarchy of power. To accomplish this, the CCP seeks to encourage greater regional economic dependence on China, restore the diplomatic performance of deference or fealty to the CCP as with the emperors, and demonstrably illustrate the geographic distance and limited ability of the U.S. to project power and influence relative to the CCP.⁶³ All of these entail soft power, institutional path dependencies, and sunk costs that leave creating alternative pathways too costly to contemplate or too politically sensitive to undertake. Among SOF, soft power might be considered a “gray zone” approach, but from a traditional statecraft

perspective, it is the elegant application of national power. The notions of hegemony and *shi* simply apply the definition of power (“the capacity to direct the decisions and actions of others”) to the often-subconscious cognitive domain instead of the overt physical or material domain to which the U.S. has become accustomed.⁶⁴

Yet, its turn toward restructuring the international system and playing a stronger role in global governance has resulted in a contradiction in the CCP’s foreign policy approach.⁶⁵ For decades, Deng’s Lying Low foreign policy strategy cultivated the image of Ferdinand the Bull—a large, muscular, potentially dangerous animal who only wanted to live in harmony with those around him (represented by the Peaceful Development and Harmonious World narratives)—but since 2015 has more assertively developed its military capabilities, utilized economic measures to pressure governments into compliance with its preferred policies, and deployed military assets to reinforce sovereignty claims over disputed territory in the South China Sea and along the border with India. Under Xi Jinping, the CCP’s foreign policy has placed greater emphasis on securing its national interests, whereas in the past, it would subordinate them to a degree to emphasize economic growth. Instead of interpreting Peaceful Development as a rejection of military force and hegemony, it now means that limited use of force is acceptable and does not contradict a mostly peaceful contribution to the international system. Military responses to threats against territorial claims or key commodity supply chains are now clearly within the CCP’s range of options, whereas before it would have demonstrated restraint. Under Xi, there has also been a clear expectation that peaceful development requires the perception of reciprocal behavior from others.⁶⁶ As Jian Zhang concludes, “Thus, unlike in the past when China often preferred to state what it hoped other countries would do, now increasingly Chinese leaders and officials have become more forthright in stating what actions by other countries China cannot tolerate.”⁶⁷

Although the CCP has accomplished much in the last 10 years, there are potential obstacles it must clear in order to restructure the international system. Internally, many foreign policy experts in China still subscribe to Deng’s Lying Low philosophy to prevent a balancing

coalition of states.⁶⁸ It is historically natural for a state's international interests to grow as its economic interests and ability to shape relations expand with national power,⁶⁹ but the overt projection of power was precisely what Deng warned against.⁷⁰ Realist theory has long held that changes in relative national power lead to balancing behavior where, for structural vulnerability or perceptions of threat, weaker states seek to offset the power of stronger ones by banding together.⁷¹ Some scholars assert that the CCP's rise mirrors the rise of the U.S. in that it was able to prevent direct conflict with the main global powers during its rapid economic expansion in the third quarter of the 19th century and only engaged in regional power politics. However, the CCP faces a more difficult rise because even regional states are locked in numerous institutional arrangements, the international system has stronger norms against violating sovereignty and militarism, the Global South is key to securing the CCP's international clout, other great and secondary powers have overlapping interests that might constrain the CCP's adventurism, and a large-scale war between other powers that collectively weakens them seems highly unlikely moving forward.⁷² The CCP's transition to a more muscular, military-backed foreign policy posture has already initiated fears among regional states and a number of others outside the CCP's immediate neighborhood, which could cause the very balancing behavior Deng's Lying Low policy meant to avoid and Xi's Community of Common Destiny rhetoric tried to reinforce.⁷³ Thus, Barry Buzan and Michael Cox warn, "For China, and for international society, the question will be whether China pulls its weight in creating and managing the post-Western order, or whether it succumbs to a self-centred and reckless nationalism."⁷⁴ There are stronger indications now that Xi intends to follow the latter course.

Use Economic Growth to Transform the Relative Balance of Power (Foreign Policy to Enable Economic Goals)

In following Deng's Lying Low foreign policy, the CCP patiently prioritized building up the economy as the foundation for all other elements of national power—military, cultural, commercial, and informational—and leveraged the security and institutionalized global

trading system offered by WLIO to do so. In other words, so long as it did not aggressively seize the territory of another state or engage in gross violations of human rights, it did not have to fear the military power of any other country. It simply had to bide its time on major sovereignty concerns, such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, until such time that its economic hegemony and military might made following CCP guidance “the propensity of things.” Recognizing its diplomatic limitations, inferior economic and military capabilities, and domestic legitimacy concerns, the CCP opted to subordinate external statecraft concerns to internal statecraft. In other words, it prioritized geo-economics and economic statecraft to build up its strength over decades just as the U.S. and Germany did in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The trade-off was that the CCP could not press its sovereignty claims during the soft power phase of accruing national power. The CCP had to consent to being a rule taker in international politics, which meant accepting the WLIO and presenting the image of a peacefully rising power. Soft power is thought to be intrinsically consistent with Confucian notions of hierarchy, self-restraint, demonstrating benevolence to subordinates, and harmonious relations.⁷⁵ For instance, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the CCP engaged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regularly in order to relax tensions and open up trade, and in so doing, signed in 2002 the *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea* whereby all signatories agreed to resolve South China Sea claims without resort to force.⁷⁶ In hindsight, this declaration fit perfectly within the geo-economics approach to accruing national power, and its terms are currently stretched to the breaking point. In CAS terms, the CCP used its economy as an enormous “basin of attraction” to which regional and international trade would flow as the propensity of things and thereby improve national power to reshape the international system.

Use the Economy for Foreign Policy Goals to Become a Rule Maker, Not a Rule Taker

Since 2013, the CCP under Xi has recognized a different potential with its national power, and this is to use its economy to achieve

foreign policy objectives.⁷⁷ The discursive move from Peaceful Development to the Community of Common Destiny was purposeful in this light because it transitioned China's role in the WLIO from a rule taker to shaping the context of global governance with alternative political and development norms—all while using multilateral institutions as a member in good standing of the international community. That is, policies like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continue the geo-economic and soft-power orientation of the CCP's foreign policy while co-opting existing or creating new multilateral institutions that entrench path dependence on the CCP's development assistance and market as the propensity of things.⁷⁸ BRI seeks to supplant the trans-Atlantic relationship by refocusing the global economy on Eurasia, and the resulting trade dependencies over time could cause WLIO security treaties (like NATO) to become ineffective based on carrot-and-stick diplomacy by the CCP.⁷⁹ Already, such economic power has resulted in diplomatic influence regarding the South China Sea and the gradual but steady diplomatic isolation of Taiwan among many developing countries,⁸⁰ but the disbursement of billions of dollars in development loans through the BRI-oriented Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank could entangle many dozens of countries in agreements that create dependence on the CCP. With the World Bank and other international lending institutions moving slowly on elevating China's place in global governance and investing in Global South-to-Global South trade lanes, the CCP realized it could seize the initiative through the BRI and use its massive dollar reserves to create new pathways of trade and new norms of international action.⁸¹ Weifeng Zhou and Mario Esteban succinctly conclude, "Regional multilateral initiatives such as the BRI are essential to produce common rules, promote alternative norms and socialize ideas of interactive cooperation for bolstering Beijing's soft power and building its role as a normative power."⁸² In this light, the Community of Common Destiny discourse is designed to cultivate a sense of "we" identity amongst the participants, unlike the China-centric Peaceful Development discourse, which was clearly representative of only China itself. In crafting this "we" identity, the CCP could generate, through geo-economics, the

diplomatic influence to reshape the rules of the international system to more naturally reflect its geopolitical interests.⁸³

Diversify Commodity Supplies and Advance Up the Value Chain

The final aspect of the CCP's economic statecraft grand strategy is to secure a diversified supply chain to continue to feed its industry and sustain its high economic growth rates. Without commodities, the CCP cannot be the world's workshop, and its own domestic legitimacy will start to wane. More explicitly, the CCP as a party will experience significant domestic political challenges if its access to cheap and plentiful commodities is disrupted because economic growth will decline below a tolerable level.⁸⁴ The BRI as an investment vehicle locks in essential inputs, such as oil, iron, gas, coal, food, and even low-level manufacturers, at relatively cheap prices for long periods of time. All these inputs are necessary to enable the CCP to redirect its domestic investment capital toward education and technology that enable China to march up the production value chain.⁸⁵ But, as noted earlier, with growing international economic interests, rising powers inevitably accrue new insecurities and often respond by growing their military strength. Here, the security dilemma becomes a problem to the CCP because its recent military build-up—owing directly to its geo-economic strength—is causing anxiety among many countries, including its regional neighbors.⁸⁶ As a result, the CCP is faced with a rhetorical commitment gap in which its discourse of Peaceful Development and Harmonious World is evaluated in the context of its actual behaviors. Overt hypocrisy could raise diplomatic and economic hurdles that have, to date, been low, with a cumulative effect of creating a drag on economic growth and forcing a guns-versus-butter dilemma. Should the costs of securing the supply chain rise and weaken this aspect of the CCP's grand strategy, its overall plans would be imperiled over the medium to long term.

HOW CAN SOF CONTRIBUTE TO OVERWHELMING AND/OR EXHAUSTING THE COMPETITOR WITH KEY POPULATIONS?

Strategic competition is fundamentally about political will, the balance of perceived relative power, raising the costs of the adversary's plans through the synthesis of the elements of national power, and eroding the surety of the adversary's placement. Within the context of the JCIC's guidance to overwhelm or exhaust the adversary, SOF's main contribution to strategic competition will be in three broad areas: improving the U.S. balance of perceived power through support to political and military initiatives, contributing to influence and information operations that illuminate the CCP's actual behavior versus its rhetoric, and competing for influence in the Global South through persistent relationship building. The combined effect of these activities should be improved political will to shape the future to the benefit of the U.S. and its allies and partners.

Competing for Advantage Essentially Means Promoting Relative Power

Improving relative national power is essentially a political undertaking, which underscores the cognitive change necessary in the military that *it contributes to political effects through military means*. Freeman describes "political actions" as "those that add the power of allies, partners, and friends to one's own, or that divide and weaken the power of enemies, opponents, and rivals. Political measures are those that apply the persuasive force of power to adjustments in military, economic, political, and cultural relations with other states through measures short of war."⁸⁷ Few countries in history have been able to unilaterally dominate an environment, and the CCP's strategic culture does not include alliance politics as known in the West. The special operations enterprise benefits by consisting of, in part, "warrior-diplomats," whose relevance to the future operating environment has renewed emphasis. Indeed, Freeman continues, "A state aggregates power through the cultivation of bilateral relations with other states; the formation of coalition, alliance, and client-state relationships; the

establishment of protectorates, buffer states, and spheres of influence; participation in international organizations; and propaganda.”⁸⁸ SOF’s role in this regard is self-evident.

Politics Is Perception—and Lies at the Heart of the Chinese Communist Party’s Grand Strategy

If perception is essential to the CCP’s plan, then perception must be a key element in U.S. statecraft. Scholars have increasingly compared the CCP’s foreign policy paths over the past 20 years to the German rise under Otto von Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II. The former largely utilized economic power and entangling alliances to facilitate Germany’s economic, and therefore military, strengthening. Kaiser Wilhelm II turned to a more expansive and militaristic foreign policy that ultimately ended his reign after World War I.⁸⁹ The CCP’s Peaceful Development, Harmonious World, and Community of Common Destiny narratives are all meant to reinforce the perception

SOF’s main contribution to strategic competition will be in three broad areas: improving the U.S. balance of perceived power through support to political and military initiatives, contributing to influence and information operations that illuminate the CCP’s actual behavior versus its rhetoric, and competing for influence in the Global South through persistent relationship building.

of peaceful intentions to avoid balancing coalitions from forming. Whether malicious or not, “propaganda is political power in the form of psychological manipulation. It draws on a state’s cultural strength to persuade foreign elites of the logic, justice, and reasonableness of the state’s policies and activities abroad, to enlist their sympathy and support for these policies

and actions, and to predispose foreign leaders to facilitate and accommodate them.”⁹⁰ The CCP’s success in this area is impressive and demands a response equal to the reputational damage its own

communication networks apply against the United States. But an effective U.S. response requires fidelity about the target audience. Freeman further concludes,

"The extent to which propaganda corresponds to the beliefs and perspectives of those it seeks to influence determines its relevance. Delivery of its message through media that reach opinion leaders gives it impact. Its irresistibility is established by the extent to which it can withstand contrary argument. Its sustainability rests on its perceived sincerity and truth; these alone give it credibility that will survive events as they unfold."⁹¹

Given placement, access, and training, SOF of all tribes have a significant role to play in this regard.

Competing for the Global South

Finally, the CCP's strategy for achieving influence while propelling its economy for the long term requires hegemony over the Global South. Although seemingly peripheral to the interests of conventional forces, SOF, as geographically aligned and population-centric elements of the military, are ideally suited for competing for advantage in this area. Improving relationships with governments as a component of external statecraft, developing relationships with relevant populations as part of internal statecraft, promoting resilience of communities under pressure, supporting development assistance as part of soft power, and other core activities contribute directly to attacking the adversary's plan. While insufficient by themselves, SOF as part of a larger JIIM-C integrated campaigning effort could be essential to U.S. statecraft in this area.

OUTLINE

Returning for a moment to the metaphors offered earlier, the CCP is not an indomitable kraken—it is a crab in a bucket. Or, perhaps, it is a paper dragon parading around the world looking fierce and coherent but with tears, uninspired or resistant marchers, and challenges that must be precariously balanced (see Figure 1.5). SOF's

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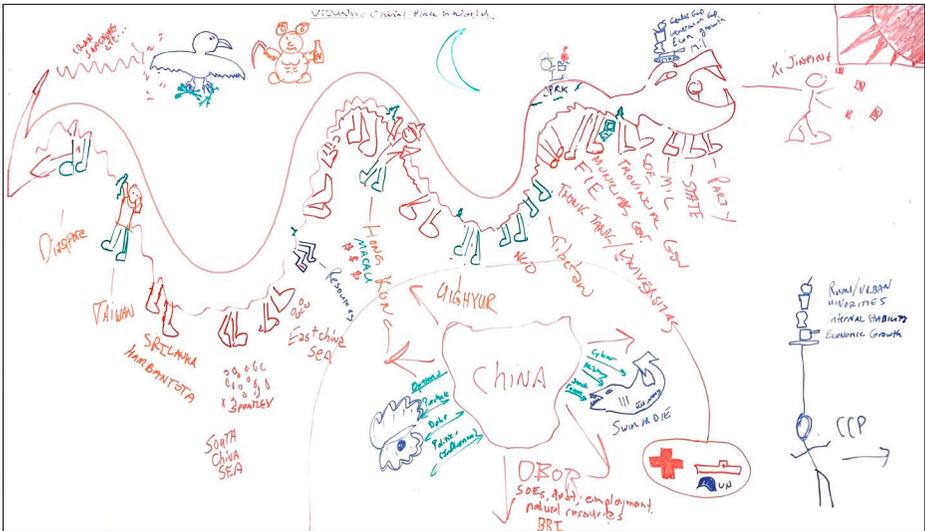


Figure 1.5. This graphic represents a metaphoric drawing co-created by a mixed team of military, interagency, and academic participants. In this image, the CCP is represented as a paper dragon that parades around the world with Belt and Road Initiative funds leading the way, but domestic political challenges cause rips and tears in the superficially coherent and menacing dragon. Whereas China was initially represented as a PRC kraken or dominating the correlation of forces, the paper dragon metaphor suggests fragility despite a menacing exterior. The dragging feet, issues being precariously balanced on the dragon's head, and the citizens marching in the opposite direction all indicate the potential for the façade to fail and the CCP's weaknesses to become readily apparent. Source: Author

contributions in attacking the CCP's strategy are, metaphorically, to erect obstructions along the parade route to limit the dragon's freedom of movement, promote headwinds that slow progress, amplify the effects of dragging feet, and make more precarious the spinning plates of domestic dissatisfaction. The chapters that follow provide a baseline for imagining how SOF can achieve these effects and are divided into three parts.

Part 1 explores the concept of soft balancing in more detail. In Chapter 1, Dr. J. Samuel Barkin and Dr. David C. Ellis outline the practice of soft balancing as U.S. experienced the approach by others during its "unipolar moment." They then apply the concept to the CCP's contribution to Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing, which directly undermines its Harmonious World and Community of Common Destiny narratives. In this area alone, SOF could contribute to multiple

JIIIM-C efforts with a range of political effects. In Chapter 2, Dr. Justin Conrad reviews the historical Chinese view of alliances and concludes that the CCP is likely to avoid creating meaningful alliances given Chinese political culture. China's traditional dynastic power placed it at the center of the "propensity of things" in its regional relationships, and the indications are that the CCP seeks to restore this natural condition. The likely CCP aversion to formal coalitions and alliances presents a strategic statecraft opportunity to which SOF could contribute.

Part 2 turns to internal statecraft challenges. Chapter 3, by Dr. Shale Horowitz and Dr. Min Ye, describes the politics of rural-urban relationships resulting from rapid industrialization. Although the CCP has presided over extraordinary economic growth, there remain critical vulnerabilities to the CCP based on how the state controls real estate and relies on the eastern industrial economy for subsidizing the more rural, farming-based interior. This chapter is essential for understanding why the CCP is so concerned with the political legitimacy associated with its economic growth rate. In Chapter 4, Dr. Lawrence C. Reardon explains the CCP's continuing challenges with religion. As a secular, communist party-state, the CCP attempted to eliminate religion from society but realized by the 1980s that it could not. Religion's role in Chinese society continues despite the party's efforts to contain it, and the Muslim, Christian, and Confucian traditions continue to be major domestic political concerns for the CCP.

By prioritizing the content in Parts 1 and 2, the hope is to emphasize the soft-power and soft-balancing opportunities in U.S. statecraft, though the natural proclivity among SOF is likely to bias toward hard balancing. Part 3 turns to hard balancing with SOF's contribution to a larger military deterrence effect through resistance activities. In Chapter 5, Will Irwin analyzes Taiwan's resistance potential as it currently stands and concludes that it has many positive factors for resistance but could benefit from more structured planning and training. Of course, the opposite side of the resistance coin is the counterinsurgency strategy adopted by the adversary. In Chapter 6, Dr. Stephen G. Craft outlines the likely contours of the CCP's counterinsurgency thinking. He assesses that the CCP likely

does not have counterinsurgency doctrine *per se*, but that it has standard practices that can be anticipated. He also concludes that the CCP is unlikely at this point to disseminate its model to other countries due to the peculiarities of how it approaches social control and political dissent.

Whereas this introduction outlines the strategic-level orientation of how special operations can contribute to competing for advantage, Chapter 7, by Dr. David C. Ellis and Charles N. Black, applies SOF's core activities toward these competition activities. In particular, they offer a framework on how to contextualize the core activities in terms of strategic political effects and frame them in terms of competing through geo-economics.

For SOF, competition below armed conflict is not just about competing against the adversary's military through military effects—it is about accepting the fact that the military engages in politics by other means with military effects comprising but one aspect. Instead, it also requires supporting larger, better choreographed, synthesized applications of national power against adversary weaknesses using the military's size, funding, placement, educational resources, intelligence gathering capabilities, and relationships on the ground. SOF have a special role to play in this regard because the future operating environment is fundamentally about, in SOF terms, political warfare.

Notes

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- ² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (2018), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257.
- ³ Charles W. Freeman, Jr., *Arts of Power: Statecraft and Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 4.
- ⁴ See, for example, Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), whose influential work appeared just seven years prior to the systemic transformation leading to "America's unipolar moment" as described in Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/1991): 23-33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20044692>
- ⁵ Joe Miller, Monte Erfourth, Jeremiah Monk, and Ryan Oliver, "Harnessing David and Goliath: Orthodoxy, Asymmetry, and Competition," *Small Wars Journal*, 7 February 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/harnessing-david-and-goliath-orthodoxy-asymmetry-and-competition>; Joe Miller and Monte Erfourth, "SOF in Competition: Establishing the Foundation of Strategy," *Small Wars Journal*, 7 June 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/sof-competition-establishing-foundation-strategy-v13>.
- ⁶ An alternate translation of the word "plans" is "strategy" or "stratagem." This latter context suggests non-economic approaches to subduing an enemy rather than attacking the military's battle plan. For a good discussion, see Derek M.C. Yuen, "Deciphering Sun Tzu," *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 2 (2008): 183-200.
- ⁷ Joint Chiefs, *Joint Concept 2018*.
- ⁸ Hilton L. Root, *Network Origins of the Global Economy: East vs. West in a Complex Systems Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 206; William J. Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft: Commercial Actors, Grand Strategy, and State Control* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 47; Jian Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0?'" *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 11.
- ⁹ Others have explored the validity of presuming the CCP's capacity to produce a grand strategy, and it is beyond the scope of this volume to review the debate in depth. This chapter follows William J. Norris's analysis in *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 45-51, in asserting that, despite internal ideological and bureaucratic divisions, the CCP demonstrates sufficient agency as a unitary actor to presume the CCP evinces a grand strategy.
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- ¹¹ Robert D. Blackwell and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 1-4, 253-255.
- ¹² John Collison of the United States Special Operations Command J59 deserves special recognition and gratitude for this framing in comments on earlier drafts of the monograph.
- ¹³ For a discussion on increasing returns and path dependence in complexity theory and international relations, see John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 53-56. For a discussion on the CCP's World's Workshop strategy, see Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 60.
- ¹⁴ For a discussion on the "myth of stability" in U.S. Government policy thinking, see David C. Ellis and Charles N. Black, *Complexity, Organizational Blindness, and the SOCOM Design Way* (Tampa: JSOU Press, 2018), 79-88.
- ¹⁵ For examples of a growing body of research on the structural weaknesses inherent to the Chinese economic system due to a massive debt burden, see George Magnus, *Red Flags: Why Xi's China Is in Jeopardy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Dinny McMahon, *China's Great Wall of Debt: Shadow Banks, Ghost Cities, Massive Loans, and the End of the Chinese Miracle* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018); Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 59-60.
- ¹⁶ David Scott, "China's Public Diplomacy Rhetoric, 1990-2012: Pragmatic Image-Crafting," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26 (2015): 250; Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise,'" *The China Quarterly* 190 (June 2007): 294-295.
- ¹⁷ For a range of perspectives, see Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "Capitalism and the Emergent World Order," *International Affairs* 90, no. 1 (January 2014): 71-91; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," *International Security* 31 (2006): 7-41; David C. Ellis, "U.S. Grand Strategy Following the George W. Bush Presidency," *International Studies Perspectives* 10 (2009): 361-377; Georg Sørensen, "What Kind of World Order? The International System in the New Millennium," *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 41, no. 4 (2006): 343-363; Annamária Artner, "Can China Lead the Change of the World?" *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 11 (2020): 1881-1899.
- ¹⁸ For example, Henry J. Kenny, "China and the Competition for Oil and Gas in Asia," *Asia-Pacific Review* 11 (2004): 36-47; Root, *Network Origins of the Global Economy*, 261-265.
- ¹⁹ Root, *Network Origins of the Global Economy*, 249-251.
- ²⁰ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 3.
- ²¹ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 20-21.
- ²² Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 21.
- ²³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 5, 19, 23-24.

- ²⁴ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 3.
- ²⁵ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 3.
- ²⁶ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 4.
- ²⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 1.
- ²⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 18.
- ²⁹ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 4, 10-11.
- ³⁰ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 10-11.
- ³¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 17.
- ³² Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 15-16.
- ³³ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 16-18; Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggles for Power and Peace, Brief Edition* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1993), 124-165.
- ³⁴ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 18-19.
- ³⁵ Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 12.
- ³⁶ Blackwell and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 20. See also Antto Vihma, "Geoeconomic Analysis and the Limits of Critical Geopolitics: A New Engagement with Edward Luttwak," *Geopolitics* 23, no. 1 (2018): 1-21; Matthew Sparke, "Geoeconomics, Globalisation and the Limits of Economic Strategy in Statecraft: A Response to Vihma," *Geopolitics* 23, no. 1 (2018): 30-37.
- ³⁷ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 20.
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- ³⁹ Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 55.
- ⁴⁰ Charles I. Jones, *Introduction to Economic Growth*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 69, 194-196.
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- ⁴² Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 58.
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- ⁴⁵ Root, *Network Origins of the Global Economy*, 212-213; Angela Poh and Mingjiang Li, "A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," *Asian Security* 13, no. 2 (2017): 86.
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- ⁴⁷ David A. Lake, "American Hegemony and the Future of East-West Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (2006): 23-30.
- ⁴⁸ Zhou and Esteban, "Beyond Balancing," 488, 492-493; Hong Yu, "Motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 105

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- ⁴⁹ Poh and Li, "A China in Transition," 87.
- ⁵⁰ Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 13-14.
- ⁵¹ Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 14.
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- ⁵³ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 263.
- ⁵⁴ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 265.
- ⁵⁵ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 263.
- ⁵⁶ Glaser and Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China," 293; Gregory J. Moore, "Bismarck or Wilhelm? China's Peaceful Rise vs. Its South China Sea Policy," *Asian Perspective* 42 (2018): 269; Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 56; Scott, "China's Public Diplomacy Rhetoric, 1990-2012," 251-253.
- ⁵⁷ Sheng Ding, "To Build A 'Harmonious World': China's Soft Power Wielding in the Global South," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 13, no.2 (2008): 210; Ding, "To Build A 'Harmonious World,'" 195.
- ⁵⁸ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), 220.
- ⁵⁹ Hoang Thi Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny and ASEAN's Ambivalent Response," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41, no.2 (2019): 226; Ding, "To Build A 'Harmonious World,'" 197; Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft*, 62.
- ⁶⁰ Scott, "China's Public Diplomacy Rhetoric, 1990-2012," 251-253, 259; Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny," 224.
- ⁶¹ Moore, "Bismarck or Wilhelm?" 268-270; Scott, "China's Public Diplomacy Rhetoric, 1990-2012," 252.
- ⁶² Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny," 230.
- ⁶³ Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny," 226-233.
- ⁶⁴ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 3.
- ⁶⁵ Poh and Li, "A China in Transition," 93; Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping," 7.
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- ⁶⁷ Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping," 12.

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- ⁷⁵ Ding, "To Build A 'Harmonious World,'" 196.
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PART 1: SOFT BALANCING



Chapter 1: Integrated Campaigning and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing

Dr. J. Samuel Barkin and Dr. David C. Ellis

INTRODUCTION

If direct military confrontation against a great power is impractical or simply not possible, what options are available to weaker states? This question was asked about the U.S. at the height of its unipolar moment in the early years of the global war on terror. The answer, scholars assessed, was the concept of “soft balancing.” Whereas employing national or alliance-based military capabilities against a competitor is described as “hard balancing,” the concept of soft balancing asserts that states can employ all other non-military capabilities to diminish, but not eliminate, the threat from a great power. Although the concept of soft balancing was formulated to explain the theoretical absence of a hard-balancing coalition against the U.S.,¹ this chapter contends that the same concepts can be applied to other rising great

powers, such as China led by the CCP. To demonstrate the value of soft balancing as a concept and how SOF might approach utilizing it, the issue of the CCP

directly supporting the violation of other states’ fisheries rights and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) is suggested as a relevant way to compete for advantage below the level of armed conflict.

The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (JCIC) states that integrated campaigning “seeks to align military and non-military activities to combine actions over time to overwhelm and/or exhaust

The concept of soft balancing asserts that states can employ all other non-military capabilities to diminish, but not eliminate, the threat from a great power.

the adversary, competitor, or population.”² Soft balancing scholars similarly describe the measures taken by states to temper U.S. power as “actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive, unilateral, U.S. military policies.”³ In seeking advantage below the level of armed conflict, soft balancing could provide SOF with a strategic approach to competition even in the absence of clearly articulated grand strategy from U.S. policymakers. At the heart of the concept is the “balance of threat,” which holds that states do not necessarily balance against power *per se* but instead balance against power they perceive could be used against them.⁴ Once again, this aligns precisely with the Joint Staff’s directive stating that “[t]he Joint Force must design all activities and operations from the outset to account for the use and impact of information on relevant actors. Instead of relying primarily on physical power as a form of destructive or disruptive force, the Joint Force must normalize the integration of physical and informational power to capitalize on the constructive and informational aspects of military power.”⁵ From a Clausewitzian perspective, soft balancing is more than just the normal friction inherent to diplomatic posturing. Rather, it is the purposeful creation of friction to deter adverse political and military initiatives by competitors to limit the amount of hard power needed to balance against them.⁶

Until recently, the CCP has been deft in avoiding the militarily aggressive behavior that would spark a hard-balancing response. Indeed, international relations scholar Robert Art assessed in 2005 that “[t]he United States cannot stop China’s rise on its own, and it cannot get the cooperation of others to do so unless China stumbles badly diplomatically. Only a militarily aggressive, heavy-handed, unilateralist Chinese foreign policy would create the political conditions necessary for a compound containment strategy against China.”⁷ Recent foreign policy controversies stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCP’s treatment of Hong Kong, and the acquisition of a Sri Lankan port for 99 years in a debt-swap arrangement might have initiated just such a change in perception.

Competing for advantage against the CCP on the basis of protecting fisheries is not the typical image associated with contemporary special operations, but in strategic competition with integrated campaigning, it could very well be the model Searlean “special” operation. In a world of increasing economic interdependence in which great powers each provide some degree of global public goods, hard balancing loses its viability for many states, but soft balancing provides them with a means for improving their relative influence within the system due to great powers being constrained by international norms, treaty obligations, or their own publicly stated policy positions.⁸ Fishery incursions encouraged by the CCP are subject to all of these soft-balancing measures, but many smaller and weaker states lack the political, organizational, and technical infrastructure to protect their rights. Given SOF’s access and placement around the world and foreign internal defense (FID) missions, it is highly likely that SOF would play an integral role in increasing the friction in this competition space.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. First, it explores the ideas underpinning the soft-balancing strategy and explains why this approach is appropriate for competing against a great power competitor that, unlike the Soviet Union, is already integrated into the international economy. Second, it demonstrates how infringement upon national fisheries in EEZs constitutes a SOF-relevant, soft-balancing opportunity through integrated campaigning. The chapter concludes with examples of how SOF could engage states impacted by the CCP’s Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF) practices to create an information and (more importantly) a strategic political effect using its intrinsic capabilities.

SOFT BALANCING GREAT POWERS

A great power is powerful because it can aggregate resources, people, technology, and industry and transform them into military and diplomatic assets that are significantly more capable than those of other countries. But a country’s “greatness” is a relative and fleeting condition that depends on the capabilities it can generate over a period of time as compared to its nearest peers. The single

most important factor in determining great power status is typically military power, which is generically a function of a force's size, quality of equipment, and ability to project and command forces for strategic effect. Beginning in 1991, the U.S. was widely regarded as the world's sole great power, but the economic and military emergence of China has now added a new great power peer to the international system. Although China's mix of military power differs from the U.S., it nonetheless has a military with which few in the world can compete. This is especially true for much smaller and weaker countries along the South China Sea and along the coasts of Africa and Latin America where China's fishing fleets regularly violate internationally recognized EEZs. Should these countries attempt to individually protect their waters with their own militaries and coast guards, they would most certainly be defeated by China's superior military power.

But unlike the global hegemonic position the U.S. has enjoyed, the CCP faces at best the prospect of cultivating a bipolar or multipolar international system in which smaller states could align capabilities with a great or secondary power to achieve diplomatic, economic, and military balancing effects.⁹ What they might not choose to do, however, is tie their options to another power over the long term through formal alliances. Since smaller and weaker countries cannot hope to change the distribution of power within the system or impact great powers at the global level, the best they can hope to do is undermine or delay potentially harmful actions at the regional level.¹⁰ Often, such actions require diplomatic coordination with similarly affected states or the diplomatic and economic support of a great or secondary power that can defray the political and economic consequences of the decision.¹¹

The concept of soft balancing has been conceptualized as both a balance of power theory and a foreign policy strategy, but for the purposes of this chapter, soft balancing is treated as the latter. Soft balancing, in Ilai Z. Saltzman's words,

is a foreign policy theory of state action...to increase states' security by restraining the emerging power and discouraging it from carrying out its over-reaching hegemonic aspirations rather than creating countervailing alliances or initiating arms races. There is an embedded degree of tolerance within soft balancing to changes and asymmetries in the distribution of capabilities, especially

*when the emerging configuration is not perceived as challenging a state's survivability and/or major national interests, or when the state is incapable to mobilize the necessary military, economic or societal capabilities and assets required for hard balancing.*¹²

A key conceptual difference between hard balancing and soft balancing is that, whereas the former seeks to accrue relative military power through improving capabilities internally or through coalitions and alliances externally, soft balancing seeks to erode the relative power of a stronger state.¹³ As a strategy designed to erode a great power's relative power, it cannot stop a major military or economic gambit that the great power determines is in its national interest, but it can raise the costs and friction of other initiatives, thereby creating more space for competitive activities across a larger range of issues.¹⁴ As a side benefit, soft balancing also creates the foundation for the participating states to progress to a hard-balancing strategy if necessary.¹⁵ Whether interpreted through the lenses of theory or strategy, scholars agree that four of the main tools in soft balancing are: (a) entangling diplomacy, (b) signaling the resolve to balance, (c) territorial denial, and (d) military capability and technology sharing.

The purposeful creation of entangling diplomatic friction does not intuitively yield a military benefit unless one adopts the statecraft perspective.

To demonstrate the

asymmetric military value of soft balancing, Robert A. Pape recounts this tactic as employed by the brilliant 19th-century Prussian/German statesman Otto von Bismarck. He notes that as a militarily weaker entity, Prussia (later Germany) could not confront France or Britain, so

A key conceptual difference between hard balancing and soft balancing is that, whereas the former seeks to accrue relative military power through improving capabilities internally or through coalitions and alliances externally, soft balancing seeks to erode the relative power of a stronger state.

he used diplomatic arrangements that worked against each other to make coherent political and military power against his state difficult to achieve. Pape concludes,

Bismarck's solution was to set up a series of cross-cutting alliances and contradictory international commitments that, at its peak, included half of Europe but excluded France. This system was largely useless in case of war, but that was not the point... this new web of international cooperation isolated and balanced against a potentially superior power not through addition (amassing military forces in opposition) but through dilution (removing capabilities available to the opponent) and without confronting the power of the opponent directly.¹⁶

The reason Bismarck was successful from a military perspective was that the crosscutting interests he institutionalized through agreements and treaties delayed and bureaucratized Britain's and France's relationships with partners and limited their room for maneuver and surprise.¹⁷ Such delays in politics are crucial because challenges arise regularly that change the focus, rebalance priorities, offer the time to generate new interest coalitions or balancing ententes, and prevent weaker states from bandwagoning with the great power due to the reputational costs.¹⁸

Another way entangling diplomacy works over time is generating international norms that constrain what is viewed as legitimate use of military and economic power. For instance, though it took decades of work, by the 1930s, Latin American countries effectively established the norm of non-intervention in sovereign states despite debt defaults, a common reason for U.S. intervention starting in the mid-1800s.¹⁹ Moreover, once the accepted norms and rules are institutionalized in international organizations or regimes, states can use institutional rules to achieve political effects, and the bureaucracy itself can manipulate its work to delay great power initiatives or highlight others great powers would rather avoid.²⁰ Indeed, in competing with the CCP, Art argues that the U.S. should create a security dialogue organization with China included precisely to set

rules and norms of behavior, establish transparency and reporting mechanisms, and mitigate the security dilemma.²¹

Signaling the resolve to balance is perhaps one of the most important but potentially risky mechanisms for smaller and weaker states. As mentioned, one of the most significant problems with soft balancing is the potential retribution a great power might enact upon states if they individually defect or overtly undermine its initiatives. In short, there is strength in numbers, but generating collective action among states with different types of interests in and degrees of dependency upon the great power is inherently difficult. Creating trust and the habit of cooperation is key to future balancing coalitions or ententes.²² The more states that join a chorus of diplomatic resistance, the easier it is for others to join to create a high level of diplomatic friction and increase the costs of the great power's initiatives or influence how they are implemented.²³ As the *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment* (JCOIE) notes, if the information and reputation aspects of integrated campaigning are now central to military operations, then the resolve to balance becomes a key soft-balancing initiative.²⁴

With territorial denial, states purposefully increase friction by limiting a great power's ability to project military and diplomatic capability by causing logistics problems. Especially when power projection is difficult for the great power, territorial denial acts as both a deterrent to military action and as a means of inflicting reputational damage on it.²⁵ For example, France and Germany blocked the use of NATO assets by the U.S. in the lead up to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003, and virtually all major African states rejected the idea of locating United States Africa Command on the continent, which enabled smaller states to reject the idea as well.²⁶

The last way to erode a great power's relative capability through soft balancing is by improving partner military capability and technology transfer. Just as with relative economic growth, a great power's military can become overstretched by the number and capabilities of competitor assets. For instance, the sharing of nuclear and missile technology between North Korea and Iran could be viewed

as a deliberate attempt to undermine U.S. capabilities by diluting the attention it can pay to each one at any given time.²⁷ Similarly, SOF's FID and building partner capacity activities represent classic soft-balancing mechanisms by increasing the relative capabilities of individual militaries. From a soft-balancing perspective, however, aggregating individual military capabilities into a cohesive, integrated force, whether through regular informal exercises, coalitions, or formal alliances, represents the most potent military soft-balancing approach because it combines signaling the resolve to balance with the military force necessary to assert hard power if necessary.²⁸

Aside from territorial denial, all these soft-balancing mechanisms are difficult for smaller and weaker states to organically generate. Instead, they often require the sponsorship, technical support, and informational power of a secondary or great power to organize them or insulate them from the great power's retribution. If the U.S. chooses to soft balance the relative strength of a CCP-led China, then it will require the additional support of a Global South that generally struggles with coordinating and executing the mechanisms. An important factor in their acceptance of U.S. or Western leadership will be their perception of threat. Until recently, the CCP benefitted from the perception that it provided a viable alternative to a threatening, neo-imperialist West. Today, this perception is under stress, which provides an opportunity for the U.S. to engage a soft-balancing strategy.

Perceptions of Power and “Benign Intent” in Balancing Behavior

Soft-balancing scholars conclude that the lack of hard-balancing behavior against the U.S. over the past three decades was largely because the U.S. presented, for the most part, “benign intent” with its overwhelming power. By this, scholars mean that as long as the U.S. did not threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states, supported the liberal international order, and provided global public goods, then secondary powers were willing to accept its unipolar status.²⁹ But, as noted earlier, a threat is a matter of perception, so even if the great power does not intend any negative effects or ill

will to other states, they still could be sensitive enough to the power differential that the potential use of power could threaten them in the future. Soft balancing, then, is a result of a change in perception about the potential abuse of a great power's strength even in the absence of a clear threat to a state at the present time. Importantly, a great power cannot proclaim its benign intent; rather, only others can come to their own conclusions based on how they perceive current behavior in the context of their historical experiences.³⁰

Even though the CCP currently encounters less diplomatic friction than the West in its interactions with the Global South, a maxim in international relations holds that “[g]reat powers always find reasons to wield their great power. Expanding power creates new goals because more power creates more opportunities for influence.”³¹ In other words, as the CCP embarks to entrench its gains with the Global South or seek new opportunities against its great power rivals, smaller and weaker states

could come to reinterpret the CCP's intentions and perceive its behavior in new, more threatening ways. Many scholars believe that the bar for what is perceived as an aggressive or threatening act lowers as a great power's relative influence increases.³²

Encroachment on a state's EEZ is, by definition, a threat to territorial integrity, but in an interdependent global economy, smaller and weaker states would need a way to express their concerns and protect their interests beyond simple alignment with Western militaries.

Soft balancing is a result of a change in perception about the potential abuse of a great power's strength even in the absence of a clear threat to a state at the present time.

Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, Soft-Balancing Behavior, and Recasting Chinese “Benign Intent”

Inherent to the CCP's Peaceful Rise narrative is the subtext of its benign intent. To the extent this myth can be exposed, the more likely it will be to experience friction in its economic and diplomatic

initiatives. The placement of the information value at the center of military operations by the JCIC makes explicit the importance of increasing the CCP's friction in international relations to overwhelm and exhaust it. Since soft balancing is perception based, integrated campaigning below the level of armed conflict relies on the JCOIE for amplifying the desired diplomatic effects intrinsic to most of the soft-balancing mechanisms. The JCOIE, in turn, requires target audience analyses and deep, nuanced, socio-cultural analysis as imagined by the *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations* so that relevant actors are engaged through meaningful activities on the ground and appropriate messaging.³³

Of the four soft-balancing competition mechanisms, the military is likely to take lead only on military assistance and technology sharing, but in this area, SOF are likely to play a prominent role. Nevertheless, SOF will be in position to accomplish multiple supporting activities to Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational, and Commercial (JIIM-C) partners on the other three mechanisms. First, SOF will often have placement and access to identify grievances partner states have with CCP politics and initiatives, which can then be transmitted to the appropriate JIIM-C entity. Second, their interaction with current and future leaders will provide SOF with the ability to disseminate or reinforce an information effect. Third, they can use their relationships with multiple states to cultivate trust relationships among them through combined exercises. Repeated exercises could lead to signaling the resolve to balance and potentially transform into hard balancing should perceptions of threat increase. Finally, SOF can garner important atmospherics and information about relevant populations as they engage in independent or partnered activities with JIIM-C entities.

The effects accomplished through soft balancing take time to materialize in many instances, but this is still consistent with the imperative of the JCIC to compete for advantage over the long term. Changes in material capabilities, diplomatic position, and reputation alter the relative balance of power—sometimes with sudden bursts as seemingly separate lines of effort converge to achieve a strategic effect. The issue of the CCP utilizing its navy and naval militias to intrude upon the fishing stocks in the EEZs of other states creates the

opportunities for SOF to compete in each of the ways noted above. The next section explains how entangling diplomacy already exists on the topic and how SOF can contribute to competing for advantage against the CCP through their assigned missions.

ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED, AND UNREGULATED FISHING AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SOFT BALANCING CHINA

Nine-Dash Line and Sovereignty Claims Over Fisheries

The waters off China's coast, in particular the South and East China Seas, are among the most fertile fishing grounds in the world. The South China Sea, for example, accounts for 12 percent of the total global marine catch.³⁴ These areas are also, for the most part, badly overfished.³⁵ While marine fisheries in most other parts of the world are either located clearly within one state's jurisdiction or are managed internationally through regional fisheries management organizations,³⁶ there is no such clear governance structure in either the South or East China Seas because of overlapping sovereignty claims to the waters and to the islands (and smaller land features) within them. Chinese claims in these waters conflict with those of Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and Taiwan.³⁷ This absence of governance and the resulting conflict over limited and often declining fish stocks threaten both livelihoods and food supplies in many of the states that fish in these waters.

According to international law, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to which the U.S. is not but China is a party, states have the right to regulate fisheries in both their territorial waters and their EEZs. Territorial waters generally extend 12 nautical miles from shore, while EEZs extend to the end of the continental shelf—up to 200 nautical miles. In both cases, the marine border between states with potentially overlapping claims is to be drawn equidistant from each state's shoreline. States have the right to regulate fisheries within their territorial waters and EEZs, including the right to exclude fishers from other countries. In the case of fish stocks

that are either migratory (that straddle maritime borders) or that are in the high seas (outside of state jurisdiction), fishing states are obligated under international law to cooperate in the sustainable management of the fisheries.³⁸ Under UNCLOS, then, it should be clear where maritime boundaries are and who has the authority to regulate fisheries.

There are, however, a set of sovereignty claims in the South and East China Seas that undermine this clarity. Some of these are the result of overlapping historical claims to islands, such as the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, claimed by China and Vietnam in the first case and by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei (in whole or in part) in the second. In the East China Sea, overlapping historical claims include the islands called *Senkaku* by the Japanese and *Diaoyu* by the Chinese.³⁹ The respective claims are not only to the islands but to the associated territorial waters and EEZs. Some of these are complicated by the existence of two Chinas; Taiwan claims the same waters as China inasmuch as it still claims (intermittently) to be the legitimate government of China. This complication is particularly relevant to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and some of the areas in the northern part of the South China Sea.⁴⁰

The other key source of overlapping sovereignty claims is what is often referred to as the Nine-Dash Line. This refers to the nine dashes on a map of the South China Sea that are the basis for Chinese claims to almost all of the sea as its waters. The claim is not based on the rules of UNCLOS, despite China being a party to that agreement. Rather, it is based on an assertion by the Nationalist Government of China immediately after World War II and seems to not have clear historical or legal precedent.⁴¹ The line extends well beyond China's continental shelf and encompasses areas of sea that, according to UNCLOS rules, are clearly within the EEZs of neighboring states. No states other than China and Taiwan recognize the claim as legitimate. Furthermore, in 2016, a panel of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, constituted under the rules of UNCLOS, ruled that "no legal basis for any Chinese historic rights" exists.⁴² China has rejected this ruling.⁴³

China's claim is problematic in two other ways as well. First, its boundaries are imprecise. They consist of a set of dashes on small-scale maps with hundreds of kilometers of water between dashes. China has never fleshed out the claim with precise coordinates. (In fact, versions of the map have had 10 or 11 dashes; even the number of dashes involved is imprecise).⁴⁴ Second, it is, in essence, a claim that the entirety of the South China Sea is Chinese sovereign territory. UNCLOS allows states to claim enclosed areas of sea as sovereign territory, but not open ocean. The form of China's claim means that it asserts its sovereignty not only over all of the islands in the South China Sea but also over marine features like shoals and reefs that, according to international law, do not count as islands.

Sovereignty and Resources

There are three key physical goods in dispute in the South and East China Seas. The first is right of access. This right encompasses freedom of navigation, specifically the right of naval vessels to transit the waters in question, the right to build on islands, and, more importantly, the right to develop non-island features (primarily reefs and shoals that are not above water at high tide) into usable land. From China's perspective, the ability to build military facilities in the South China Sea far away from the mainland and to exclude foreign military vessels from the sea has significant military value; it provides a kind of first line of defense at a distance.

The other two kinds of goods are mineral resources on or below the ocean floor and marine living resources in the water column—or, in other words, oil and fish. There is significant potential petroleum wealth underneath the South China Sea; estimates of proven reserves of oil are 11 billion barrels, with the potential of almost twice that much still to be found, and equivalent amounts of gas.⁴⁵ Some of this is in waters that are clearly within China's EEZs, but some of it is in disputed waters and has in the past led to international tension, most notably between China and Vietnam in 2014.⁴⁶ Having said this, disputes about mineral resources under the South China Sea are more potential than

actual, about who gets to exploit them in the future rather than about who is currently exploiting them.

With respect to fishing, however, the issue is competition over current exploitation of the resource. The Nine-Dash Line encompasses several rich fishing grounds that are well within areas that are both part of the legal EEZs and part of the traditional fishing grounds of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. These traditional grounds are important to the countries involved for reasons that go beyond the market value of the catch. They provide key sources of protein in all the countries in question and employ millions of people in economically underdeveloped areas.⁴⁷

Because of the imprecision and legal tenuousness of China's claims in the South China Sea as well as the territorial disputes in the East China Sea, the Chinese government has felt the need to establish its sovereignty over these seas through creating facts on the ground (as it were). It has been consistent in its claims to sovereignty over the area within the Nine-Dash Line in political forums by, for example, complaining about foreign naval presence and rejecting international arbitration to resolve disputes. It has also been active in large-scale construction projects to transform marine features such as reefs into artificial islands, essentially creating territory where none had existed. This process began a quarter of a century ago at Mischief Reef, but the scale of construction has expanded notably in the past decade or so, such that several previously uninhabitable marine features now house military facilities including ports and runways.⁴⁸ China does not physically control all the land and potential land in the South China Sea; in particular, in the Spratly Islands, it controls less than half of the marine features. But its construction activities give it a base for projectable force that other claimants lack.

In addition to diplomacy and construction, China approaches the extraction of natural resources, including both hydrocarbons and fisheries, through the lens of its territorial claims. With respect to fisheries, it does this by subsidizing its fishing fleet, encouraging it to fish throughout the South China Sea, and reacting aggressively

when its fishers are arrested by other countries.⁴⁹ In addition, Chinese forces occasionally provide military cover for Chinese fishing activities. This has come in the form of naval and coast guard vessels, as well as military and quasi-military forces on fishing vessels. These activities can all be interpreted as an attempt by China to maximize its fishing haul (although not its economic gain from the South China Sea, as the costs of supporting the fishing activity are almost certainly greater than the value of the catch). But the focus of the activities on disputed seas suggests that the opposite relationship—fishing supporting sovereignty claims—is more likely.

Plainly stated, Chinese intrusion in EEZs directly undercuts its Peaceful Rise narrative, and the indications are that it will use bilateral negotiations as a means of amplifying its relative power over individual, smaller, and weaker states. China's aggressive fishing efforts in the South China Sea threaten its neighbors and rival territorial claimants in two key ways. The first is political by creating facts on the ground that support and enforce China's claims, particularly the Nine-Dash Line. The second is economic by undermining the livelihoods of millions of fishers in the region both by taking ever-larger shares of the existing catch and by undermining the long-term viability of the regional industry by overfishing. Here, U.S. support could be seen as both economically strengthening partners while simply supporting the principle of international law. Disputes in the East China Sea are somewhat different both because the rival claimant, Japan, is economically more developed and has greater military capabilities and because there are two active Chinese claimants—the People's Republic and Taiwan. The relationship between Taiwan and Japan with respect to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in fact provides some potential guidance on a constructive American role in the South China Sea.

Fisheries Issue Structure

Before getting to potential American roles in the region, though, a brief detour through a discussion of the nature of fisheries disputes as political issues is in order. High-seas fisheries are a type of good referred to by economists as common pool resources (CPRs).⁵⁰ The

two key characteristics of CPRs are non-excludability and rivalness. *Non-excludability* means that potential users cannot be excluded from access to the good; if it is available to anyone, it is available to everyone. *Rivalness* means that use by one actor precludes use by others; rival goods can be used up. CPRs are different from private goods, such as sandwiches or cars or sovereignty over small islands in the South China Sea, in that private goods are excludable. An actor who is in possession of or who has clear legal claim to such goods can prevent other actors from access to the good. CPRs are different from public goods, such as radio broadcasts or national security, in that public goods are nonrival. Once they are provided, they can benefit everyone at once, and one actor's benefit from them need not diminish the extent to which others can benefit concurrently.

The politics of CPRs are different from the politics of either private or public goods. Disputes over private goods are a zero-sum game; if one actor gains control over a good, the other necessarily loses it. This can be seen with territorial claims such as the dispute between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. If one side controls them, the other, by definition, does not. This makes disputes over private goods potentially conflictual but also potentially stable; a *status quo* in which one side controls the islands is stable unless the other side actively chooses to challenge that *status quo*.

With public goods, there is no grounds for dispute over who gets to benefit from the good because all actors can do so at the same time. But because any actor can benefit from a public good whether they themselves provide it, actors all have an incentive to not provide it and hope some other actor will. Economists call this the problem of *free riding*.⁵¹ An example can be found with efforts to combat piracy in the South China Sea. All states benefit from the reduction of piracy even if they do not participate in it and, therefore, have an incentive to let other states do the actual work. The result is that the good is often under-provided unless there is a central authority able to enforce contributions or a single actor that is relatively large enough that it makes sense for that actor to provide the good on its own.

The political dynamics of CPRs are different, however, because they encourage free riders like public goods but can be used up

like private goods. Because CPRs can be used up, users of the good know that if they do not act quickly, the good might be used up. As a result, responsible actors end up with nothing, and the free riders who act the quickest and take the most win out. A notable difference between CPRs and both public and private goods is that responsible actors cannot on their own manage a good responsibly, either by excluding others or by providing a public good despite free riders. With CPRs, the free riders can use up the good on their own. This means not only that cooperation is necessary to manage CPRs effectively but that all of the potential users of the good must participate in the cooperation because any free riders who do not can undermine the benefits of cooperation on their own.⁵²

The policy upshot of this political dynamic is that, to the extent that the policy goal is maintaining the health of the CPR, success can only be achieved by convincing all the states that use the CPR to cooperate by limiting their use of the resource. Furthermore, this cooperation must be both actively maintained and renegotiated over time because levels of resource use need to be adjusted to reflect the changes in the carrying capacity of the resource. When states have competing policy goals that involve both CPRs and other kinds of goals that do not require cooperation in the same way, the political dynamics can get complicated. In the cases of the South and East China Seas, the littoral states have as goals both the pursuit of territorial claims and the maintenance of healthy fisheries. These two goals are in conflict to the extent that settling territorial claims necessarily involves winners and losers, whereas with fisheries, states either win collectively via successful cooperation or lose collectively via competitive overfishing over the long term. The U.S., with neither territorial claims nor major fishing interests in the region, is better placed to find a way of finessing this conflict than any other international actor.

Modes of Response

There are a number of potential responses to Chinese claims in the South and East China Seas (or any other fisheries upon which they encroach). In line with soft balancing, these include legal, diplomatic, and military action. All of these have been tried by at least some of

the claimants, and some have been pursued by non-claimants as well, including the United States. The most aggressive military action has been by China, which has engaged in large-scale construction in many places in the South China Sea, creating naval and air bases on marine features, some of which were under water at high tide and most of which are outside of where its EEZs would be under UNCLOS rules. While China's construction efforts have been politically contentious, they have, for the most part, not generated a kinetic response, either by the relevant littoral states or by the United States. Although the most frequent form of response has been demonstrations of military capability, this might not be the most beneficial long-term approach from a soft-balancing perspective.

Legal

Legal responses to Chinese claims are mostly through the mechanisms created by UNCLOS. This agreement, of which China is a signatory, clearly specifies the acceptable bases for territorial and sovereignty claims at sea. China has, in fact, used UNCLOS rules as the basis of several maritime claims, including in disputes over EEZ borders with Japan and the Republic of Korea.⁵³ However, when the Philippines sued China over its broad claims to the South China Sea, arguing that these are incompatible with UNCLOS, China refused to participate in the arbitration proceedings. It also rejected the arbitration panel's findings, which were dismissive of China's claim. China argues that territorial and sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea should be dealt with bilaterally but has shown little willingness to actually engage in good-faith, bilateral negotiations on the issue. In the absence of Chinese willingness to engage in or accept the results of arbitration, legal responses are unlikely to be productive.

Diplomatic

The second mode of response is negotiation. This is the mode most likely to be effective with respect to fisheries issues because successful management of those issues requires cooperation. It is also the way in which high-seas fisheries and fisheries that straddle national borders are managed elsewhere when they are managed

effectively. Successful management of international fisheries requires three things. First is a willingness to cooperate on the part of all key national players. Second is comprehensive monitoring so that all parties to cooperative agreements can be confident that other parties are in compliance. This can involve mechanisms ranging from requiring third-party monitors or transponders on fishing vessels to required inspection or certification of catches in port. Third is effective means for excluding non-participants from the fishery to prevent free riders from profiting from cooperative management. Exclusion can happen directly through force or indirectly through market mechanisms that exclude fish caught outside of the cooperative agreement.⁵⁴

Cooperation over the management of fish stocks that straddle the waters (whether territorial or EEZ) of two countries is usually managed through bilateral agreement. When the stocks straddle three or more countries or are in the high seas, cooperation generally happens through treaties overseen by special-purpose international organizations called Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). These organizations coordinate the scientific research that underlies effective management, act as fora for negotiating quotas, and oversee monitoring and exclusion mechanisms. China is currently a member of seven RFMOs and agrees in principle with both the need for collective management of international fisheries resources and existing practices for doing so. Nonetheless, no RFMO exists for either the South or East China Sea.

Bilateral negotiation toward fisheries management in the region is hampered by overlapping territorial claims. Since an EEZ gives a state exclusive right to manage fisheries under UNCLOS rules, including the right to exclude fishers from other countries, bilateral negotiations can be seen as concessions of sovereignty by states that argue they have legitimate claims to EEZs. This has prevented meaningful cooperation over fisheries in the South China Sea, as the littoral states other than China see Chinese fishing efforts as illegal. There have been some efforts at bilateral cooperation in the East China Sea, most notably a Japan-Taiwan fisheries agreement signed in 2013.⁵⁵ This

agreement created a fisheries committee that has met several times and updated the agreement.

This agreement deals with the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands by not mentioning the sovereignty dispute. Taiwan does not give up its claim, but, as a practical matter, the agreement *de facto* accepts that Japan controls the islands. The agreement is also focused on preventing disputes among fishers and enforcement vessels of the two countries by specifying which country has enforcement powers in which waters and creating protocols for waters where fishers from both countries mix. The agreement has had mixed success (it seems to be more popular among diplomats than among fishers on both sides),⁵⁶ but it is notable that it focuses on making the fishery non-conflictual; it does not focus on making it sustainable. It is also notable that it is Taiwan rather than China that signed the agreement. Taiwan was willing to sign an agreement that did not further its territorial claims in part because Taiwan, lacking recognition by the United Nations as a state, sees any international agreement as reinforcing its international legitimacy. China has no such need for international agreements for their own sake.

Even when smaller and weaker states conceptually agree to legally or diplomatically challenge a great power, there are often a number of impediments that only secondary and other great powers can overcome. The first is the requirement for an “anchor power” to aid states that could otherwise be harmed economically or militarily by the balancing actions. Especially when there are significant differences in relative capabilities, smaller and weaker states might need the strength of numbers to make the cost of retribution by the great power too high or too complex to implement. An anchor power is one that, due to comparable relative power or sufficient insulation from the competitor, can credibly challenge a great power, especially in diplomatic and economic initiatives. Anchor powers provide one or more other states the diplomatic, military, or economic resources to mitigate the potential losses stemming from attempts to balance, and its willingness to shoulder the burdens builds confidence in the undertaking.⁵⁷ In unipolar systems, anchor powers can be difficult to

find, but they tend to be more common in multipolar systems due to narrower gaps in relative capabilities.

The second impediment to collective action relates to the human and technical capacity of smaller and weaker states to catalogue incursions and navigate diplomatic and international legal institutions to redress their grievances. The scope for American diplomatic intervention in territorial disputes is limited. This is true in part because the U.S. has not signed UNCLOS, whereas all principals to the disputes in the South and East China Seas have (except for Taiwan, which is not recognized as a state by the United Nations). But this is the case mostly because the disputes are zero-sum, meaning that there is little scope for the U.S. to act as an honest broker. In any case, China has made it clear (as has Taiwan) that it will not accept results of international arbitration that reject its Nine-Dash Line claim. The U.S. can promote the principle of legal resolution to territorial disputes and can continue, as it always has, to reject the Nine-Dash Line as a basis for territorial claims, but short of large-scale military force, it cannot do much to encourage or coerce China to negotiate its claims or accept the results of arbitration.

The scope for an American role as honest broker in fisheries disputes in the area, however, is much greater. Furthermore, because such brokering would act as a counterweight to China's overwhelming advantage in both military and economic power (except with respect to Japan), it would likely do much to show American support to its allies and to neutral states in East and Southeast Asia. The U.S. could do this through both diplomatic efforts and the provision of technical assistance, both to allied states and to any international organizations that might be created, such as RFMOs.

There are many potential avenues for diplomatic efforts to address fisheries disputes and to try to decrease rampant overfishing in the South China Sea. The principals to the territorial disputes in the East China Sea, China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea are collectively members of several RFMOs, including the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and the North Pacific Fisheries Commission, meaning that they (including China) are sympathetic to the idea of collective fisheries management in the high seas. Efforts could be made through

existing RFMOs by suggesting a new RFMO specific to the South China Sea or by encouraging bilateral negotiations on specific fisheries issues. Furthermore, these efforts could be made through a variety of channels, including bilateral and multilateral diplomatic venues traditionally managed by the State Department but also including fishery-specific or marine-specific channels under the auspices of the Departments of Commerce and Defense respectively.

These diplomatic efforts would be most likely to succeed if they completely avoid questions of sovereignty and focus on fisheries management in ways that do not privilege territorial claims. One way to do this is to focus on IUUF, a term that covers any catches outside of (or in the absence of) existing fisheries management rules. Most, if not all, IUUF in the region is based in the littoral states, but those states have an interest in decreasing its prevalence nonetheless both because IUUF makes it impossible to manage the CPR of fisheries sustainably and because it reduces the potential for state-to-state conflict over fisheries when fisheries regulators or coast guards arrest fishers from other states. The U.S. is well placed to act as an honest broker in supporting efforts to manage IUUF because it has an interest in generating cooperation on the issue but no interest in participating in the fisheries themselves.

Such support can go beyond diplomatic engagement. The U.S. can assist in helping to monitor agreements as well. As noted above, monitoring is a key component of cooperation over CPRs; since free riders can undermine cooperation, it is imperative to know who is free riding. Technologies for monitoring fisheries agreements, such as transponders, have made monitoring easier, and the U.S. could help by counterbalancing the Chinese advantage over the other littoral states of the South China Sea in such technologies. The U.S. could also deploy technologies like satellite monitoring that are beyond the capabilities of those other littoral states.

Military

The last mode of response for providing support against EEZ infringement involves the military, primarily through freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS). These entail sending warships to sail

through what the U.S. considers to be international waters to contest what it considers to be unfounded claims to those waters. The U.S. generally conducts several of these a year.⁵⁸ Some other states without sovereign claims in the region, particularly France and the United Kingdom, also conduct such operations, although less frequently.⁵⁹ China always condemns such operations as infringements on its sovereignty and occasionally puts on a countervailing show of force. This has not yet resulted in direct conflict between navies, although in 2018, Chinese and American warships apparently came within 40 feet of each other. The Chinese Navy has also sailed warships close to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in support of its claims there.

Beyond FONOPS, SOF could contribute to both military and diplomatic efforts in a few ways, particularly when the states into whose EEZs China's Nine-Dash Line claims impinge are hesitant to challenge Chinese claims through traditional military shows of force. Smaller states do occasionally challenge China in ways that directly protect their access to resources in their waters. These range from occupying marine features to arresting Chinese fishers caught fishing illegally. China has occasionally shown a willingness to throw its diplomatic and economic weight around to secure the release of both personnel and vessels taken in these circumstances. In soft-balancing terms, smaller states require an anchor power who can elevate their relative power, insulate them from potential retribution by creating alternative economic options, and/or generate entangling diplomatic challenges that increase the costs of violating the EEZs.

The first way for SOF to contribute is by improving partners' coastal and EEZ protection through SOF's FID role. In many cases, these states lack the indigenous resources and technical skill to manage large naval vessels and need smaller, domestically sustainable options. Whereas the conventional U.S. Navy is oriented toward larger warships requiring robust logistics support, Naval Special Warfare Command has experience with possibly better-suited asymmetric options and concepts. Ironically, Iran's use of swift boats might serve as a functional model of how to confront a conventional navy with lighter, less capable, but radically cheaper alternatives. Additionally, SOF might

assist other interagency partners in their support options, such as identifying specific needs with which U.S. Coast Guard authorities and funding mechanisms might complement broader initiatives.

The second way SOF might contribute is simply through serving as an interagency sensing mechanism due to their placement and access. SOF's FID role often provides them with placement in partner countries on a regular basis, which gives personnel the opportunity to identify diplomatic or commercial grievances, military and diplomatic technical gaps, and sensitivity to local innovative ideas. If relative power is a function of aggregating national capabilities, it stands to reason that Western institutional solutions and doctrine will be harder to make work in foreign environments. Indeed, defense institution building through a design-thinking approach, whereby SOF and interagency personnel cocreate local solutions, could be an increasingly important approach when competing for advantage.⁶⁰

Additionally, SOF can contribute by supporting strategic communications due to their access to leaders in partner militaries. An anchor power's effectiveness is going to be based on the awareness partners have about the size of the coalition or entente being composed and the staying power of the great power in the enterprise. With broad placement and access, SOF are likely to be in a position to reinforce the signaling-to-balance efforts. Successful strategic communications might lead to limiting or denying China access to territory for military use, which would, as Robert Pape notes,⁶¹ impose a significant military cost on China's ability to project power beyond the South and the East China Seas.

A third way SOF can contribute is with military information support operations (MISO). Building awareness of and confidence in partner, coalition, entente, and allied soft-balancing efforts will make future endeavors more likely to experience success. Since the information effect is at the center of the concept of the JCIC of competing below the level of armed conflict, MISO can reinforce the benefits of positive bilateral and multilateral collaboration to relevant population groups. In a U.S. Naval Institute article, Hunter

Stires likens this to a maritime counterinsurgency initiative. He notes that fishermen, for example, will follow the rules imposed upon them irrespective of what the law actually permits. Periodic FONOPs that fail to protect fishermen on a daily basis will result in their acquiescence to a powerful, imposing state. MISO that demonstrate broad, persistent presence and support by the anchor power could embolden smaller states to hold out for their rights to be protected and thereby generate a higher cost on the CCP's attempt to compel their compliance to a new order.⁶²

A fourth SOF contribution based on placement could be with helping to catalogue EEZ violations, determining effective and ineffective responses by partnered forces, disseminating best practices among partnered forces, and enabling interagency personnel in their responses. This sensing mission places the military in a completely supporting role, but the information passed along provides the most essential content for the diplomatic elements of integrated campaigning to achieve a diplomatic soft-balancing effect. The more effective the military is in the sensing component, the more the Peaceful Rise narrative gets undermined by EEZ violations and the more likely soft-balancing ententes are to form. In short, SOF's role as a sensor could yield significant political gains in the medium to long term that then contribute to rapid gains as diplomatic support coalesces.

CONCLUSION: SOF SUPPORT TO A SOFT-BALANCING STRATEGY

In many respects, soft balancing is strategic deterrence that adds to relative national power by subtracting from the adversary's power. That is, the CCP's ability to leverage its capabilities depends on its ability to concentrate its relative power toward specific objectives by leveraging the gap between its own and others' economic and military clout. This in turn depends on the degree to which states perceive its relative power as a threat. The more that states interpret the CCP's initiatives as harmful to their interests, the more likely they will be to join soft-balancing efforts. To be effective, such efforts require shared

awareness of states' shared interests and challenges, an anchor power to help them weather a potential backlash, and technical support to improve their relative power and diplomatic influence. With the JCIC directing the Joint Force to compete below the level of armed conflict, soft balancing can serve as a strategy for competing for advantage even in the absence of grand strategy or clear, directive policy.

What role can SOF play in supporting both its allies and the principles of freedom of navigation and sustainable resource use in EEZs? They can usefully employ a variety of capabilities, ranging from the hard power to the soft, acting both unilaterally and multilaterally. At the hard-power end of the scale, the U.S. should continue its freedom-of-navigation missions, and SOF can help partnered forces imagine new ways to generate locally sustainable forces that contribute to that effect. The U.S. should do this both to reinforce the principle of free passage through international waters and to reinforce the arguments of littoral states against Chinese claims with respect to the Nine-Dash Line and to sovereignty over the many contested islands in the region. These missions, though, will create more

With the JCIC directing the Joint Force to compete below the level of armed conflict, soft balancing can serve as a strategy for competing for advantage even in the absence of grand strategy or clear, directive policy.

successful signals to China with more participating states because they enhance the soft-balancing effects of signaling to balance and creating the relationships and familiarity to progress to hard-power coalitions if necessary. These effects, in turn, require coordinating with allies, both in Southeast Asia and those in Europe who also undertake such missions, to ensure that missions

occur regularly, do not antagonize China more than necessary, and contribute to the information operation underlying a desired political effect. In other words, successful SOF support to EEZ operations must be rooted in a strategic communications campaign with a JIIM-C orientation from the beginning.

SOF assistance to EEZ protection would yield a number of important integrated campaigning effects. First, it would contribute to a larger strategic communications campaign that erodes the myth of the CCP's benign intent inherent to its Peaceful Rise and Harmonious World narratives. Second, it would contribute to developing a pattern of coordination among smaller and weaker states within the Global South that are reticent to challenge the CCP bilaterally. This alone could translate into headwinds that raise the cost of the CCP's initiatives and create second- and third-order economic effects. Third, it would contribute to the CCP recalculating the value of its own military and domestic investment, or "guns-versus-butter" debate. If Chinese economic growth is in part dependent on allowing its fishers to violate others' EEZs and securing favorable, perhaps predatory, trade deals, then states working together on the EEZ issue could lead to future trade deals that equalize the imbalances in other commodities. In sum, all these potential lines of effort contribute to exhausting or overwhelming the CCP as a competitor while improving U.S. and ally utility to the Global South as a balancing anchor.

Notes

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Chapter 2: Cause and Consequence— U.S. Military Alliances and a Rising China

Dr. Justin Conrad

As the world enters a new era of great power competition, international military alliances will play a central role.¹ Alliances are not just a symptom of the competition but an instigating factor as well. This is especially true of the increasingly adversarial relationship between the U.S. and China. The current international order—to the extent that one exists—was constructed by Western states following the end of World War II and was maintained by these states via a network of alliances during the Cold War.² The modern understanding of alliances and alliance behavior, then, largely derives from the West’s relationship with Russia. Unlike Russia’s relations with the West, which are heavily shaped by the role of NATO, military alliances have often been a secondary consideration in U.S.-China relations. But like Russia’s opposition to the very existence of NATO, U.S.-centered military alliances in Asia are key factors driving competition with China. In 2019, China’s Defense Ministry identified U.S. alliances in the region as one of several “prominent destabilizing factors” and argued that “profound changes” must be made in the organization of the international system.³ If China has truly assumed a “revisionist” role in global affairs, then the U.S. alliance system in Asia is one of the most important targets of its efforts.

A long-running debate both in Washington and in academic circles is whether China should indeed be classified as a revisionist power.⁴ This debate has centered on whether Beijing is actively seeking to challenge the current international order and/or the regional balance of power in Asia. Even a cursory examination of official and unofficial Chinese statements, however, suggests that China is dissatisfied with the current international system, as well as the system’s dominance by

the U.S. and its allies. Chinese statements to this end have made two consistent points. First, the formal and informal systems of alliances that developed after World War II and survived beyond the Cold War are a threat to China's well-being. U.S. dominance around the world, let alone in Asia, is seen as a constraint on China's natural trajectory in economic and political power. Second, and logically following from the first point, is that this traditional order must be challenged if China is to secure its rightful place in Asia and in the world.⁵ As a result of the increasing frequency of such messaging and of China's increasingly assertive military and diplomatic behavior, the debate over China's revisionist stance has evolved more recently into a consensus. Most scholars and policy makers now agree that China seeks to revise the international *status quo*, though the question remains to what degree. There also seems to be growing awareness that just because China has so far "peacefully" challenged the status quo does not mean an unwillingness to fight for change. In other words, a "lack of action to bring about change does not imply no desire for change."⁶

The U.S. alliance system may be an effective deterrent against a more aggressive approach by China, but it is also central to understanding China's dissatisfaction with the status quo. The alliance system is therefore a prime target for future Chinese efforts to create a world more friendly to its interests. As early as 1998, when head-to-head competition between China and the U.S. was still largely speculative, the Chinese government explicitly stated its views to this end. In the China Daily article, "China's National Defense," the U.S. alliance system was labeled a destabilizing force in the world, especially within Asia.⁷ Many of China's criticisms about U.S. alliances in East and South Asia mirror Russian frustrations at the time over the growing presence of NATO in Eastern Europe.⁸ As with the expansion of NATO and overtures to countries formerly in Russia's sphere of influence, China became exasperated with what it saw as U.S. meddling in Asia. China's irritation with U.S. military and diplomatic activity in the region has only intensified over the last two decades. Using language similar to Russia's during the same time period, China has framed U.S. efforts to form new partnerships and deepen existing relationships in

the region as a form of encirclement.⁹ The 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) outlines the practical implications: both Russia and China actively seek to fracture or undermine the U.S.-led international order while simultaneously reaping the benefits that they derive from the system.¹⁰

Great power competition between the U.S. and China has therefore evolved into a dangerous “chicken-and-egg” problem. The U.S. continues to maintain and, where possible, strengthen its current network of formal and informal alliances as a way to deter future Chinese aggression.

But as a result, China may increasingly view aggression as a necessary step in countering what it perceives as a growing threat to its rise in the region and the world.

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CHINA’S CURRENT AND HISTORICAL VIEWS OF ALLIANCES

China’s dissatisfaction with the international order is not simply an artifact of its recent rise in prominence. As with much of China’s foreign policy, its general conception of alliances and their (lack of) place in the world has much longer historical roots. In fact, China considers the rise of the West and all its trappings (including military alliances) as a “historical anomaly.”¹¹ At best, China has been highly skeptical of such arrangements in international affairs. In recent years, this skepticism has increasingly given way to outright hostility. Further, this hostility has developed within and has been shaped by the country’s domestic political institutions as its leaders push a more revisionist approach to foreign policy. In practice, all states (including the U.S.) harbor some revisionist preferences while also benefiting to some extent from maintenance of the status quo. The important question is, what will

cause a state like China to pursue the former at the expense of the latter? As James Morrow points out, “The definition of a state’s interests and when it should pursue change instead of working to keep the status quo lie[s] in the hands of a state’s leader and government.”¹² In other words, while there are many possible factors that determine a state’s role in the world, the decision to actively pursue change in the international order rests within its political institutions.

In China, those institutions are currently controlled by the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and President of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping. The strategic path that Xi has laid out for the party and the country ensures that it must take an increasingly revisionist role in international affairs. According to Graham Allison, the best way to summarize China’s foreign policy goals under Xi is the slogan “Make China Great Again.”¹³ First and foremost, this approach dictates that China must return to its historically dominant role in the region. Through recent efforts, the CCP has interpreted and reinterpreted the history of China as one in which it politically and economically dominated the region and even the hemisphere. This interpretation has been central to the CCP’s justification of its expansionist activities in the South China Sea and beyond. China continually appeals to historical precedent as it frequently “discovers” older maps indicating broader territorial and maritime domains than the country currently enjoys.¹⁴

A second major goal of the CCP under Xi is the physical establishment or reestablishment of control in these domains.¹⁵ This territorial strategy, of course, directly supports the primary goal of reestablishing China’s political, cultural, and economic dominance. In other words, China cannot reassert its historical primacy without also asserting its territorial claims in areas like the Senkaku Islands, which are also claimed by Japan. The Senkakus, in fact, offer a microcosm of the strategic dilemma that the U.S. and its allies face. In recent years, the U.S. has increasingly signaled its support of Japanese administration and *de jure* claims to the islands. Such support has been intended as a deterrent against any Chinese designs to take the territory by force. But like the U.S.-Japan alliance itself, this

deterrent is viewed by the Chinese as an outright threat to its territorial sovereignty. The U.S. alliance system also poses a strategic conundrum from China's point of view. U.S. cooperation with China's neighbors is viewed as a direct threat as it potentially introduces additional military capacity that could be used offensively against China. Intensified security cooperation by the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and others is therefore viewed by China as a constraint on Chinese territorial and political ambitions. While the U.S. and its allies may only have defensive intentions in mind (i.e., preservation of the status quo), China considers these activities as anything but benign.

China's skepticism of the entire concept of alliances has also precluded it from forming alliances of its own. Other than the *realpolitik* relationship with the U.S., which was intended to counter the Soviet Union during the Cold War, China has almost entirely avoided any kind of formal or informal alliance. The relationship it formed with the U.S. during the Cold War was only for instrumental purposes, and it was viewed as particularly distasteful because it meant limited cooperation with not just Washington but also Tokyo.¹⁶ Because the entire arrangement was aimed at countering and deterring the Soviet Union, it provided evidence in favor of China's view that alliances are primarily used to constrain specific states.¹⁷ China thus views the current U.S. alliance system in Asia as clearly intended to hold China back.

China is also wary of the constraints that come with "membership" in an alliance. Once again, this view has a long historical and cultural precedent. In Chinese, the word for China means "Middle Kingdom." This phrase does not refer to a temporal period but rather China's spatial position between heaven and Earth.¹⁸ In other words, the universe literally revolves around China, and as such, no kingdom or state or collection of people can be an equal to China itself. The country approaches foreign policy in many ways from such a perspective of hierarchy. China's foreign policy, especially since World War II, has been decidedly "non-egalitarian."¹⁹ Logically, if no state can be a true equal or peer, then any alliance relationship must be purely hierarchical. This understanding has been a powerful impediment to China forming its

own alliances. It cannot accept any arrangement where it plays an equal role with others, let alone a subordinate role as is the case in many alliance relationships. This view not only precluded deeper cooperation with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but it also poses a significant challenge to future cooperation between the PRC and Russia.

WHY U.S. ALLIANCES REMAIN EFFECTIVE DETERRENENTS

China's natural skepticism and avoidance of alliance entanglements and the persistence of the U.S.-led alliance network in Asia has created informational asymmetries in the U.S.-China relationship. For the past 70 years, China has eschewed military alliances while maintaining an intense interest (an existential interest, to be sure) in U.S. military activities in the region. The result is that China has accumulated far more information about the U.S. and its allies than vice versa.

Alliances are signaling mechanisms intended to strategically reveal information about military capabilities and the willingness to use them.²⁰ As such, the wealth of information that China has on U.S. alliance partnerships in the region is an advantage for the United States. High-level coordination and joint military exercises occur regularly between the U.S. and its allies, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and others. Witnessing these activities at frequent intervals, China is presented with credible evidence of the allies' preparation in the event of a conflict. Further, since high-level military coordination is a costly signal for states to send, China is presented with credible evidence that the alliance commitments will be honored in a crisis. Lastly, U.S. alliances in the region are especially credible because of one simple fact: they are democratic countries.²¹ In sharp contrast, the U.S. has very little, if any, tangible evidence that other countries would assist China in a time of war. For reasons that will be discussed below, coordinated exercises with Russian forces do not offer the same credible signaling value.

The signaling value of U.S. alliances is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the U.S. relationship with Japan. Increasing military and diplomatic coordination between Washington and Tokyo is arguably

the most threatening development from Beijing's point of view. But the alliance is threatening precisely because it is credible. In the final years of the Cold War and even for a short time afterward, Beijing seemed to grudgingly tolerate the U.S.-Japan alliance because they saw it as a mechanism for keeping Japan in a subordinate role.²² This view, once again, emphasizes China's broad understanding of alliances as hierarchical, unequal relationships. But in the 21st century, China has come to view the alliance with growing apprehension and largely considers it to be for offensive purposes.²³ Concurrent with its statements of support for Japan's claims in the Senkakus, the U.S. has increased its encouragement of Japanese militarization.²⁴ This evolution in the alliance is transparent and highly visible to Beijing, so no amount of signaling is missed.

China is acutely aware, for instance, that the U.S. and Japan now conduct joint exercises in the South China Sea. Such activities appear deliberately threatening to China not only because they occur entirely outside of the Japanese archipelago but also because they are credible, costly symbols of commitment between democratic allies. External observers, including China, view these signals as credible for three important reasons. First, states tend to judge the credibility of alliance and military commitments by the similarity of foreign policies between the alliance partners.²⁵ States with dissimilar foreign policies or major dissimilarities in their political institutions are more likely to be judged as non-credible partners. The most famous illustration of this principle is the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in 1939. Even after the pact was signed, conflict between the two long-time rivals was seen as a near certainty, including by Adolf Hitler himself.²⁶ External observers likewise viewed the "alliance" as more of a temporary convenience. The ideological makeup of the two governments, of course, could not be more different, and their foreign policies had been diametrically opposed for decades. Unsurprisingly, the pact dissolved little more than a year later when Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

Second, alliances tend to improve military coordination, which reduces inefficiencies in the event of conflict.²⁷ In addition to their

deterrent effects, one of the central mechanisms of alliances is the practical effect they have on military coordination and preparation. Alliances may or may not be upheld, and states may or may not follow through on their commitments. Since World War II, in fact, alliance commitments have only been honored in war 22 percent of the time.²⁸ But even those that are not upheld often result in peacetime coordination and cooperation that would not have occurred otherwise.²⁹ This is especially true of defensive pacts. Governments understand the additional deterrent value of such coordination, so they may be willing to incur the costs of formalizing their relationship, regardless of whether they intend to honor the commitment in wartime.³⁰ In short, the U.S. and its allies in Asia have sent a strong signal that they are prepared to coordinate their efforts in a hypothetical conflict against China, whether or not they would actually do so. This is especially true when coordination and preparation take place across multiple domains, including the cyber domain. Such multi-domain coordination is a hallmark of the U.S. relationship with Japan.³¹

The third reason why U.S. alliances in Asia are particularly credible is that democratic states, more than their autocratic counterparts, incur costs from not honoring their international commitments. The academic literature on “audience costs” has argued that leaders of democratic countries are far more likely to be removed from office when they renege on international commitments or otherwise perform incompetently in foreign policy.³² Democratic institutions allow these leaders to be effectively “punished” by being voted out of office. And as a further consequence of these electoral institutions, policymaking in democracies is more inflexible and slower moving than in autocratic systems. It is therefore more difficult for democratic governments to abandon international commitments, including military commitments, even if they judge abandonment to be in their best interest.³³

The combination of these three factors implies that U.S. alliances in Asia, and the alliance with Japan in particular, are potent signals that a fight against any of these states would likely result in a multilateral conflict. The U.S. and Japan, for instance, have very similar foreign

policy goals and generally seek to maintain the international status quo rather than revise it. Additionally, their military coordination is among the deepest in the world. Decades of joint military planning, training, and operations means that the two militaries are fully prepared to fight alongside one another. Finally, and most importantly, both the U.S. and Japan are democracies. This makes their commitment to one another highly transparent. KEEN SWORD, the biennial exercise between the two countries, involved 57,000 people during its 2018 iteration. This kind of event draws a significant amount of attention, and it is strategically publicized to send direct signals to Beijing. The U.S. conducts a variety of similar exercises with other militaries in the region for the same purpose. The democratic institutions of the two countries ensure that their governments and their leaders would suffer high costs if they fail to follow through on their commitments in a time of conflict. In short, maintaining active U.S. alliances in Asia serves as a credible deterrent against China as “challengers are less likely to attack democratic alliances because they believe the alliance will be strong in a time of crisis.”³⁴ This is especially true of the U.S.-Japan alliance because it is not only credible but has also evolved into an almost singular focus on deterring China.

Looking around the region, many of the features of the U.S.-Japan alliance that make it credible (and threatening to China) are present in other U.S. relationships. The U.S., for instance, has recently fulfilled its years-long goal of stationing large contingents of military personnel in Australia. Some 2,500 U.S. Marines are now permanently based in Darwin, a goal initially set out in 2011.³⁵ Growing cooperation between the two countries has also led to millions of dollars in construction of new, permanent military infrastructure.³⁶

But the “encirclement” does not end with Australia. Cooperation between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea has posed a perennial foreign policy challenge from China’s perspective. Before U.S. negotiations with North Korea led to changes, the annual FOAL EAGLE exercise reached its peak in 2016. Just over 300,000 combined South Korea and U.S. forces participated in the month-long exercise that year.³⁷ U.S. joint exercises with China’s neighbors,

in fact, have been growing at an almost exponential rate. For the first time in 2018, all three of India's military services (army, navy, and air force) participated in a large-scale exercise with U.S. forces. The exercise is just one illustration of deepening ties between the U.S. and India. In 2016, the U.S. took the costly step of declaring the country a "major defense partner," and two years later, established the high-level 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue between the two countries.³⁸ U.S. military activity in Southeast Asia has also been outpacing activity in previous years. In 2014, the U.S. signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, described as "the most significant defense agreement...with the Philippines in decades."³⁹ Increased cooperation with the Philippines, Vietnam, and others has been focused on potential conflict in the Spratly and Paracel Islands, making China the clear target of such cooperation. Further, it is the potential for these bilateral military arrangements to evolve into multilateral alliances that worries China the most. China has frequently voiced concern over mechanisms like the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue between the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia, which it has alleged is a precursor to an "Asian NATO."⁴⁰

Almost all the military outreach and engagement of the U.S. in the region, in fact, appears to be sharply directed at Beijing (North Korea notwithstanding). Unsurprisingly, China views these activities as stifling its natural economic and geopolitical rise. U.S. alliances and coordination with Asia's democracies are undoubtedly credible deterrents against Chinese aggression, but they also represent a major irritant to an expanding China looking to reassert itself regionally and globally. Unfortunately, this creates a feedback loop in the short term: aggressive Chinese moves in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and elsewhere seem to push regional powers into pursuing closer ties with the United States. These deeper ties, in turn, are viewed as credible threats by China, likely triggering even more intransigent and hostile behavior from Beijing. In the words of one scholar, "China's own policies are a major driver of the alliance system consolidation (i.e., balancing) it wishes to prevent."⁴¹

WILL CHINA DEVELOP ITS OWN ALLIANCES?

China's military capabilities—capabilities which are increasing in quantity and quality with each passing year—serve as the most important deterrent against the U.S. and its allies. But what other options does China have in a prospective war against the U.S. and its major allies in the region? The nightmare scenario for many U.S. policymakers and military planners, of course, is a functional Chinese–Russian military alliance. China and Russia continue to take divergent approaches to foreign policy. However, suggesting that a true alliance—defensive or otherwise—is just as unlikely as it was during the height of the Cold War. Yet, in recent years, both governments have signaled such cooperation is indeed possible. Both governments, for instance, have increasingly used the term “ally” to describe one another.⁴² Further, the two countries have deepened their engagement with major joint exercises like “Peace Mission” and “Joint Sea.” Such exercises are held on a regular basis and have increasingly focused on strategic geographic locations like the Mediterranean Sea and the South China Sea.

While their informal alliance may not be as credible as established U.S. alliances in Asia, Russians and Chinese operating jointly in the South China Sea is nevertheless a critical development. Aside from the strategic location of the exercises, their frequency and scale also command attention. In 2018, for instance, China participated in 12 bilateral and multilateral training events, and more than 3,000 Chinese troops took part in Russia's long-running *Vostok* military exercises in Siberia that year. China was also the first international buyer for Russia's S-300 and S-400 anti-aircraft weapons systems, and observers have noted that they regularly coordinate efforts in “controversial military operations...diplomatic postures, and military, economic, and diplomatic coercion.”⁴³ Despite having no formal alliance treaties, China increasingly operates like an alliance partner, especially in its relationship with Russia. According to one observer, China and Russia have become “allies without an alliance treaty,” suggesting that a formal alliance may be just that—a formality.⁴⁴ Some scholars have argued that the relationship is “highly institutionalized” and that their 2001 Bilateral Treaty of Good

Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation amounts to a de facto defense agreement.⁴⁵ Still, others maintain that high-level military consultations between the two states is only “skin deep.”⁴⁶ Whether China’s and Russia’s relationship can be considered a true alliance in any sense, it is undeniable that the last decade has seen convergence between the interests and the *modus operandi* of the two states.

And yet, when compared to long-established ties between the U.S. and its partners in Asia, the Russia-China relationship does not measure up. There are two reasons why their military coordination—whether through a formal alliance or not—is still an unlikely possibility. The first major challenge is China’s cultural and historical aversion to such international arrangements, as discussed previously. No matter the apparent benefits derived from such a partnership, China would need to overcome serious cultural hurdles to strike a genuine cooperative agreement. Ultimately, “the question of which country would lead a Chinese-Russian alliance presents a major psychological impediment to the formation of any formal bloc.”⁴⁷ Second, lessons learned from the Cold War suggest that the idea of any serious cooperation between Russia and China should be considered dubious. Despite their growing convergence of interests, they were arguably more aligned during the early days of the Cold War. In that instance, not only did true cooperation fail to materialize, but their relationship was primarily defined by competition.

Alliances are not necessary for military cooperation to occur. Nevertheless, the decision to uphold an alliance agreement in the midst of a crisis is directly related to the decision to sign the agreement in the first place. In other words, the costly act of signing a formal agreement adhering one’s military to any kind of commitment suggests that the commitment is more likely to be honored. It is ultimately difficult to believe that China shares strong enough interests with any country to intervene on their behalf (or vice versa). If it did, it likely would have already signed a formal alliance. North Korea is perhaps the one exception to the rule, but that is largely because an attack against North Korea would pose a direct threat to the Chinese mainland. Shared interests with Russia are certainly more difficult to

pin down. Emphasizing this point, both China and Russia have been non-committal and “ambivalent” about each other’s controversial territorial claims.⁴⁸ Might China yet intervene on behalf of Russia in a conflict to take control of Eastern Ukraine, for instance? Even with military exercises occurring in the South China Sea, would Russia really send its forces there in the event of a major conflict with the U.S. military? Formal alliances are a costly signal of deterrence. The fact that China has been unwilling to incur this cost would suggest it is unwilling to incur the far greater costs of wartime intervention.

China may hold memberships in multilateral organizations, but it still frequently behaves like a solitary actor.

Another possible avenue for China to develop significant interstate cooperation is through multilateral institutions. China’s participation in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) has grown exponentially since the end of the Cold War. The country has gained a great deal of prestige by establishing leadership roles in these multilateral organizations, and many have pointed to this as evidence of a “soft-balancing” approach by Beijing.⁴⁹ At a time when U.S. participation in international forums appears to be halting or receding, China has used its position in various IGOs to assert its claim as a regional and world leader. In April 2020, for instance, at the same time the U.S. announced it would stop funding the World Health Organization, China pledged to increase its funding to the agency.⁵⁰ This behavior represents the culmination of a decades-long shift in Beijing’s perspective: where once it saw interdependence and multilateral cooperation as largely supporting U.S. interests, it now sees major benefits and opportunities.⁵¹

But even with its new appreciation of international institutions, many observers have noted that China continues to follow a model of “separateness and ambiguity” in such contexts.⁵² China may hold memberships in multilateral organizations, but it still frequently behaves like a solitary actor. As a result, true military cooperation with other states is unlikely to arise from such participation.

Similarly, some have suggested that China's increasing use of its economic soft power could lead to de facto alliances with other states. The Belt and Road Initiative, in particular, has been noted for cementing China's foreign relationships across Asia and in other regions. But even these efforts are not without their detractors, and ultimately, "Chinese financing and construction does not translate directly into Beijing's ability to exert influence in recipient countries."⁵³ In short, while China has pursued a number of soft power approaches in recent years (e.g., participation in IGOs and increased bilateral trade), they are pursued pragmatically. These efforts may indeed spread Beijing's political influence, but deep military cooperation is an unlikely byproduct.

China's final pathway to deterrence is to rapidly build up its own arms in lieu of seeking out allies.⁵⁴ This appears to have been China's strategy for the past 20 years. Recognizing the unreliability and unpleasantness of alliances, China has instead chosen to invest its efforts into building a unilateral capacity for war. A recent RAND Corporation report suggests that this strategy has been effective: growing Chinese capabilities have chipped away at the U.S. advantage in every possible domain since 1996.⁵⁵ In the projected scenario where China attacks a U.S. military base, the authors of the report estimate that the U.S. will be at a disadvantage. In 1996, that same scenario was rated as a major advantage for the United States. The same change is estimated for Chinese anti-surface warfare scenarios. Every possible scenario, in fact, has seen some diminishment of U.S. military advantage. All of this suggests that, given enough time, China does not need alliances to successfully challenge or defend against the U.S. in a regional conflict. China has singlehandedly placed the U.S. at a disadvantage at the same time that the U.S. was increasing its cooperation with allies in the region. Further, one study finds that states form alliances when they expect a future military threat and that they are more likely to do so as their probability of winning a future war declines.⁵⁶ With the military advantage swinging more into China's favor, it would seem China would be less likely to seek out an alliance if the trend continues.

Despite a historical precedent against allying with Russia, as well as general cultural and historical disinclinations against such relationships, the possibility cannot be ruled out altogether. Neither a formal nor informal military commitment is impossible should China perceive a sufficient threat. China is most likely to perceive such a threat from the U.S. and its partners in Asia. It is conceivable that China would accept a temporary, albeit distasteful, arrangement with Russia if its core interests were directly challenged. This does not ensure that Russia would see challenges to Chinese interests as warranting its own military commitment, but the barrier to a true alliance would certainly be much lower. Prestige, in addition to threat, can be a powerful motivator for states to show support for one another.⁵⁷ Countries are also more likely to intervene on another's behalf when doing so might actually change the outcome of the conflict—a high likelihood if Russia were to join China in any conflict.⁵⁸ Challenges that could possibly lead to such cooperation would be a crisis in the South China Sea or the Senkakus. The single scenario most likely to spark unprecedented behavior on the part of China, however, continues to be a crisis involving Taiwan.⁵⁹ U.S. and/or allied interference in Taiwan would be considered the most acute threat possible, and as such, military coordination between Russia and China (along with a range of other responses) would not be out of the question. After all, China's 1997 *New Security Concept*, which called for more frequent and higher-level cooperation with Russia and other countries, was a direct response to the 1996 U.S.-Japan joint declaration.⁶⁰ The tenets of the *New Security Concept* never really took form, in fact, because the document was framed as a policy to counter U.S. interests and never offered much beyond a vague conceptual opposition to the idea of alliances and blocs.⁶¹ Additional security concepts published since then, however, continue to focus on countering U.S. influence by promoting cooperation with other states. In its *New Regional Security Concept*, China encourages building military cooperation with its neighbors, albeit without formal alliances.⁶²

Given the largely consistent Chinese viewpoint and the deepening engagement of the U.S. with its partners in the region, alliances will

remain a central point of contention—and a central hope for peace—in the region. The U.S. continues to place its trust in the broad network of military cooperation, increasingly designed to counter Beijing. One of the three principal lines of effort in the U.S. NDS, for instance, is to “strengthen alliances and attract new partners.”⁶³ As such, any fracturing or weakening of the alliance system will be seen by China as a point of leverage. This was the case recently when China’s defense minister outlined a strategic plan to “woo, gain control over, or otherwise undermine” allies who have begun to question American commitments to the region.⁶⁴ At the operational level, one reality also persists: U.S. forces, whether in conjunction with their allies or not, are unlikely to face any other military forces besides China’s in a conflict with the rising power. Tacit support from Russia may be forthcoming, but even so, China may not require it.

Notes

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PART 2: CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY INTERNAL STATECRAFT CHALLENGES



Chapter 3: Managing China's Rural Economy and Urbanization

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Since Deng Xiaoping launched China's Reform and Opening Up (改革开放) in the late 1970s, China has experienced the kind of rapid, sustained economic growth that had previously occurred in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. How has this economic transition affected China's rural development and urbanization? Like other countries experiencing rapid growth, China's population has urbanized rapidly due to the concentration of more productive, higher-paying jobs in the cities. Nevertheless, the CCP regime's policies have influenced rural development and urbanization in a number of distinctive ways—most importantly via restrictions on land use and on migration from the countryside to the cities. These policies not only harm economic efficiency but do so in a way that exacerbates and hardens the already significant tendency for residents of rural and less-developed regions to fall behind. To limit these high economic costs and the resulting political discontent, the CCP regime has gradually moderated its policies. Nevertheless, the basic restrictions are likely to persist because the regime continues to place an overriding emphasis on maintaining economic and political control and stability.

The most significant restrictive policies have been holdovers from the orthodox communist era dominated by Mao Zedong, who ruled from 1949 to 1976. In the countryside, the CCP has retained collective rural land ownership and management, thus preventing the development of private markets in land. Both in the countryside and the cities, the CCP has maintained restrictive residence permit policies, which make it more difficult for people to move to the cities and regions with better economic opportunities and public services. How these distinctive rural and urban development policies are

administered by the elaborate, top-down institutions of China's party-dominated state will also be discussed in this chapter.

These policies have had predictable economic, social, and political consequences. The main economic consequences are to introduce constraints on land and labor mobility and human capital accumulation, which reduce productivity growth in both rural and urban areas. Socially, the costs are borne disproportionately by those who are prevented from moving or from taking full advantage of local opportunities—creating a kind of discriminatory economic class system with country people at the bottom, followed by non-permanent rural migrants to cities, on up through permanent residents of smaller cities, bigger cities, and mega-cities. Political discontent tends to rise as one descends the ladder of economic privilege.

The costs and benefits of China's distinctive policies, in turn, make it possible to analyze why the CCP regime has chosen to adopt some reforms and avoid others and whether current trends are likely to continue in the future. CCP policy choices show that the regime tends to be flexible but not in a way that risks fundamentally compromising its core objectives. As the high economic and political costs of land use and migration restrictions have become more apparent, the regime has moderated them without altering the fundamental design retaining key levers of control over the rural economy and over the populations of the most politically sensitive big cities. Even in response to significant costs and stresses, the regime prefers to retain and moderate control rather than relinquish it. This preserves better capabilities to deal with short-term problems or crises and thus most reliably protects long-term control and stability. This behavior also provides useful evidence for analyzing the CCP's behavior in the broader setting of international great power competition. The main implication is that the CCP will continue to be willing to subordinate economic efficiency and geopolitical strategic efficacy to its primary goals—internal political stability and regime survival. China's great power competitors would do well to take account of these priorities in understanding the CCP regime's behavior and in choosing their own strategic responses.

The next section evaluates the typical path of urbanization in developing countries, focusing on common problems and common policy responses. This provides context to understand what is distinctive in China's rural and urban development policies, which are described and analyzed in the following two sections. The conclusion summarizes the economic and political strengths and weaknesses of these policies and what they are likely to mean for China's future development. It then explains what these policies seem to show about the CCP's priorities and strategic behavior in general and discusses implications for strategic competition.

URBANIZATION AND THE RURAL ECONOMY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

China's restrictive land use and migration policies are best understood against the background of what has been done elsewhere. China's Mao-era policies originated in the efforts of a Leninist party-state to impose political control over a huge population and to mobilize resources and labor for rapid development within a centrally planned economic system. China's political leaders and economic planners also hoped to avoid many of the characteristic pitfalls of the more typical, uncontrolled process of urbanization such as widespread urban poverty, related social pathologies, and political instability. As will be seen, China avoided or limited these problems at the cost of creating or worsening others.

Across the developing world, economic forces have driven rapid urbanization. This urbanization has had large economic benefits but usually also important negative social and political consequences. The poorer the economy, the less efficient traditional agriculture tends to be. This opens large productivity and wage gaps vis-à-vis the big cities, driving more rapid migration of marginal rural populations.¹ City governments generally lack the resources, technical capacity, and political incentives to keep pace with large migrant inflows. When basic infrastructure, like roads, water, sewage, and electricity, does not expand in proportion to the population, migrants are forced into improvised, substandard housing in slums or shantytowns. Governments that fail to expand physical infrastructure usually also

fail to extend core public services like law and order, basic healthcare, and education. This means that migrant neighborhoods usually have higher levels of crime, less healthy populations prone to chronic health conditions and infectious diseases, and more poorly educated young people. These risk factors, in turn, tend to increase social pathologies like gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, and broken families. These slow social mobility and trap marginal populations in poverty. While such populations may be no worse off or even better off than marginal rural populations, they tend to be concentrated in a small number of big cities. Such pools of economic discontent may more easily spill over into increasing political instability.

At the same time, large out-migrations to the cities would be expected to deliver important benefits to the countryside. With fewer people living off the land, the average size and productivity of landholdings should rise, raising previously rock-bottom rural incomes. Yet such improvements may be slowed by a variety of factors. Ineffective governance combined with the limited know-how and resources of farmers may slow the process of improving transportation infrastructure, commercializing crops, and upgrading methods and technology. Farmers may also be hobbled by the need to take on greater debt while navigating often volatile commodity prices, producing recurring boom-bust cycles. Despite rising rural incomes, such economic volatility may also threaten social and political stability.²

How have governments responded to these paired challenges of urban and rural development? They have struggled to cope with poor urban migrant populations, and they have generally focused resources disproportionately on the wealthier and more politically influential neighborhoods that house few migrants. Such neglect is often compounded by regulatory policies that slow economic growth and drive up unemployment among more unskilled workers—hindering the ability of poor migrant populations to help themselves.³

Governments have influenced rural incomes largely via international trade policies. Some governments, in efforts to raise tax revenue and

subsidize urban development, have raised export taxes on important commercial crops. This tended to retard rural development while subsidizing better-off urban populations and corrupt urban political machines. ⁴ More commonly, governments have used import taxes to shelter more inefficient domestic producers of important staple crops like wheat or rice. This tends to raise and stabilize domestic prices of widely planted crops. In this case, city dwellers pay higher food prices to subsidize farmers. Importantly, such floors under staple crop prices act as a barrier against sudden or sustained declines that might fuel rural political radicalism and propel large, destabilizing surges of rural migrants into the cities.⁵

Better-run governments tend to adopt more effective policies in both urban and rural areas. They focus on providing better infrastructure and basic services in the cities while encouraging more rapid development of the urban economy. In rural areas, they sometimes promote the development of independent farmer classes with land reforms that yield plots of more efficient size while providing technical advice and low-cost loans. As the cities become wealthier, such governments often provide additional rural subsidies by raising staple crop tariff barriers and domestic agricultural price supports still higher. ⁶

CHINA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES: USING COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP AND HOUSEHOLD-BASED LAND ALLOCATIONS TO MAINTAIN RURAL CONTROL AND LAND SECURITY

Land policy is the key to understanding China's rural development. From the starting point of outright collectivization of land in the Maoist era, the general direction of change over the following 40 years has been to let farmers take back more control over the land. This began with the Deng Xiaoping-era decision to let farmers decide how to use their allotment of collectively owned land and continued in the new century by allowing farmers to rent out their land. This transition dramatically improved agricultural productivity and freed up hundreds of millions of laborers to move into China's booming export sectors. Nevertheless, the CCP's continuing resistance to allowing private

ownership of rural land remains a major brake on development. As long as the most valuable rural asset cannot be freely traded and utilized, the countryside will remain mired in inefficient production methods and will have trouble attracting much-needed investment and talent. At the same time, other policies limit the ability of country people to migrate to the cities, limit the opportunities of those who do migrate, and funnel most of the benefits of rising rural land values to developers and local government elites. Taken together, the policies widen the gap between rural and urban living standards, provoke chronic rural unrest, and make China more dependent on foreign food imports.

Deng's economic reform brought dramatic changes to China's vast rural areas. The Mao-era People's Commune system (人民公社) was abolished. The new 1982 constitution replaced people's communes with towns or townships along with subordinate, self-governing villages.⁷ Important town and township officials are appointed by their superior-level governments (i.e., county government) through the top-down *nomenklatura* system. Top county officials are themselves appointed one level up at the prefecture level, the prefecture-level officials at the provincial level, and the provincial-level officials at the center of power in Beijing. Only at the lowest level, that of village leaders and members of village committees, are officials elected from below by villagers.

Village elections are regulated by the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees, according to which villagers can vote and recall village leaders and members of villagers' committees. The Organic Law also grants villagers the right, through the Villagers' Assembly or Villagers' Representatives Assembly, to supervise village leaders and villagers' committees. They can also revise or revoke inappropriate decisions made by leaders. According to one nationwide survey in 2017, more than 98 percent of villagers' committees are directly elected, and only 1.92 percent are appointed by the town/township government.⁸ However, the quality of village elections varies greatly across the country. Studies show that China's village elections are not independent but rather subject to influences from higher authorities, village-level party branches, and other social forces.⁹

Towns/townships sit at the lowest level in China's administrative hierarchy. But the organization of the CCP extends one level deeper to the village level. Both the village party secretary and members of the village party committee need to be approved by township-level party committees. Although not directly elected by villagers, the party secretary is usually the village's most prominent political figure.¹⁰ The CCP Constitution clearly stipulates that the party organization assumes the "core leadership role" in the village.¹¹ On the one hand, compared to the People's Commune system, local cadres have much-diminished influence in villagers' social lives and economic activities. On the other hand, local cadres still wield significant power in many areas such as land management, family planning, maintenance of schools and public facilities, and dispute mediation. After China's rural taxes and fees reform in the early 2000s, which culminated in the abolition of the agricultural tax in 2006, towns/townships and villages have had to rely on the county government for resources. Overall, elected village officials, while accountable to village voters, must still conform to the authority and policy priorities of upper-level authorities.¹²

During the Mao era, the Peoples' Communes were the basic economic units in the countryside. Their primary function was agricultural production. All the land and productive assets were owned by the communes as well as their subordinate brigades and teams.¹³ Rural residents owned only their home and a small plot of private land where they could grow crops or raise farm animals.¹⁴ Farmers received their compensation from the collectives, mostly in the form of produce plus a small amount of cash, based on their labor input. Before the economic reform in the 1980s, this system resulted in both low productivity and extreme poverty. Although grain production had been hailed as the top priority of China's rural economy, as exemplified by the slogan, "Take Grain as the Key Link" (以糧為綱), China's per capita grain production merely increased from 306 kilograms in 1957 to 319 kilograms in 1978.¹⁵ The growth of other major crops was even less impressive. For instance, between 1955 and 1978, per capita production growth of cotton and oilseeds, the two other major agricultural products, failed to keep up with population growth.¹⁶

During the rural economic reform between 1978 and 1984, collective farming was gradually replaced by a household-based farming system, and households returned as the basic unit of farming.¹⁷ Under the newly established Household Responsibility System (包產到戶制), land was still owned by the collective, but households were granted the contractual right to use the land. Collective farmland was contracted to households for a fixed number of years—in most places about 15 years. Households could independently manage their land and were responsible for their profits and losses. After the required amount of grain was given to the state, the remaining output could be sold on the open market. The impacts of the rural reform were dramatic and immediate. For instance, China's grain production increased from 305 million tons in 1978 to 407 million tons in 1984. The production of cotton and oilseeds increased from 216 and 521 million tons in 1978 to 625 and 1,190 million tons, respectively.¹⁸ Moreover, this rapid growth was achieved with lower labor inputs.¹⁹ Increased agricultural productivity meant that hundreds of millions of rural laborers were freed up from agricultural activities—a critical factor for China's broader economic takeoff.

The Household Responsibility System, while providing a tremendous boost to China's agricultural production, did not address the fundamental issue of property rights. While individual farmers have the right to use land, the collective ownership of the land means that, both in theory and in practice, local authorities have the right to renew the contracts, reallocate and transfer the farmland, or, sometimes, expropriate the farmland from the farmers (usually with very low compensation). Therefore, households have usually had little incentive to make long-term investments in agricultural production, such as irrigation and mechanization. At the same time, local governments' miscellaneous taxes and fees have eaten up farmers' meager profits.²⁰

Consequently, the income gap between rural and urban areas widened. The ratio of urban to rural per capita income increased from 1.81:1 in 1984 to 3.3:1 in 2007.²¹ As farming became less profitable, more and more young rural laborers moved to local industries, or

migrated to big cities, or developed coastal areas for better-paying jobs. In many places, a substantial amount of farmland was deserted.²² In order to maintain their access to land, and also partially due to hukou residence restrictions (see below), most migrant workers left behind some family members—usually old parents and/or young children—in their rural homes.²³

Remittances from migrant workers have become a major source of income for their rural family members. According to a survey conducted between 1997 and 2004, rural migrant workers sent about 53–72 percent of their income back to their rural homes. On the receiving side, a survey in 2005 estimated that these remittances constituted approximately 53 percent of total family income.²⁴ As more rural migrant workers swarmed into the cities, their remittances skyrocketed from 271 billion yuan in 1997 to 2.1 trillion yuan in 2014.²⁵ While these remittances are primarily used to cover daily expenses, the money put into children’s education and agricultural production (such as seed and fertilizer) also raises agricultural productivity.²⁶ Interestingly, by raising the cost of living in rural areas, remittances increase the incentive of rural labor to migrate to the cities and deepen the rural-urban income gap in the long run.²⁷

The widening rural-urban divide has gradually become a major focus of the Chinese government. Since the turn of the century, a series of measures have been taken to address the so-called “Three Rural Issues” (三農問題).²⁸ In 2003, after years of pilot reform, China decided to reform the myriad fees and taxes charged to farmers. Existing taxes and fees were restructured into the agricultural tax and its surtax, with a maximum overall rate of 8.4 percent. Rural infrastructure and education, previously funded by villagers, were then paid for out of local government budgets. The controversial labor accumulation and volunteer work system was also abolished.²⁹ In 2006, the Chinese government revoked the agricultural tax altogether. Since then, the government has started to provide substantial support to the countryside. In addition to the longstanding protection against foreign competition, farmers received subsidies for agricultural production, and more resources

were allocated to improve the poor public services in rural areas—such as infrastructure, education, health insurance, and social security.

The other substantial reform area involves land property rights. In the late 1990s, most contracts signed during the 1978–1984 reform, usually renewed for another 30 years, expired. This practice was legalized in the Law on the Contracting of Rural Land, adopted in 2002. This law also regulated how farmers could lease and transfer their contracted farmland (土地流转), laying the legal foundation for the emerging rural land market.³⁰ Reforms were accelerated in the 2010s, and in 2018, the Law on the Contracting of Rural Land was revised. Farmers' inalienable and permanent rights to use the land were confirmed, thereby relieving their concerns about future renewal of land contracts. More importantly, farmers' private right to manage the land (土地经营权)—including the right to lease their land-use rights, as long as the farmland is not used for a non-farm purpose—was clearly defined as a third basic right alongside collective ownership of land (集体土地所有权) and farmers' contractual right to use land (土地承包权). The transition from the “two-right” Household Responsibility System to the current “separation of three rights” land system (三权分置) marks a major step in China's rural land reform. It will facilitate the modernization of China's agricultural production and marketization of China's rural economy. By the end of 2018, China's Agriculture and Rural Affairs had registered more than 600,000 household farms, with 71.7 percent of their 26.3 million acres of land being transferred contracted land.³¹ In the meantime, China is working on a national registry system of rural land, clearly differentiating farmland from non-farmland. Although the primary objective is to protect China's farmland and food security,³² it will also pave the way for further urban expansion.

Agriculture and the rural economy have seen remarkable progress since 1978. The ratio of labor employed in agriculture dropped from 70.5 percent in 1978 to 26.1 percent in 2018, and the population living in rural areas decreased from 82.1 percent to 39.4 percent during the same time.³³ Over this time span, the CCP has gone from imposing a highly inefficient system with high taxes to removing many inefficient

constraints and replacing taxes with gradually increasing subsidies. Yet many problems remain. Not surprisingly, many are closely related to the absence of full private property rights and free markets in rural land. Limits on agricultural land transfers hamper the consolidation of larger, more efficient farms,³⁴ while the absence of private property rights weakens incentives to make long-term investments. The requisitioning of land from agriculture to other uses such as housing, commercial and manufacturing developments, and infrastructure remains largely controlled by village leaders and state officials. The compensation paid to farmers for their farmland and homesteads is usually far below their actual value. On average, farmers are given approximately one-fifth of the market value of their land.³⁵ Most of the profits go to local government (20–30 percent) and developers (40–50 percent).³⁶ This partially explains the exponential growth of local governments' land-related revenue. For instance, from 1999 to 2014, land transaction fees (土地出让金)—the fees developers paid to the local governments for the requisitioned land—increased by a whopping 66.8 times, dwarfing the 13.5 times increase of general local revenue.³⁷ From 2001 to 2019, the share of land-related income in local governments' revenues jumped from 19.7 percent to 52.9 percent.³⁸ On the other side of the ledger, however, incomes of local governments and developers were the major grievances of farmers. Since existing laws and regulations offered no effective recourse, farmers turned to civil unrest. According to a 2012 official report, more than 22 percent of civil unrest incidents (demonstrations and riots) were caused by land requisitions and the follow-on forced evictions.³⁹ Official data on civil unrest (群体事件) during recent years is not available, but a recent textual analysis of published local policies regarding land dispute-related unrest shows that undercompensation is the most frequently used term. This suggests that inadequate compensation of farmers remained the top reason for land dispute-related unrest.⁴⁰

CHINA'S URBANIZATION POLICIES: USING HUKOU TO LIMIT MIGRATION TO THE CITIES

In 1978, right before Deng's market reforms, 172 million Chinese, or 17.9 percent of the population, lived in urban areas. By 2019, this number had increased to 848 million, or 60.6 percent.⁴¹ China's urbanization has been accompanied by rapid industrialization and mass domestic migration. What makes China's transition unique, however, is a system of extraordinary restrictions on urban residency, called the hukou (Household Registration) system. The hukou system was set up in the 1950s to facilitate political control and planned economic development. It also safeguarded the privileges of existing urban dwellers, who were the main beneficiaries of planned development. The resulting inefficiencies were exacerbated after market reforms took off. In response, central and local governments have spent the past 40 years tweaking the system, creating all kinds of legal pathways for rural migrants. At the same time, the control and stability motives behind the original policy remain strong, and urban residents already holding hukou permits prefer to maintain their privileges. Despite all of China's economic achievements, the hukou system has created an inferior urban social class who are ruthlessly denied access to a swath of economic opportunities and social services. Government moves to relax hukou restrictions have not kept pace with urban development. Since the regime is unlikely to change its gradualist approach and fully relinquish key levers of control, the resulting inequities are likely to remain a key feature of Chinese life for the foreseeable future.

In China's political system, a city (市) could refer to the administrative unit of three different levels: a province-level directly administrated municipality (DAM, 直辖市), prefecture-level city (地级市), or a county-level city (县级市). According to the 2019 China Statistical Yearbook, China currently has four directly administrated municipalities,⁴² 293 prefecture-level cities, and 375 county-level cities. The population of a city ranges from tens of thousands to tens of millions. For instance, while the population of the city of

Arxan (in Inner Mongolia) is less than 70,000, the total population of Chongqing is over 31 million. All these cities, regardless of their administrative level, are composed of an urban center and surrounding rural areas. The urban areas of the directly administrated municipalities and prefecture-level cities are further divided into city districts, which are at the same level as those of surrounding counties. As China's urbanization moves forward, more surrounding counties have been "upgraded" to city districts. For instance, in 1980, the urban districts of Shanghai, China's largest city, were encircled by 10 counties. Over the years, all those counties have been transformed, combined, or absorbed into city districts. At present, with the exception of Chongqing, China's three other mega-DAMs have become "county-less."

According to the Regulations on the Organization of Urban Sub-District Offices, city districts and county-level cities with more than 50,000 residents should have sub-districts (街道).⁴³ Like towns/townships in the rural areas, sub-districts are the lowest level of administrative unit in the urban areas. Their heads are appointed by their county or district-level governments. Similar to rural areas, residents in each sub-district can be further divided into communities (社区). Communities with high population densities can be further demarcated into resident groups (居民小组). Residents in a community, like their village counterparts, elect the members of the self-governing residents' committees (居民委员会) and residents' assemblies (居民会议). The main functions of residents' committees are to provide basic social services such as public security, family planning, and dispute resolution. Nevertheless, because all urban land is owned by the state, residents' committees (unlike those in rural villages) have no say in urban land issues. Another significant distinction is that the remunerations of residents' committee members are from the budget of districts or counties. Organizations of the Communist Party are established at all levels of the urban administrative hierarchy, including communities. In communities, as in rural areas, resident committees are usually overseen and heavily influenced by party organizations.

China's *hukou* (户口) or Household Registration system was established by the 1958 Hukou Registration Regulation. Under the system, all residents were registered in their origin location with either a non-agricultural hukou (非农业户口) or agricultural hukou (农业户口) status.⁴⁴ The hukou system divided Chinese society along two dimensions. First and foremost, the hukou system consolidated the rural-urban division. Residents with non-agricultural hukou included urban workers, officials of government and government-affiliated institutions, and their dependents. China's huge numbers of farmers and their dependents constituted residents with agricultural hukou. Non-agricultural residents were granted access to rationed food grain (商品粮) and other social and welfare services provided by the government. In contrast, agricultural hukou holders, who mostly engaged in agricultural production, were largely denied such benefits. The amount and quality of the social services that rural people received completely depended on the limited resources of their local governments (People's Communes and later townships and villages). The second dimension is the interregional division. For a resident, all the above-mentioned benefits were provided based on continued residence in his or her registered residential location.⁴⁵ Leaving for a different place—including not only moving from a rural area to an urban area, but also moving from one city to another city, or (much less commonly) from one rural area to another rural area—meant giving up one's original hukou-based benefits. Benefits were only picked up in one's new place of residence if one could gain hukou there.⁴⁶

The hukou system was a product of China's larger economic system: farmers were tied to collectively owned land and collective production units in the rural areas, and city dwellers were assigned employment in state-run work units (单位). But hukou was also designed to accelerate China's industrialization beginning in the 1950s. With the notorious "price scissors" (价格剪刀差), the government extracted agricultural products, materials, capital, and other resources from the rural areas to finance urban industrial projects. The net flow of resources strongly favored the cities. Understandably, the resulting urban-rural gap, as well as regional disparities, would tend to drive migration from rural

to urban areas and from less developed to more developed regions. However, under the hukou system, conversions of hukou status from agricultural to non-agricultural (农转非) have been strictly limited and must be approved by the local governments on both ends. The hukou system built an invisible Great Wall, keeping country people out of the cities and keeping people from poorer regions out of richer ones.⁴⁷ As a consequence, the Mao era saw an odd marriage between industrialization and de-urbanization. The percentage of China's urban population actually declined from 18.5 percent in 1958 to 15.8 percent in 1978.⁴⁸ China's largest city, Shanghai, lost a total of 1.86 million people between 1955 and 1976.⁴⁹

Deng's economic reforms completely reversed this tendency. On the supply side, agricultural de-collectivization freed up enormous numbers of rural laborers. On the demand side, the urban economic reforms and, from the mid-1980s, export-led industrialization, generated an insatiable need for unskilled labor, especially in China's major cities and in the more developed southeastern coastal areas. The initial sign of change appeared in 1984, when some farmers were granted a special non-agricultural hukou in the townships where they migrated for work—known as the self-supplied food grain hukou (自理口粮户口)—as long as they gave up their old land holding in their original villages and either owned their own businesses or were employed in their new townships. This new type of urban hukou had strict conditions and did not offer access to state-subsided social and welfare services. Furthermore, the holder still needed to go through the regular procedures should they want to move to higher-level urban areas (counties or above). Yet the policy did, for the first time, legalize the movement of rural laborers to urban areas. Before 1990, approximately five million farmers moved to townships under the self-supplied food grain hukou.⁵⁰ In the following year, another new category of hukou, temporary residence (暂住), was created in China's urban areas. Non-hukou holders who needed to stay or work there for longer than three months were obliged to apply for a temporary residence permit (暂住证).⁵¹

The temporary residence system provided rural laborers a legal path from their farms to the factories. Yet the temporary residence

system also created a huge inferior social class in China's urban areas. Temporary residents were denied access to many well-paid jobs (e.g., in state-owned enterprises or in government or its affiliated institutes). Their family members were not covered by local health insurance, nor could their children go to public schools. As a result, many rural migrants were forced to leave their older family members and children in their rural homes, and as discussed above, remitted a substantial share of their income to support them.⁵² The educational inequalities are particularly important. Good schools are concentrated in the biggest, wealthiest cities—especially Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin—and the big cities of the rich coastal provinces from Jiangsu to Guangdong. Via a highly competitive examination system, the best local schools are the gateway to the best local universities, which are in turn the gateway to the best local jobs. Those without local hukou are largely kept out of this pipeline and hence are denied access to the best life opportunities.⁵³

Unsurprisingly, many rural migrants have chosen not to acquire temporary residence permits. In 1995, only 44 million of the estimated 80 million “floating” population (流动人口) registered as temporary residents.⁵⁴ The main purpose of the temporary residence system was not to provide services but to police the floating population. Those who failed to obtain or renew their temporary residence permit usually faced fines, detention, and repatriation (收容遣送). In March 2003, the whole nation was shocked when a young college graduate, who did not apply for his temporary residence permit in time, was beaten to death in a detention center. This tragedy led to the abolition of the notorious custody and repatriation system three months later. But the temporary residence permit (暂住证) requirement remained in force until the late 2000s.

Since the early 1990s, China has experienced skyrocketing migration from rural to urban areas. The total floating population, most of whom are rural migrant workers (农民工), jumped from 21 million in 1990 to 121 million in 2000 and 221 million in 2010.⁵⁵ Abundant rural labor became an indispensable resource lifting China to its current status of “the world's factory.” Yet the hukou system remained a significant

barrier to the free movement of labor. Moreover, as 10–15 percent of the total population came to live in urban areas as second-class citizens, the grievous differences in life opportunities originating from their different hukou status became harder to hide. Although some restrictions were eased in the late 1990s,⁵⁶ experts and observers increasingly argued that a thorough overhaul of the hukou system was necessary. In 2014, China's State Council laid out a new roadmap for reform.⁵⁷ According to the plan, China would move toward abolishing the distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural hukou. All restrictions were removed for settlement in towns and small cities with populations less than 500,000. Medium-sized cities with populations between 500,000 and one million were required to loosen restrictions on settlement. However, restrictions were largely unchanged for large cities (population between one and five million) and even tightened for extra-large cities (population over five million). In 2015, after years of experiments, the temporary residence system was formally terminated and replaced with a less discriminatory residence permit (居住证). Compared with the temporary residence permit, a residence permit carries basic social benefits and services but is still short of a formal hukou status.⁵⁸ By late 2016, all of China's 31 province-level governments had announced their schedules to combine agricultural and non-agricultural hukou into a unified residence hukou (居民户口), formally ending the 60-year urban/rural hukou distinction. In 2016 alone, more than 16 million farmers were converted to urban residents.⁵⁹ In 2019, China further removed hukou restrictions for all cities of less than three million and encouraged cities under five million to relax restrictions.

Undoubtedly, these efforts have facilitated the movement of labor inside the country. They also gave rise to notable progress toward more equal services and opportunities. But hukou reform still has a long way to go. A citizen's freedom of residence and movement, which was removed from China's constitution in 1975, still does not exist as a legal right. In theory, the 1958 hukou Registration Regulation remained the only legislation on hukou. Though most restrictions in cities with fewer than three million people have been eliminated,

access to formal hukou is still rigorously controlled in China's largest cities, especially in the so-called "first-tier" cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen)—the places with the highest productivity and the best services and opportunities. For instance, in 2018, 9.8 million of Shanghai's 24 million population were without formal hukou. In Shenzhen, hukou holders were only 35 percent of its 12.5 million population.⁶⁰ While the labyrinthine and fastidious local point-based system (积分落户) can offer a glimmer of hope to wealthy or well-educated outsiders,⁶¹ almost all rural migrant workers are limited to staying and working using the residence permit. While a residence permit can bring its holders limited social and welfare benefits, substantial differences still exist between the residence permit and formal hukou.⁶² In the frigid winter of 2017, when a campaign to "clean the low-end population" drove tens of thousands migrant workers out of their homes on Beijing's outskirts, residence permits apparently provided little protection.⁶³ Since most cities of over five million have set rigorous limits to their total population, the last mile to relax migration control is likely to be the hardest. For instance, Beijing plans to reduce the population living in the core urban area by 15 percent from 2014 to 2020.⁶⁴

China's unique combination of collective ownership of rural land with the hukou system has caused "urbanization with Chinese characteristics." It exists in the separation between urbanization of land and urbanization of people. As discussed, village leaders and state officials decide on the transfer of agricultural land to other uses. They have a strong financial incentive to expedite such transfers, especially to expand urban development. On the other hand, stringent hukou control has hampered migration from rural to urban areas and from less developed to more developed regions. As a result, China's cities have expanded much faster in area than in population. For instance, between 2008 and 2017, the annual increase of land used for urban construction was 5 percent, compared to a 3.19 percent increase in urban population. Years of such uneven development caused a 28 percent drop in China's urban population density from 2007 to 2016.⁶⁵ Such imbalances were further aggravated by hukou policies.

Classification of urban dwellers into formal hukou holders, residence permit holders, and floating populations who are unwilling or unable to get a residence permit created first-, second-, and third-class citizens within the same city. Lack of social benefits in cities and collective land ownership in the countryside split up the families of millions of rural migrant workers. Farmers who were undercompensated for their land refused to surrender their homesteads. Their shabby, traditional homes formed numerous urban villages scattered throughout the forests of skyscrapers. While the recent hukou and rural land reforms mitigate these problems, the fundamental solution will require private ownership of land and completely abolishing the 60-year-old hukou system.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

What are the economic and political strengths and weaknesses of China's rural and urban development policies? How are they likely to develop in the future? What broader conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of their motivations? In the countryside, Deng's transition to The Household Responsibility system produced huge, one-time productivity gains as farmers were incentivized to pour greater effort and know-how into raising yields on their small plots. Yet land ownership and hukou policies imposed long-term constraints on rural land and labor markets that slowed both agricultural productivity growth and migration to the cities. For the CCP regime, collective rural land ownership slowed migration and maintained a minimum level of rural economic security. More importantly, it provided closer oversight and control of rural populations by local party and state cadres. It also maintained an economic and political safety valve whereby the regime—as done periodically during the Mao era and more recently in Beijing—would be able to send large numbers of urban dwellers back to their home villages.

Urban development policies display similar trade-offs. The hukou system has added dramatically to already large and unavoidable sources of rural-urban and regional inequalities. Hukou thus does great harm to both economic productivity and political legitimacy. What, then, are the advantages of hukou? By reducing the rural surge

into big cities, it has reduced the strain on urban infrastructure and services. Yet this advantage should not be exaggerated. China excels at providing infrastructure, along with law and order. China's big cities do have occasional rural migrant shantytowns, but housing, infrastructure,

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and public order are far better than in other developing countries at similar levels of development.

While migration controls may have prevented uncontrolled expansion of third world-style slums and shantytowns in the 1980s and 1990s, they hardly seem necessary since. So, the main remaining benefit, again, seems to be maintaining a more reliable

level of political oversight and control. The big cities are most sensitive politically. Hukou helps to keep them smaller and easier to manage. Moreover, just as it discriminates against rural migrants, it discriminates in favor of the incumbent city dwellers, who thereby have a greater incentive to support the existing system.⁶⁶

The CCP has successfully modernized China's economy via market reform and international economic integration. Yet a review of rural and urban development policies shows that CCP leaders have not hesitated to maintain policies that have huge efficiency and fairness costs if these policies also seem to have significant benefits for political oversight, control, and stability. A complementary explanation is that the CCP in the post-Mao era is both forward looking and conservative. It is forward looking in its commitment to maintaining economic growth. But it is conservative in its desire to maintain control and to avoid big risks by reforming slowly and incrementally—in Deng's words, "crossing the river by feeling the stones."

In the future, the CCP will continue to converge toward global norms of urbanization, but it will also continue to compromise efficiency to protect economic and political control and stability. This trade-off has already been discussed as an explanation for

slow reform of rural property and land use regulations and hukou. It can also be seen in a range of related areas. China has become increasingly dependent on food imports, so the regime worries about food security. Consequently, it imposes restrictions on conversions of farmland to other uses and seeks to diversify its sources and supply routes for food imports. Yet, its own restrictive property and land use regulations remain the biggest barrier to increasing domestic food supply.

A similar point can be made about the bigger picture of international economic integration. China's discriminatory practices in international trade and investment—from providing large-scale subsidies to state-owned enterprises, other large, politically connected firms, and high-technology industries generally, to discriminatory regulatory treatment of foreign firms in China's home market, to forced technology transfer and technology cybertheft—are in the process of generating a foreign backlash that is threatening China's access to developed country markets, technology, and investment. Loss of such access will have large negative effects on China's technological modernization and economic growth rate. Yet again, China's leaders appear ready to pay this price to maintain

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better oversight and control of the domestic economy and to reduce dependence on foreign markets and technology.

Finally, the same pattern is apparent in foreign military policy. In place of Deng's policy of "concealing strength" and "never being the highlight," Xi Jinping now pursues the "China Dream," which adds to economic modernization a return to China's traditional central place on the world stage. Xi has pursued more confrontational policies simultaneously along China's entire eastern, southeastern, and southern peripheries. This has predictably generated a strategically counterproductive drawing together of regional and great powers

toward a de facto defensive coalition. But this has not deterred Xi because external strategic efficiency is not the primary goal. Instead, the primary goal seems to be to use an assertive foreign policy and the associated external frictions to rally the people (and the PLA) around the CCP regime as the protector of the Chinese nation.

This does not mean that CCP strategy will recklessly risk conflict or that it will not rationally respond to deterrence efforts of its foreign rivals. It also does not mean that CCP leaders are not genuine nationalists. It just means that they will tend to pursue nationalist goals in ways that advance their political legitimacy and security even when this produces inferior strategies and outcomes on a geopolitical level. Here, as elsewhere, the point is that foreign observers and governments should be aware that CCP leaders' primary objective is political survival, and the primary means to that survival is internal control and legitimacy. Efforts to understand why CCP leaders choose the policies they do, and external state policies and strategies aimed at influencing the CCP regime, should be approached accordingly.

Notes

- ¹ Simon Kuznets, "Economic Growth and Income Inequality," *American Economic Review* 45, no. 1 (March 1955): 1–28.
- ² The resulting rural populism varies in its political forms and consequences. For comparisons of the overseas English plains societies and Latin America at different stages of development, see Ronald Rogowski, *Commerce and Coalitions: How Trade Affects Domestic Political Alignments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- ³ Latin American populism of the Peronist type and post-colonial, urban-biased developmental regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa are classic examples. See Eliana Cardoso and Anne Helwege, *Latin America's Economy: Diversity, Trends, and Conflicts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 203–222 and Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
- ⁴ Cardoso and Helwege, *Latin America's Economy*, 203–222; Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*.
- ⁵ Such methods became the norm in developed countries after World War I and spread across much of the rest of the world after World War II. For a discussion of economic and political drivers, see Shale Horowitz, "Reversing Globalization: Trade Policy Consequences of World War I," *European Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 1 (March 2004): 33–59.
- ⁶ For an economic efficiency analysis, see *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and for a discussion of policy and politics, see Stephan Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- ⁷ Towns that have at least 10 percent of the population living in urban settings are more urbanized than the more purely rural townships. As a consequence of China's rapid urbanization, the number of towns surpassed that of townships in 2001. According to the 2019 *China Statistical Yearbook*, there are 19,249 towns and 15,120 townships. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2019/indexeh.htm>
- ⁸ Huan Li et al., "Surveys of 261 Villages in Three Provinces Show Mixed Outcomes of Villagers' Committee Elections," *Banyue Tan*, 30 November 2017, <http://www.banyuetan.org/chcontent/jrt/20171128/240785.shtml>.
- ⁹ Kevin O'Brian and Rongbin Han, "Path to Democracy? Assessing Village Elections in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 60 (June 2009): 359–378.
- ¹⁰ According to the Chinese Communist Party constitution, the secretary and members of village party committees are elected by the village party assembly. The election outcomes must be approved by town or township party committees. See *Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 1982*, University of Southern California US-China Institute, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://china.usc.edu/constitution-peoples-republic-china-1982>.
- ¹¹ *Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 1982*.

- ¹² John Kennedy, “Rural China: Reform and Resistance,” in *Politics in China: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., William Joseph, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 294–319.
- ¹³ During the Great Leap Forward movement, communes were the basic accounting unit. In 1962, two subordinate units—brigade and team—were created under the People’s Communes to boost agricultural production. While the typical size of a commune was about 2,000 households, a typical brigade had around 200 households and a team around 30 households. Accordingly, teams became the basic accounting units.
- ¹⁴ The private plots were about 5–7 percent of the cultivated area. Economic activities on the private plots were always controlled and at times even totally prohibited by the collectives. See David Zweig, “China’s Political Economy,” in *Politics in China: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., William Joseph, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 254–290.
- ¹⁵ Data is from *China’s Statistical Yearbooks*, China’s National Bureau of Statistics.
- ¹⁶ Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Adaptation and Growth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).
- ¹⁷ This transformation was initiated by some farmers in an Anhui province village in late 1978. It was promoted and extended to the whole country by the central government only after Deng Xiaoping gave his public approval in 1980. See Xueping Zhang, “A Study on Deng Xiaoping’s Talk of ‘On Rural Policy,’” *CPC History Studies* 31, no. 10 (October 2018): 39–49.
- ¹⁸ Data is from *China’s Statistical Yearbooks*, China’s National Bureau of Statistics.
- ¹⁹ For instance, the labor days per hectare of wheat dropped from 461 in 1978 to 218 in 1985; those of cotton fell from 908 in 1978 to 643 in 1985. See Naughton, *Chinese Economy*.
- ²⁰ In addition to taxes and fees regulated by the state (e.g., agricultural tax, tax on native products, tax on slaughtering household animals, tax on land occupation, and fees paid for overall township planning and village reserves), farmers also had to pay various fees and taxes imposed by local authorities. According to one survey conducted in China’s ten provinces between 1993 and 1999, the share of all of these taxes and fees out of a farmer’s household income is between 9.86 and 21.57 percent. See Ran Tao, Mingxing Liu, and Qi Zhang, “Analysis on Rural Taxation, Government Regulation and Fiscal Reform,” *Economic Research* 38, no. 4 (April 2003): 3–12.
- ²¹ Data is from *China’s Statistical Yearbooks*, China’s National Bureau of Statistics.
- ²² National data on abandoned farmland is unavailable, but according to a study that covers seven provinces between 1994 and 2017, abandoned farmland is very widespread across China. For instance, in populous Sichuan province, the ratio increased from about 2 percent in 1994 to 20.1 percent in 2017. See Mingjiu Zhang, “An Empirical Study on the Problem of Cultivated Land Reclamation in the Process of Rural Revitalization,” *Economic Research Guide* 416, no. 30 (October 2019): 26–32.
- ²³ Feng Hu, Yupeng Shi, and Qiwen Wang, “Are Remittances of Rural Migrant Workers Altruistic?” *Journal of Financial Research* 331, no. 1 (January 2008): 175–190.

- ²⁴ Feng Hu and Yupeng Shi, “Remittances of Rural Migrant Workers and Local Economic Developments,” *World Economic Papers* 33, no. 2 (April 2013): 80–95.
- ²⁵ Xiaochun Li, “An Analysis of the Impact of Migrant Workers’ Remittances on Employment and Welfare,” *Frontiers* 8, no. 5 (May 2019): 40–47.
- ²⁶ Hu and Shi, “Remittances of Rural Migrant Workers and Local Economic Developments.”
- ²⁷ Xiaochun Li and Caijiao Yang, “An Analysis of the Connection between Remittances of Rural Migrant Workers and the Rural-Urban Income Gap,” *Economic Science* 40, no. 6 (December 2018): 118–128.
- ²⁸ The three rural issues are agriculture, rural areas, and farmers.
- ²⁹ The former labor accumulation was villagers’ labor input for a village’s infrastructure. The latter, volunteer work, was for natural disaster relief. In both cases, villagers were not compensated for their labor.
- ³⁰ Kunqiu Chen, Hualou Long, Li Ma, and Yingnan Zhang, “China’s Rural Land Reform and Rural Vitalization,” *Progress in Geography* 38, no. 9 (September 2019): 1424–1434.
- ³¹ Yong Lan, Min Jiang, and Zhixiong Du, “A Study on Contract Extension Willingness and Factors Influencing Land Transfers from Household Land Allocations to Family Farms,” *Chinese Rural Economy* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 65–85. The statistics imply that the average farm size in China is 43.8 acres. By comparison, most estimates for U.S. average farm size come in at around 440 acres—10 times larger than in China.
- ³² In China’s *Outline of the National Overall Planning on Land Use (2006–2020)*, issued in 2008, the Chinese government set the “red line” (the minimum area) of China’s farmland at 296 million acres. As of 2019, the total area of China’s farmland is 333 million acres. See “Information on Farmland, 2019,” China’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, accessed 25 June 2020, http://www.moa.gov.cn/xw/bmdt/202005/t20200513_6343752.htm. <https://leap.unep.org/countries/cn/national-legislation/outline-national-land-use-master-plan-2006-2020>
- ³³ Data is from *China’s Statistical Yearbooks*, China’s National Bureau of Statistics.
- ³⁴ For instance, the term of most transferred contracted land is 5–10 years. See Peng Xiao and Zhiwang Lv, “Handicaps and Innovations of Land Management Right Mortgage,” *Journal of Northwest A&F University* 16, no. 4 (August 2016): 43–48.
- ³⁵ Hao Ren and Jinmin Hao, “The Impact of the Scissors Gap on Agricultural Land Prices,” *Land Science of China* 4, no. 3 (June 2003): 38–43.
- ³⁶ Li Zhang, Shuwen Li, and Yike Yang, “70 Years of Urbanization and Land Policy Changes in the People’s Republic of China,” *Journal of Macro-Quality Research* 7, no. 2 (June 2019): 80–102.
- ³⁷ Jinhua Du and Zhiguo Chen, “Effect of Land Finance Dependence on Urban Expansion,” *Finance & Economics* 42, no. 5 (May 2018): 79–89.
- ³⁸ The total land-related income includes land transaction fees plus five specific taxes (tax on land occupation, property tax, land value added tax, urban land-use tax, and deed tax). See “Local Governments’ Reliance on Land-

Related Income,” E-House China Institute, accessed 11 May 2020, <http://admin.fangchan.com/uploadfile/uploadfile/annex/2/1584/5e54c5e824d58.pdf>.

- ³⁹ Rui Chen and Meng Fu, “More than 20 percent of Civil Unrest Last Year Related to Land Requisition and Forced Evictions,” *Legal Daily*, 6 January 2013.
- ⁴⁰ Nan Zhang, “Textual Analysis on Local Governments’ Efforts to Prevent Land-Disputes Related Social Unrest,” *Social Science in Guangxi* 208, no. 8 (August 2019): 63–71.
- ⁴¹ Data is from *China’s Statistical Yearbooks*, China’s National Bureau of Statistics.
- ⁴² The four directly administrated municipalities are Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing.
- ⁴³ According to *Regulations on the Organization of Urban Sub-District Offices*, city districts and county-level cities with fewer than 50,000 residents should not have sub-districts.
- ⁴⁴ Note that there are some differences between *hukou* and residency. For instance, while China’s urban population includes residents with agricultural *hukou* (e.g., migrant rural laborers), some rural populations, such as government officials and workers in state-run farms and other agricultural enterprises, carry non-agricultural *hukou*. See Kam Wing Chan, “The Chinese *Hukou* System at 50,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50, no. 2 (April 2009): 197–221.
- ⁴⁵ To a farmer, this benefit is embodied in his or her access to collectively owned farmland and homestead.
- ⁴⁶ In theory, according to the *Hukou* Registration Regulation, residents who move elsewhere (usually to cities) for three days or longer must register for a temporary residency permit with the local government.
- ⁴⁷ Governments had the ultimate authority and were the only driver of large-scale domestic migration. For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Down to the Countryside movement sent millions of city dwellers (who therefore lost their non-agricultural *hukou*) to the countryside to address food shortages and widespread unemployment in China’s urban areas.
- ⁴⁸ Data is from Chan, “The Chinese *Hukou* System at 50.”
- ⁴⁹ See Naughton, *Chinese Economy*.
- ⁵⁰ Dongjie Guo, “The Change of Household Registration System, Population Mobility and the Process of Urban-Rural Integration in New China in the Past 70 Years,” *Zhejiang Social Sciences* 35, no. 10 (October 2019): 75–84.
- ⁵¹ In 1995, the temporary residence system was extended to rural areas to accommodate migration in the countryside.
- ⁵² Another motivation, as discussed above, was to maintain their share of the collectively owned farmland and their homestead in their home villages.
- ⁵³ Again, these inequalities exist not only between countryside and city but also between poorer and richer provinces. The average child in Zhengzhou, the capital of the relatively poor province of Henan, will have more limited life opportunities than the average child in Guangzhou, the capital of the rich province of Guangdong.

- ⁵⁴ Kam Wing Chan and Li Zhang, “The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes,” *China Quarterly* 160 (December 1999): 818–855.
- ⁵⁵ Data from Guo, “Change.”
- ⁵⁶ In 1997, qualified residents were granted formal *hukou* in small towns/ townships. In 1998, restrictions were eased for newborns and other immediate family members of those already granted *hukou*. By the late 1990s, almost all major cities in China had begun offering a *lanyin hukou*—a temporary *hukou* that can be converted to formal *hukou* after a number of years—to those who own qualified real estate.
- ⁵⁷ State Council, 2014. *Opinions of the State Council on Further Promotion of Reform of the Household Registration System*. #25.
- ⁵⁸ In many ways, a residence permit resembles a U.S. Permanent Resident Card (green card): it is linked to the benefits of local residents and has a pathway to a formal *hukou* status but needs to be annually renewed, is tied to the holder’s employment status, and can be revoked under numerous conditions.
- ⁵⁹ Jinwei Liu, “The Effects, Problems, and Solutions in the New Round of Reform of the Household Registration System,” *Population and Society* 34, no. 4 (July 2018): 89–98.
- ⁶⁰ Xiaozhao Lin, “Cities with Most Population with Hukou,” accessed 26 April 2020, <http://www.nbd.com.cn/articles/2019-04-14/1321010.html>.
- ⁶¹ For instance, in 2019, a total of 6,007 applicants were granted Beijing formal *hukou* through the point-based system.
- ⁶² The differences vary dramatically across regions and are usually most important in the areas of employment, education, and healthcare.
- ⁶³ Chris Buckley, “Why Parts of Beijing Look Like a Devastated War Zone,” *New York Times*, 30 November 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/asia/china-beijing-migrants.html>.
- ⁶⁴ “Beijing Finished the Population Plan of Each District,” Xinhua News Agency, accessed 28 April 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-11/23/c_1123755590.html
- ⁶⁵ Zhang, Li, and Yang, “70 Years.”
- ⁶⁶ There is an analogy here with the way that residents of rich cities and towns in democracies tend to support politicians who limit new development, which in turn drives up housing prices and keeps down the number of residents.

Chapter 4: The Chinese Communist Party–State and Religion

Dr. Lawrence C. “Chris” Reardon

INTRODUCTION

Mao Zedong and his comrades in the Political Bureau agreed in 1949 to establish a comprehensive, Stalinist political, economic, and social paradigm whose long-term goal was to establish a vibrant national economy while maintaining strong national defense and party hegemony over the state. After Mao’s death in 1976 and rehabilitated leader Deng Xiaoping’s consolidation of power in December 1978, China’s reformist leaders initiated a paradigm shift that transformed the Stalinist economic paradigm from pursuing a self-sufficient economy to an outwardly oriented, export-driven paradigm. Sustained double-digit economic growth rates over the next several decades catapulted China to the world’s second-largest economy by nominal gross domestic product. To avoid the fate of the Eastern European communist states, party leaders retained but adapted the Stalinist political and social paradigm to prevent the emergence of a free civil society inspired by foreign ideas and a new entrepreneurial class.

Since his appointment as CCP general secretary in 2012, Xi Jinping has continued his predecessors’ campaign to transform the hearts and minds of religious believers as well as followers of heterodox religious movements like the *Falungong* (FLG) using incarceration, reeducation through labor, and sometimes death. Xi has imposed sinicization on China’s religious institutions, which has resulted in the dynamiting of newly built churches, the dismantling of mosques, and the plowing under of religious graveyards as well as the removal of Christian crosses and Islamic star-and-crescent symbols from religious buildings. Xi’s most draconian actions have taken place in

China's northwest autonomous region of Xinjiang, where the party-state has established political and religious reeducation camps for the Turkic Uighur minorities.

This chapter analyzes the formation, adaptation, and enforcement of the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm since 1949. It argues that the CCP has placed its highest priority on controlling and minimizing domestic and foreign religious movements to avoid internal threats to its vibrant economy and national defense while guaranteeing the party's hegemony over the state.

THE STALINIST BUREAUCRATIC RELIGIOUS PARADIGM

In April 2018, the State Council estimated that China's five officially recognized religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism) had roughly 200 million religious believers.¹ Unfortunately, the white paper failed to include the estimated half-billion believers in Chinese folk religion or account for the large number of religious believers attending non-official religious institutions.² When including both official and nonofficial congregations, there are approximately 200 million Buddhists, 100 million Christians, and 50 million Muslims.³

While the true number of Chinese religious believers is difficult to estimate, it is not surprising that the CCP has strictly regulated religion since 1949. Like their former counterparts in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Chinese elites have been guided by the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, which is defined as the party's comprehensive control over all religious beliefs. Within this Stalinist paradigm, Chinese elites are strictly committed to atheism and consider China's traditional religions such as Daoism and Buddhism as part of feudal culture, while foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam are a form of foreign imperialist control. Although Chapter 2, Article 36 of the Chinese constitution forbids the state from "discriminat[ing] against citizens who believe in or do not believe in any religion," the paradigm's long-term goal is for believers to become non-believers, to strengthen national security, and to comply with the party's hegemony.⁴ Thus, the constitution forbids all religious activities "that disrupt public order,

impair the health of citizens or interfere with the state's education system. Religious groups and religious affairs shall not be subject to control by foreign forces.”⁵ The party bureaucracy determines which religions are legal, approves personnel and liturgical decisions, controls all overseas connections, and approves all physical and spiritual structures and activities. To achieve the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, the party-state thus determines what constitutes “normal” and “abnormal” religious activities.

The constitution's focus on public order reveals a deep-seated fear of millenarian movements that have challenged Chinese autocratic rule throughout the centuries. After defeating the Ming Dynasty in 1644, the new Manchu leaders of China put down the White Lotus Rebellion (1794–1804). The movement, which transformed itself from a religious meditation movement into a rebellion against Manchu government, resulted in more than 100,000 deaths.⁶ Fifty years later, the Manchus became embroiled in another religious uprising, the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864). After reading Christian literature and studying with the American Southern Baptist missionary Issachar Roberts, Hong Xiuquan believed he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ. He led a nominally Christian millenarian movement that established the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of 30 million people who lived in the middle and lower Yangtze River Valley. By the end of the rebellion, 20–30 million Chinese had died.⁷

Against this historical backdrop, CCP leaders fear the threat of millenarian movements and view these “abnormal” religious beliefs as disrupting the public order and threatening CCP hegemony. Upon assuming power in 1949, the CCP eradicated the Chinese folk religion *Yiguandao* and since 1999 has ferociously suppressed the FLG movement. The party-state also argues that Tibetan Buddhists have “abnormal” religious beliefs that “disrupt the public order” by revering the 14th Dalai Lama, who fled to India after the Tibetan uprising in 1959.

The constitution's wording also reflects a fear of foreign religions, which during the past centuries have mobilized the citizenry,

challenged autocratic rule, and dismantled the state. Threatened by growing numbers of foreign religious believers, the Emperor Wu Zong eradicated all foreign religions, including Buddhism, Manicheanism, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorianism, in the 1840s. To establish a pure Daoist empire, Wu Zong laicized foreign religious groups, confiscated their property, destroyed their temples, and executed their spiritual leaders.⁸

The party-state today remains concerned about the influence of foreign religions, especially as many Chinese people have been conspicuously searching for a new spiritual underpinning to their lives since the Cultural Revolution ended, the cultish obeisance to Mao abated, and the economy dramatically expanded and brought increased wealth to many. However, these forces also brought a concomitant loss of moorings. To meet the growing demand of Chinese religiosity, Chinese Catholics reopened cathedrals that had been converted into machinery shops during the Cultural Revolution while a new entrepreneurial class of Protestants, the so-called “boss Christians,” established megachurches whose steeples and brightly lit crosses dotted the skyline of eastern Chinese cities, such as Wenzhou.⁹ Protestants and Catholics also established unofficial churches, underground or house churches, in both urban and rural areas. The CCP regards all such unofficial gatherings of adherents of foreign religious faiths as a threat to national security and the party’s hegemony.

Yet, of all the foreign religious “threats,” Islam remains the Chinese leaders’ greatest fear. Xinjiang separatist movements, such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), carried out terrorist attacks throughout Xinjiang in the provincial capitals of Urumqi (1997), Kargilik (1998), and Kashgar (1992, 2008, 2011). After two Uighur migrant workers in Guangdong were killed by their Han Chinese co-workers in 2009, demonstrations erupted in Urumqi in which 197 people were killed. Since Xi assumed power, ETIM claimed responsibility for the 2013 suicide car attack in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square that killed three car passengers and two tourists. In 2014, 31 people were killed in the Kunming railroad station. In the same year, while Xi was visiting Urumqi, a suicide bomber attacked the Urumqi railroad station, killing

one person. One month after Xi returned to Beijing, there was another attack in a crowded Urumqi market that killed 39 people. In internal speeches, Xi argued that the party-state “must be as harsh as them and show no mercy.” He described Islamic extremists as infected with a highly addictive drug in which people lose their “sense, go crazy, and will do anything.” Thus, the leadership needed to impose “painful, interventionary treatment.”¹⁰

To achieve the long-term goals of the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, Chinese leaders since Mao Zedong have used negative, positive, and transformative religious sanctions in the form of policy regulations to establish, co-opt, or exterminate religious movements.¹¹ Autocratic leaders most often use negative religious regulations to eliminate threats to their hegemony by replacing existing religious groups and beliefs. These negative sanctions impose boundaries and controls, including restricting or banning religious organizations, practices, and activities; imprisoning religious leaders and believers; and demolishing religious structures. After dismantling religious groups, autocratic leaders adopt transformative religious regulations to rebuild religious institutions and beliefs to serve the autocratic state. In the 1950s and more recently, Chinese leadership has implemented a sinicization transformation strategy to eradicate all foreign influence and institute a Han-centric ideal of morality that advances the interests of the party-state. To strengthen these religious institutions, autocrats adopt positive religious regulations that harness religious organizations’ ability to contribute to the long-term goals of the party-state, foster stronger relations between the autocratic state and religion, and reinforce the autocrat’s hegemonic control.

During the past 70 years, the Chinese elites have gradually adapted their Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, which has gone through three evolutionary stages: paradigm establishment (1949-1979), paradigm adaptation (1979-1999), and paradigm enforcement (1999-present day). Its establishment stage took over 30 years as elites could not decide which Stalinist religious paradigm was most appropriate. After resolving this internal debate, elites reestablished the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, which they adapted to compensate

for the spillover from China's economic reforms. After 1999, elites progressively tightened enforcement of the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm and reinstated its sinicization transformation strategy as societal forces within China emerged to challenge the party's religious hegemony.

THE FIRST STAGE: ESTABLISHING THE PARADIGM, 1949-1979

In the decade following the defeat of the Nationalist Government Kuomintang forces and their retreat to Taiwan, China's communist leaders co-opted or eliminated foreign and domestic religious threats to CCP hegemony. Chinese communist leaders initially adopted an enlightened atheism strategy composed of negative and transformative regulations,¹² which was inspired by Stalin's co-option of Russian religious believers after 1941 and promoted by Stalin's emissaries to China and throughout the communist satellite states in the 1950s. Communist leaders hoped that through education, propaganda, and scientific development, the masses would eventually become atheists.¹³

Ten months before the establishment of the PRC in October 1949, the party-state launched its first salvo against *Yiguandao* (Way of Unity), which was a syncretic religion that had gained over 10 million northern Chinese followers and was inspired by Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese folk religion. Having declared *Yiguandao* as a reactionary organization that had collaborated with the Japanese during the war, the CCP systematically executed its leaders and banned the movement.¹⁴ They expanded negative sanctions on all political, economic, and social vestiges of the former regime, including churches, temples, and religion-affiliated schools, hospitals, and other institutions established over the centuries. With the adoption of the Directive on the Suppression of Counterrevolutionary Activities in October 1950 to "attack imperialist countries' conspiracies and destructive plots and eliminate the vestiges of Chiang Kai-shek's criminal clique," foreign religious missionaries were either exiled or imprisoned, resulting in many of the religions reestablishing their

orders, schools, and hospitals in Hong Kong and Taiwan and the Vatican's official representative being exiled to Hong Kong.¹⁵

To build the new Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, the elites implemented transformative policies based on enlightened atheism and sinicization. To maintain bureaucratic control and encourage patriotic behavior, the party established Bureau Two of the United Front Work Department (UFWD), which co-opted minorities and religious believers. The UFWD coordinated policy implementation at the central and local levels with the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), which later became the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). After 2018, the UFWD assumed complete control of religious and minority affairs and transferred SARA personnel to the UFWD's Bureaus 11 and 12.¹⁶

These party-state bureaucratic organizations implemented a comprehensive bureaucratization and sinicization campaign in the 1950s. Having expelled most foreign missionaries, Chinese Protestant leaders organized the Three-Self Patriotic Movement to promote a "self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating" organization.¹⁷ By 1957, the party-state established five official religious organizations, including the Chinese Buddhist Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council, and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA).

To reduce the influence of Islam and promote the sinicization of Uighur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz Turkic peoples in Xinjiang, the party-state established the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in 1955, whose religious affairs were controlled by the UFWD, the RAB, and eventually the Islamic Association of China. To promote a greater Han presence and tighter central control, the party-state transferred tens of thousands of workers from eastern China during the 1950s and set up the paramilitary Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps [*bingtuan*] in 1954.¹⁸

To affirm China's sovereignty over Tibet, the PRC signed the Seventeen-Point Agreement with the Tibetan government in May 1951.

The PRC thus agreed to respect the political and religious rights of the 14th Dalai Lama and guarantee the integrity of Tibetan religious beliefs as well as the financial power of the monasteries. Following the Lhasa Uprising of 1959 and the Dalai Lama's escape to Dharamsala, India, the party-state eliminated the power of the Tibetan monasteries and religious elite, destroyed 6,000 monasteries, redistributed monastic lands, and secularized education. The party-state undertook the prolonged process of sinicization by transferring Han party administrators, workers, and farmers from China's other provinces to live in all regions of Tibet, which culminated with the establishment of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 1965.

Thus, by the mid-1960s, the elites had realized the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm by successfully eradicating all vestiges of foreign religious influences and implementing transformative policies to sinicize religious institutions. However, the party elite lacked a unified vision of the policies to achieve the Stalinist religious paradigm, which reflected the two different Stalinist paths of religious development. Mao disagreed with his fellow Political Bureau members on the efficacy of bureaucratic Stalinism, which he felt had hindered China's political, economic, and social development. Instead, he was inspired by radical Stalinism, which was based on the Soviet Union's Radical Atheism strategy of the 1920s and early 1930s in which Lenin and Stalin replaced "feudal" religious ideals with atheism. Following the pledge of absolute loyalty to Stalin in 1927 by Sergius, Russian Orthodox Church Metropolitan, Stalin either shot or imprisoned Orthodox priests and Islamic clergy. He restricted religious activities while closing or destroying Russian Orthodox churches and Islamic mosques.¹⁹

Even though Stalin had replaced radical atheism during World War II with enlightened atheism, Mao advocated Stalin's earlier approach during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s to eliminate religion. He considered it as part of the Four Olds (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas). He dismantled the bureaucratic Stalinist religious institutions, including the RAB, and religious patriotic associations. He closed all churches, temples, and mosques, many of

which were converted into garages and warehouses. Religious faith leaders were laicized, and celibate Catholic priests and nuns were forced to marry. Led by the example of the People's Liberation Army, the party-state implemented a new radical Stalinist religious paradigm that transformed Mao Zedong into a kind of living god, with the Little Red Book as his sacred text and the Red Guards as his religious storm troopers who reinforced the quasi-religious cult of Mao. After his 50th birthday in 1929, Stalin had also encouraged a similarly quasi-religious cult during the height of radical Stalinism.²⁰

THE SECOND STAGE: ADAPTING THE PARADIGM, 1979-1999

Following Mao's death in 1976 and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, Chinese elites resurrected the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm and reestablished institutions and practices based on its Enlightened Atheism strategy of the 1950s. While tightening the paradigm after the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen incident, Jiang Zemin adapted the religious strategies to reflect China's changing economy and society by adopting a new pragmatic atheism strategy.

During the 1980s, Deng and the Chinese elites reestablished the bureaucratic religious paradigm and its Enlightened Atheist strategy that allowed Chinese religious believers to worship the five official religions. They reestablished the UFWD, the RAB, and the five patriotic religious associations. To reflect the leaders' new emphasis on economic development, the Central Committee issued document 1982.19 that urged all religious believers to work together with the state to promote economic modernization.²¹ The party-state subsequently adopted a series of positive sanctions to strengthen the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm. Religious leaders, some of whom had been incarcerated since the 1950s, were released from jail. Religious properties were returned, many of which had to undergo substantial architectural repairs. Local RAB offices allowed the reopening of clan temples, the practice of local folk religions, and the re-emergence of sectarian folk religious groups, fortune-telling, and fengshui. Acknowledging responsibility for the cultural destruction during his

1980 visit to Tibet, Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang called on the CCP to respect the Tibetan people and culture.²² The party-state thus repaired many of the monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and allowed the Panchen Lama to regain his position as a religious political leader until his death in 1989.

With this gradual reestablishment of religions, the official Christian congregations once again opened church doors on Sunday. Parishioners attended the reopened official churches, but after so many years of having to hide their faith, they also gathered in smaller, independent, Protestant house churches composed of Pentecostals, evangelicals, and the new urban middle class.²³ Despite their unofficial status, lack of fixed meeting areas, and limited finances, this Protestant religious “black market” began to flourish in China’s urban and rural areas. By early 2000, the estimated number of Protestants attending the official and unofficial churches numbered over 50 million.²⁴

The Chinese Catholic Church did not enjoy the exponential growth rates of the decentralized Protestant churches in part because of the Vatican’s dual-track reconciliation strategy. In the early 1980s, Pope John Paul II called for a renewed dialogue with the RAB and the CCPA. However, he concurrently supported the expansion of the unofficial church and sought to aid imprisoned clergy and others whose allegiance was to the Vatican. Deep antipathy between the official and unofficial Catholic clergy and parishioners grew as the Vatican forbade underground church members from receiving the sacraments in CCPA churches.

Despite these problems, Chinese religions enjoyed a phoenix-like revival in the 1980s, which in part was fueled by a disenchantment with communist ideology and a growing need for an alternate source of morality and spirituality. By the late 1980s, Chinese leaders were confronted by new calls for social and political reform that started in 1986 with student demonstrations, pro-Tibetan independence protests from 1987–1989, and calls for greater democracy during the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen protests—which occurred simultaneously with

the implosion of Eastern European communism. During this turbulent period, the Chinese leadership feared that religious forces could exacerbate the situation. Religion had incited civil unrest in Eastern Europe, spurred on by such events as the Pope's enthusiastic support for the Solidarity movement in Poland and the Lutheran Church's role in organizing and legitimizing the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany. One of Deng's closest allies, Chen Yun, argued, "Using religion to win over the masses—especially young people—has always been a favorite trick of both our domestic and foreign-class enemies. This is the bitter lesson of several of the communist-led countries that recently lost power."²⁵

Deng thus tightened the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm to restrict religious influences and carried out a series of campaigns against forces of religious "terrorism, separatism, and extremism" in Tibet.²⁶ Hu Yaobang's overture of reconciliation with the Tibetan people in 1980 was replaced by 13 months of martial law in 1989. The party-state ended its dialogue with the Dalai Lama, who had promoted a middle way of reconciliation, and increased their supervision of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, which were challenging the CCP's hegemonic control of Tibet. With the other religions, the RAB tightened restrictions on official religious institutions and attempted to "protect the legal; wipe out the illegal; resist infiltration; and attack crime" by closing unofficial churches.²⁷ The party was especially concerned about foreign religious infiltration and prevented Chinese students from attending foreign religious institutions.²⁸ Perhaps reflecting the pope's role in undermining the Polish communist regime, the party-state adopted the "Circular on Stepping Up Control over the Catholic Church to Meet the New Situation" in 1989, which strengthened the CCPA, increased

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arrests of underground clergy, and formulated new regulations that restricted non-authorized religious activities.²⁹

After Deng undertook his second visit to the Special Economic Zones in 1992, the new general secretary, Jiang Zemin, gradually adopted a more pragmatic atheism strategy that acknowledged the intractable nature of Chinese religious belief.³⁰ Jiang thus adopted a utilitarian attitude toward official religion. By the 1990s, China had a more market-oriented economy with a growing entrepreneurial middle class. The party-state realized that official religious organizations could be regarded as partners to share the burden of social welfare responsibilities. Thus, according to this pragmatic strategy, the party-state could coexist with growing religious institutions and their nongovernmental organizations if they supported China's economic modernization and complied with existing laws.

The State Council thus enacted Documents 1994.144 and 1994.195 that lifted various restrictions imposed in the immediate post-June 4th Tiananmen era. The UFWD and the RAB once again allowed greater religious freedoms, including limited interactions with international religious institutions.³¹ The party-state viewed official religious organizations, especially the traditional religions such as Buddhism, as partners to share the burden of financing social welfare services.³² Many religious institutions enthusiastically undertook such welfare responsibilities as part of their religious mandate to promote the welfare of all, as well as to convince the party-state that they could be willing partners to promote China's political and economic security.

From 1979 to 1999, Chinese elites revived and adapted the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm. While Chinese elites reinforced party supervision following Tibetan protests and the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen incident, Chinese believers continued to flock to the reopened religious institutions, which expanded their social welfare activities with the encouragement of the party-state. During the 1990s, General Secretary Jiang changed the strategy to achieve Stalinist paradigm strategy from a more stringent, enlightened atheism to a more pragmatic atheism that could more readily adapt to the growing wealth of the

new entrepreneurial and middle classes who were actively supporting religious activities. However, Jiang and future party leaders realized that their pragmatic approach to the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm was ineffective at controlling religious groups that were increasingly challenging the party's hegemony.

THE THIRD STAGE: ENFORCING THE PARADIGM, 1999–PRESENT

Reaching back to the 1950s, the party-state reimplemented its sinicization strategy to eradicate all foreign influence and institute a Han-centric ideal of morality that advanced their interests. They were particularly concerned about the rise of heterodox religious and millenarian groups, the evil cults, and the growing independence movement among the Tibetan Buddhists and the Islamic Turkic groups in Xinjiang, to which they refer as forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism (*kungbu zhuyi*, *fenlie zhuyi*, *jiduan zhuyi*).

Since the 1980s, the UFWD and the RAB have designated nearly two dozen religious groups as evil cults whose heterodox beliefs were considered “abnormal.” Many of these groups were sectarian Protestants, including the Shouters (*Huhanpai*) of Zhejiang, the Disciples of Christ (*Mentuhui*) of Shaanxi, and the Church of the Almighty God (*Quannengshen*), or Eastern Lightning, founded in Henan in 1989.³³ Others were variants of Buddhism that originated from Taiwan, including the True Buddha School and Guanyin Famen.³⁴ In April 1990, they also executed Chao Zhengkun, who reportedly declared herself empress of the Great Sage Dynasty, surrounded herself with a male harem, and planned to spread the good news to 14 various Chinese cities.³⁵

Yet, party leaders have been most concerned about the rise of the FLG and its leader, Li Hongzhi, who mixed the meditative practices of qigong with various ideas drawn from Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Jiang and party elites unexpectedly discovered that the FLG movement had recruited 70–80 million followers, including party and government members who were attracted by its meditative qigong practices.³⁶ On 25 April 1999, 10,000 FLG believers gathered

near the party's Beijing headquarters in Zhongnanhai to petition for the release of FLG practitioners who had been arrested in the nearby city of Tianjin. Jiang subsequently ordered the crackdown on the FLG movement. In October, the National Peoples' Congress passed laws that forbade heterodox religions and religious cults. This action was followed up by Central Committee/State Council Document 2000.5 that made "socially harmful" qigong organizations such as FLG illegal.³⁷ Since 1999, the Ministry of Public Security has detained, imprisoned, and reeducated those citizens "misled" by such heterodox religious movements. A substantial number of reports state that some FLG prisoners were put to death and their internal organs harvested for transplantation.³⁸

Party General Secretary Hu Jintao (2002–2012) continued Jiang's pragmatic atheism strategy, which was now couched in Hu's signature policy of establishing a socialist harmonious society that promoted greater social equality. Hu Jintao amended the party constitution, which acknowledged that the party could use religion as a tool to raise moral standards and promote economic growth.³⁹ In November 2004, the State Council issued a new document, Regulations on Religious Affairs, which clarified the 1994 regulations. It includes new rules concerning non-governmental religious organizations that manage medical institutions, training institutes, and kindergartens. The regulations also empowered local authorities to continue the campaign against FLG and other "abnormal" religious beliefs.⁴⁰ Hu thus continued to arrest "evil cult" members, some of whom were incarcerated in mental institutions.⁴¹ Thus, as long as religious believers followed existing laws, party cadre at the national and local levels cooperated with emerging religious groups who provided social welfare to the neediest in society.

Hu Jintao also expanded efforts to enforce the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm in the restive autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. As the Tibetan party secretary from 1988–1992, Hu dealt directly with the largest anti-Han and pro-independence demonstrations since 1959.⁴² As party general secretary, he confronted renewed demonstration in Lhasa in 2008. One year before, SARA had

issued Document 2007.5, which regulated the process of living Buddha reincarnations and required the living Buddha to respect China's party-state and reject "the dominion of any foreign organization or individual" such as the Dalai Lama.⁴³ By 14 March 2008, Tibetans joined Buddhist monks in Lhasa to demonstrate against the Chinese occupation following the annual commemoration of the Tibetan Uprising Day and the exile of the Dalai Lama. These demonstrations spread to the surrounding provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu, where large numbers of ethnic Tibetans reside. In response, the PLA and the People's Armed Police imprisoned at least 4,400 Tibetans and raided Tibetan monasteries.⁴⁴ The CCP ended eight years of negotiations with the Dalai Lama, restricted the veneration of the Dalai Lama, forbade government workers and students from practicing religion, and initiated a large-scale reeducation campaign. In 2009, Hu also faced a series of anti-Han demonstrations in Urumqi, Kashgar, and Hotan. Fearing that these demonstrators were inspired by growing Islamic fundamentalism and independence groups attempting to establish an East Turkistan state, the CCP restricted the wearing of headscarves, growing long beards, fasting, abstention from alcohol during Ramadan, and praying in public.⁴⁵

Hu Jintao thus continued to pursue Jiang's pragmatic atheism strategy when confronting the expansion of official and unofficial churches and the rise of the new middle class and their search for religious succor. He continued to battle the heterodox religious and millenarian groups as well as the Tibetan Buddhists and Xinjiang Turkic groups advocating independence. Yet, faced with these serious and growing challenges to party hegemony, the new party general secretary, Xi Jinping, rejected pragmatism and readopted the Enlightened Atheism strategy of the 1950s and its emphasis on sinicization and eliminating foreign influence.

A half year after assuming command of the party, on 22 April 2013, Xi issued Document 2013.9 on the current ideological state of the country. This internal document revealed that Xi feared the influence of western ideas that were corroding China's culture, social values, and intellectual discourse. Thus, the CCP needed to oppose

all concepts of western democracy and western universal values, the development of civil society, the comprehensive liberalization of the economy, the development of a free press, the publication of revisionist histories of China, the questioning of China's opening strategy, and its socialist nature.⁴⁶

Xi's solution was the sinicization strategy, which the party-state had first implemented after 1949 to rid the country of the Guomindang and foreign influences. Leaders such as Hu Jintao had also used sinicization strategies in Tibet and Xinjiang. However, in 2016, Xi elevated the importance of sinicizing religions so that they became integral parts the party's vision of Han Chinese culture and identity.⁴⁷ Xi promoted "positive politicization" of Chinese traditional cultures and faiths by strongly endorsing Chinese Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism as key to restoring China's morality. He adopted negative sanctions to force foreign religions to integrate the party's values with religious values. Xi took more forceful measures to suppress and eliminate those religious groups that rejected sinicization. To ensure that his new vision was implemented, Xi assumed greater personal control over policy formulation and implementation by transferring direct control of religious policy from the State Council's SARA to the party's UFWD in 2018.⁴⁸

The Central Committee and State Council subsequently issued policy documents that strengthened Sinicization and the Enlightened Atheism strategy. The May 2014 report on national security urged that religion be regarded as a national security matter.⁴⁹ The CCP thus promulgated the Counter-Terrorism Law, the Security Law, and the 2016 Cybersecurity Law.⁵⁰ These new laws regulated all forms of expression, including the internet, and imposed tighter controls on official religious organizations. They also used a Strike-Hard approach to interdict all non-sanctioned religious activities, including those of the unofficial churches and the Turkic Islamic and the Tibetan Buddhist nationalists.

The party-state also adopted a new version of the Religious Affairs Regulations document that went into effect in February

2018. The regulations defined how religions were to implement core socialist values by imposing harsher restrictions on registered and unregistered religious activities and organizations. Local-level UFWD/SARA departments could impose tighter restrictions on the importation of religious material, the sales of religious materials in places of worship, unauthorized travel and religious training abroad, proselytization within schools, the distribution of religious information, and internet activities. The regulations provided detailed guidelines concerning the construction and renovation of religious buildings and the financing of religious organizations.⁵¹ The CCP subsequently issued detailed guidelines, such as the September 2018 rules that only allow UFWD/SARA-approved organizations to use the internet to promote religious doctrines and religious activities. “No organization or individual is permitted to stream videos of religious activities like worshiping, burning incense, receiving precepts, attending mass, and receiving baptism or broadcast those in the form of text, photo, and audio or video.”⁵²

To augment the 2018 Religious Affairs Regulations, the Central Committee issued Document 2018.1 that authorized greater suppression of illegal religious activities in rural areas, especially the unofficial churches. The document authorizes restrictions on large-scale religious and social activities, the dismantling of illegal religious buildings and statues, strict restrictions on religious education, and prohibitions against non-certified religious leaders. To prevent greater foreign religious penetration, local religious organizations were not allowed to accept foreign financial support. In November 2019, SARA issued the Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups, which gave greater authority to the local religious affairs department to supervise and manage the official religious groups.⁵³

In addition to these internal regulations, Beijing signed a two-year agreement with the Holy See in September 2018 to erode the influence of the unofficial Chinese Catholic Church and take initial steps to establish diplomatic relations, which would further diplomatically isolate the Republic of China (ROC) from Taiwan. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI sought to unify the official and unofficial

churches in China, although he previously supported the unofficial church that had flourished since the 1980s. His successor, Pope Francis, has been anxious to prevent a growing schism between the official and unofficial Chinese Catholic Church and gain spiritual authority over the official Catholic Church. As Rome and Beijing wanted to preserve their authority, they agreed to a power-sharing agreement in which the CCP chooses potential candidates for bishop who are then approved by the Pope. The confidential agreement resulted in several bishopric appointments but has not insulated the Chinese Church from the CCP's new religious regulations and its sublimation under the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm.⁵⁴

SINICIZATION IN ACTION

To implement this return to the more xenophobic, Enlightened Atheism strategy of the 1950s and its emphasis on sinicization, the CCP carried out a series of rectification campaigns at the national and local levels. Beginning in June 2018, the CCP initiated the Four Requirements, in which all officially recognized religious institutions were required to raise the national flag and sing the national anthem; promote China's constitution, laws, and regulations; promote "core socialist values;" and promote "China's excellent traditional culture." Institutions were required to post the new Religious Affairs Regulations, provide study guides of China's core socialist values, integrate China's traditional culture with religious teachings, and post slogans from the 19th Party Congress and warnings about prohibiting the teaching of minors and the participation of communist party members.⁵⁵

The leaders of the five official religious groups committed their organizations to realize Xi's sinicization plans and to carry out the Four Requirements campaign. In 2018, the Three-Self Patriotic movement and China Christian Council issued a five-year plan of sinicization;⁵⁶ the other four official churches have formulated similar plans. According to the director of the Chinese Buddhist Association, Master Xuecheng, "Chinese religions should break beyond the limitations of sticking to traditions and effectively integrate this religion with modern ideology, management systems, and media."⁵⁷ In 2019, the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference and the CCPA held a two-day conference in

Sichuan in which representatives sought ways to “integrate excellent Chinese traditional culture to preach the Gospel and let the Gospel of Christ take seed and grow in China.”⁵⁸ The newly appointed imam of the Dongguan Mosque in Xining, Qinghai province, interwove Communist and nationalist ideas in his prayer services and in his teachings at the mosque’s academic center.⁵⁹ The Hui Muslims living in Jilin were forced to sing patriotic songs praising the communist party such as “I Love You, China” to celebrate Eid al-Adha, which marks the end of Ramadan.⁶⁰

Xi’s Four Requirements campaign thus resulted in a nationwide campaign to secularize and sinicize the physical appearance of China’s churches, temples, and mosques. The campaign was first tested in Zhejiang province, whose provincial party secretary, Xia Baolong, implemented the three-year Three Rectification and One Demolition Campaign that began with the destruction of the \$5.5 million Sanjiang Church in April 2014 because it was four times larger than originally approved. The provincial documents authorized the local authorities to identify “overly popular” Christian sites and eliminate conspicuous religious symbols from the city’s skyline, which resulted in the removal of over 1,000 crosses from religious buildings.⁶¹

With the official approval of the Four Requirements campaign in 2018, the secularization/sinicization campaign spread to other provinces, including Henan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Anhui, where crosses were dismantled, unofficial churches were closed, and members attending the official church were fingerprinted and identified with facial recognition software.⁶² Religious buildings were adorned with patriotic slogans, while inside, copies of the Ten Commandments were replaced by the Quotations of Xi Jinping.⁶³

The Four Requirements campaign not only affected official Protestant and Catholic Churches but also Islamic mosques and shrines. The party-state in Luoyang city in Henan, as well as in Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia dismantled Islamic-style architecture including dome structures, minarets, star and crescent symbols, and Arabic language signs.⁶⁴ The destruction of Islamic mosques and shrines was even more draconian in Xinjiang.

While foreign religions have endured most of the Four Requirements secularization/sinicization campaign, the CCP ordered the dismantling or reconfiguration of Buddhist statues as well. Starting in 2019, a 20-meter-tall statue of Guanyin, located within a Buddhist cemetery, was transformed into a lotus flower. A 10-meter-tall statue of the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva was encased in marble tablets in the northeast province of Liaoning. The party-state also dismantled a 16-meter-tall golden statue of Guanyin and a 15-meter-tall Bodhisattva statue in Shanxi province while demolishing a 30-meter-tall statue of the Thousand-Hand Guanyin and a statue of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva in Shandong.⁶⁵ In December 2019, a 23-meter-tall statue of the dripping-water Guanyin statue, which was financed by Overseas Chinese and erected in Guangdong's Meizhou city, was demolished as it was too tall. The party-state determined that a newly built Maitreyan statue in Hunan province was "too eye-catching" and so ordered its destruction.⁶⁶ By summer 2020, the CCP also destroyed statues of Buddhist deities in Hubei, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and Sichuan provinces. Buddhists seeking enlightenment must now contemplate the quotations of Xi Jinping and pictures of Marx and Lenin.⁶⁷

To ensure the success of the new sinicization campaign, Xi Jinping's party-state adopted biometric measures and artificial intelligence (AI) surveillance programs to monitor religious services. To identify religious believers, the party-state has undertaken a major program of DNA sampling, fingerprinting, facial recognition, blood type, and other intrusive means to identify enemies of the party-state and to solidify the party's hegemony. By 2016, more than 176 million surveillance cameras were installed in central urban and rural areas.⁶⁸ The Public Security Bureau has installed cameras to monitor services and persecute those who preach "anti-government" content within many of the official Protestant and Catholic churches. The party-state reportedly has also infiltrated the Vatican's computer networks.⁶⁹

However, Xi has adopted his most draconian sinicization measures in his crackdown on forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism in Xinjiang. In 2014, party leaders opened a new front in Xinjiang.

Its Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism eventually resulted in the mass detentions of Turkic Chinese believers of Islam. Leading this campaign has been Chen Quanguo, who previously was the Tibetan party leader later transferred to Xinjiang in 2016. Having learned from his Tibetan experiences, Chen tightened police surveillance by establishing “convenience police stations” every 200 meters.⁷⁰ He approved the installation of various AI surveillance systems in Xinjiang, including within Islamic religious institutions.⁷¹

In 2017, Chen established “reeducation” internment camps for Muslim ethnic minorities including the Uighurs, Kazaks, and Kyrgyz. Chen told the police to carry out a “smashing, obliterating offensive” and to “round up everyone who should be round up,” which included religious believers who wore long beards, did not drink alcohol or smoke, studied Arabic, and prayed in the mosque.⁷² By August 2018, one report stated that of the “population of Uighurs estimated at more than 11.3 million, or 48.5 percent of Xinjiang’s total population of 23 million (2014), roughly 30 percent, or 3.3 million, may have been subjected to ‘re-education,’ including about 10 percent, or 1.1 million, in detention camps and about 20 percent, or 2.2 million, in day/evening forced brainwashing.”⁷³ By 2020, the international press reported that Xinjiang authorities had implemented a rigorous birth control campaign in which Turkic women were subjected to pregnancy tests, the insertion of intrauterine devices, sterilization, and abortion. As a result of the birth control campaign, birthrates in Xinjiang dropped 24 percent in 2019 while the nationwide decrease was 4.2 percent.⁷⁴

To complete this secularization/sinicization process, the party-state is erasing the Turkic people’s cultural, religious, and ethnic identity, which is being replaced by a Han Chinese vision of a modern Turkic Chinese citizen. The party-state thus has altered or demolished 31 mosques and major shrines by removing the domes and minarets and transforming them into more Chinese-style buildings, converting them into morgues, or creating new bars and clubs serving alcohol. The party-state outlawed Islamic dress and headscarves and the wearing of any clothing with a star or crescent moon, forbade the growing of beards, and prohibited fasting or

abstaining from alcohol during Ramadan and naming children with Islamic names.⁷⁵ To teach the Turkic peoples to become more “Han-like,” the party-state initiated the Visit, Aid, Unite program, in which a million-Han cadre make compulsory visits to Turkic families. Han Chinese cadre members live with Turkic families under the Becoming Family program to observe family members and report on their political and religious beliefs.⁷⁶ Starting in 2011, the Xinjiang party-state started Project Beauty, seeking to sinicize traditional Xinjiang norms to “look towards ‘modern culture’ by removing face veils and jilbab” and adopt Han style of makeup and dress. By 2017, the party-state initiated the “Three News” campaign that “advocated a new lifestyle, establish[ed] a new atmosphere, and construct[ed] a new order.”⁷⁷

By 2019, many Turkic minorities reportedly had “graduated” from internment camps and had been sent either to guarded residential communities where they continued their political indoctrination classes, engaged in self-confessions, etc.⁷⁸ Others, whose children have been sent to orphanages, have been transferred to other parts of China where they live under guard and work in factories.

COVID-19 AND SINICIZATION

In spring 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCP closed all religious institutions. It continued to carry out its sinicization campaign, however, by dismantling crosses throughout Jiangxi and Anhui provinces as well as removing a 100-year-old calligraphed plaque and the star and crescent iconography from Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar, Xinjiang province. The CCP has mandated that these and other religious buildings be secularized and sinicized to reflect Chinese architectural aesthetics.⁷⁹ As the COVID-19 crisis subsides in China, religious institutions in Henan must comply with 42 requirements to reopen. Worshippers “must register online, cross-referencing their health code, and provide their personal details, including name, gender, ID card, and phone number. Venues must intensify patriotic education and study China’s religious policies and other regulations, and implement the ‘four requirements.’” Reports state that local RAB offices in Liaoning, Shandong, and Zhejiang provinces have threatened

to close again any church or temple that fails to contribute to COVID-19 relief funds.

CONCLUSION

Since 1949, the Chinese elites have maintained the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm with its long-term goals of establishing a vibrant national economy while maintaining a strong national defense and party hegemony. During the first stage of paradigm establishment, elites adopted an enlightened atheism strategy that eliminated foreign influences, sinicized religious institutions, and assumed hegemonic control over all religious beliefs. After the Cultural Revolutionary period of radical atheism, elites re-implemented enlightened atheism, reopening religious institutions and allowing greater religious freedoms. During the second stage of adapting the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, the party adopted a pragmatic atheism strategy adaptation to welcome support from domestic and foreign religious bodies that share the burden of social welfare services and promote cultural values supportive of the party-state.

During the third stage of enforcing the Stalinist bureaucratic religious paradigm, elites were concerned about the growing power of organized religions, millenarian movements such as the FLG, and the growing religious nationalism in Tibet and Xinjiang, which threatened national security and the hegemony. Xi Jinping thus readopted the xenophobic-enlightened atheism and its secularization/sinicization strategy of the 1950s to strengthen party control. The party-state has gone beyond tearing down religious symbols and buildings to eroding the core religious values by implementing its Four Requirements campaign

Growing fears of terrorism, separatism, and extremism in Tibet and Xinjiang has resulted in the party adopting draconian sinicization measures to restrict religious practices, which some foreign observers have described as crimes against humanity.

that mandates religions incorporate the party's "core socialist values" and "China's excellent traditional culture." Growing fears of terrorism, separatism, and extremism in Tibet and Xinjiang has resulted in the party adopting draconian sinicization measures to restrict religious practices, which some foreign observers have described as crimes against humanity.

In response, the Trump and Biden administrations have implemented the Global Magnitsky Act, imposed travel and trade bans, and frozen assets of key regional party leaders and organizations involved with the suppression of Xinjiang's Turkic peoples. While the world is finally waking up to the draconian measures taken against the Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, how this secularization/sinicization campaign continues to impact the rest of China cannot be forgotten.

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PART 3: HARD BALANCING THROUGH SUPPORT TO RESISTANCE



Chapter 5: Taiwan—An Assessment of Resistance Potential

Mr. Will Irwin

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan is viewed today as one of the world's most perilous flashpoints, significant partly because any conflict across the Taiwan Strait could possibly trigger a larger war between two nuclear-armed powers. China's authoritarian government under President Xi Jinping has become increasingly assertive. On the other hand, Taiwan has enjoyed a vibrant economy and a vigorous democracy after experiencing a prolonged period of one-party authoritarian rule. While Beijing has made reunification of Taiwan with mainland China its foremost national priority,¹ Taiwan is experiencing "increased confidence and an increasingly separate identity."² China hopes to accomplish reunification peacefully but is prepared to use force if necessary and especially in the event of a declaration of independence by Taiwan.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded by Mao Zedong on 1 October 1949 after the Communist Chinese victory over the Nationalist Government in a civil war that began four years earlier. The defeated Nationalist Government, or *Kuomintang*, under President Chiang Kai-shek, fled to the offshore island of Taiwan, where it reestablished the Republic of China (ROC) and proclaimed it to be its legitimate government.

The CCP's Central Committee proclaimed in January 1950 that one of its main tasks for that year was "to liberate Taiwan, Hainan, and Tibet."³ China wasted little time in occupying the autonomous region of Tibet, doing so shortly after Mao's late-1949 victory. An armed Tibetan resistance movement disrupted the Chinese consolidation and occupation with support from the U.S. beginning in 1956 until Washington ceased all further support in 1969.⁴

The ROC received political recognition and military assistance from the U.S. for much of the Cold War, but in 1971–1972, as U.S. involvement in Vietnam was winding down, President Richard Nixon sought closer relations with Beijing. Meetings between the two powers in Shanghai during the last week of February 1972—at both the head-of-state and ministerial levels—resulted in a *Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People’s Republic of China*, commonly referred to as the Shanghai Communiqué, on 27 February. On the question of Taiwan, the Chinese government reaffirmed its position that Taiwan is a province of China and that the Beijing government is the sole legal government for all China. Matters dealing with Taiwan, therefore, are an internal Chinese affair and not the concern of external powers. China further demanded that all U.S. forces be removed from Taiwan and that all U.S. military installations be closed. The U.S. expressed no direct challenge to the position that Taiwan is part of China and stated the desire to have China and Taiwan come to a peaceful settlement themselves. The U.S. agreed to progressively reduce its military presence in Taiwan as tension in the area diminished.⁵

On 1 January 1979, Washington and Beijing signed the *Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China*, which declared mutual recognition and opened diplomatic relations between the two governments. The agreement reaffirmed the principles agreed to in the *Shanghai Communiqué* and expressed the shared desire to reduce international tension. Neither side, under the terms of the agreement, would seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. As a result of the agreement, the U.S. ceased formal diplomatic relations with Taipei, transferring recognition to Beijing.⁶

In the spring of 1979, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Taiwan Relations Act, which was retroactive to 1 January 1979 and served as the defining document for continuing relations with the “governing authorities of Taiwan.” The document stated that the U.S. would continue to maintain commercial and cultural relations with Taiwan without official government representation via a nonprofit corporation known as the American Institute in Taiwan. The act also contained provisions for the U.S. to make available to Taiwan certain defense articles and services of a defensive nature.

More recently, as the increasingly authoritarian nature of the regime of Chinese President Xi has become evident to the outside world, the residents of Taiwan have grown progressively uneasy with their political condition. The sympathetic relationship that had developed between the citizens of Taiwan and those of Hong Kong, both facing an uncertain future under Beijing's One Country, Two Systems policy, was jolted by Beijing's implementation of its National Security Law in Hong Kong on 30 June 2020. This curtailed many of the freedoms previously enjoyed by citizens of the city. Meanwhile, Taiwan has enjoyed several years of vibrant democracy. Direct presidential elections have resulted in three peaceful transfers of power since the lifting of martial law in 1987. Both Hong Kong and Taiwan have experienced a burgeoning pro-independence sentiment. This has now been crushed in Hong Kong. China, meanwhile, pursues a mixed strategy of persuasion and coercion intended to impede further development of such attitudes. Prudently, Taiwan's President, Tsai Ing-wen, has abstained from declaring independence for the ROC, aware that this would be the surest provocation of war with the PRC.

The Chinese government reaffirmed its position that Taiwan is a province of China and that the Beijing government is the sole legal government for all China. Matters dealing with Taiwan, therefore, are an internal Chinese affair and not the concern of external powers.

PURPOSE

This chapter is intended to provide a cursory assessment of Taiwan's resistance potential in the face of threatened aggression by China. Author Mark Grdovic, an experienced unconventional warfare practitioner and theorist, has identified certain prerequisites that must be present in a given environment for resistance to succeed. Calculating the potential for resistance involves an integrated assessment of the terrain, population, leadership, and vulnerabilities of an occupying force or government.⁷ This chapter

follows Grdovic's assessment template. It also explores the possible roles that popular resistance might play in Taiwan and ascertains the expected value and effectiveness of such resistance as one component of a comprehensive deterrence package.

SITUATION

The potential for a China-Taiwan conflict has been a major concern of the U.S. and the region for seven decades. Among the topics discussed at a U.S. National Security Council meeting on 27 July 1950 was "a recommendation from the Joint Chiefs before the Council that we grant all-out aid to the Chinese Nationalists [in Taiwan] so as to enable them to defend themselves against a possible Communist attack on the island."⁸

President Xi has asserted that the reunification of Taiwan with China must be realized soon, by force if necessary, and that Beijing intends to cease passing the issue on "from generation to generation."⁹ For at least two decades, China has invested heavily in modernizing its armed forces and expanding its capacity for expeditionary operations, resulting in an undeniable quantitative overmatch in strength compared with the armed forces of Taiwan.

China has, however, failed in developing and implementing an effective influence campaign to win over the people of Taiwan. For an appreciation of how well Beijing's One Country, Two Systems policy might work if reunification took place, the citizens of Taiwan need only to monitor conditions in Hong Kong. Moreover, all are aware of the plight of China's Tibetan and Uighur populations, who are becoming strangers in their homelands, seeing the best jobs and housing go to outsiders (relocated Han Chinese), and witnessing the disintegration of their cultures.¹⁰

THE THREAT

Threat Force

China's armed force, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), has been in existence for less than a century. It continues an ongoing transformation into a professional military under President Xi

with roles and missions recalibrated to promote a growing power projection capability.¹¹ Significant recent modernization investments have resulted in improved capabilities in all domains. China employs a strategy it characterizes as “active defense”—strategically defensive while operationally offensive. Increased emphasis has been placed on maritime operations, offensive air operations, long-distance ground force mobility operations, and superiority in the information domain.¹² Vast improvements have also been made in China’s ability to deter or deny foreign intervention in the region.

With an active-duty force of approximately 915,000 personnel in combat units, the PLA Army (PLAA) is the largest standing ground force in the world.¹³ Organizational improvements have resulted in a more mobile and modularized force. The combat force is organized into field group armies, each of which is roughly equivalent in size to a U.S. Army corps. A group army, composed of six combined-arms brigades, each with up to 5,000 troops, serves as the army’s primary maneuver force. Subordinate to the combined-arms brigade are combined-arms battalions, the basic tactical unit for joint operations. There are three versions of these combined-arms battalions—heavy (equipped with tracked, armored vehicles), medium (with wheeled armored vehicles), and light. Light battalions can be high-mobility, mountain/jungle, air assault, or motorized. Each group army also includes an artillery brigade, an air defense brigade, an army aviation or air assault brigade, a SOF brigade, a combined engineer and chemical defense brigade, and a service support brigade. Two air-assault brigades, which were established in 2017, can augment the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Airborne Corps’ combined-arms airborne brigades. Equipment found in PLAA infantry units is a mix of modern and obsolete systems. The primary missions of SOF units, which include organic vertical lift, are believed to be special reconnaissance and direct

With an active-duty force of approximately 915,000 personnel in combat units, the PLA Army (PLAA) is the largest standing ground force in the world.

action (DA). The PLAA is manned with a mix of two-year conscripts and volunteers. Interest in the military as a career was not widespread during the period of China's fast economic growth.¹⁴

The PLAN is the largest navy in the world, with a fleet of around 350 ships and submarines, including aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, patrol craft, and other surface combatants. By comparison, the U.S. Navy has approximately 293 ships as of early 2020,¹⁵ although the larger and more capable U.S. ships more than double the tonnage of their Chinese counterparts. China has committed to building an improved expeditionary capacity and has demonstrated improved capabilities by conducting operations such as live-fire exercises in the East China Sea north of Taiwan. By 2020, the PLAN was expected to increase its submarine force to between 65 and 70, including a mix of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, nuclear-powered attack submarines, and conventionally powered attack submarines. The latter includes a growing inventory of submarines equipped with advanced anti-ship cruise missiles. Ship-building programs are expected to produce new guided-missile cruisers, guided-missile destroyers, and guided-missile frigates. Several new and more capable amphibious warfare ships are under construction, but there is no indication that a significant expansion of the landing-ship force is underway. The PLAN Marine Corps comprises a total of six combat brigades.¹⁶

As with the other components of the PLA, the PLAAF has also undergone considerable modernization. With a force of more than 2,700 aircraft of all types—2,000 of these combat aircraft, including a growing bomber force—the PLAAF is the third-largest air force in the world and the largest in the region. The PLAAF includes five airborne combined arms brigades, making it the equivalent of a PLAA group army. In recent exercises, the PLAAF has demonstrated new capabilities in long-range raid and airborne operations. The service also maintains a large suite of unmanned aerial vehicles. Finally, the PLAAF fields one of the world's largest inventories of surface-to-air missile systems.¹⁷

In addition to the SOF brigade organic to each group army, the PLAAF airborne corps includes the *Leishen* (thunder god) airborne commando unit, trained to conduct penetration operations and DA against key enemy leaders and command and control (C2) facilities. Likewise, the PLAN includes the *Jiaolong* (water dragon) commando unit, which has conducted high-profile missions such as anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the evacuation of hundreds of Chinese citizens and foreign national personnel from Yemen when they were endangered by Saudi airstrikes.

The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) fields both nuclear and conventionally armed land-based missiles. Its fleet of conventionally armed anti-ship ballistic missiles is capable of attacking aircraft carriers and other ships throughout the western Pacific Ocean. The PLARF also has an arsenal of 90 intercontinental ballistic missiles, with some capable of reaching targets in the continental United States.¹⁸

China's Strategic Support Force, created in 2016 as a theater command-level organization, provides control over all strategic space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare assets. It currently controls approximately 100 orbiting spacecraft.¹⁹

China's Eastern Theater Command would have primary responsibility for operations against Taiwan. It currently consists of three group armies, two marine brigades, a naval fleet, two air force bases, and a missile installation.²⁰

If Chinese forces were successful in invading and occupying Taiwan, any local resistance movement would face four organizations responsible for various aspects of China's internal security. First would be the civilian national police force under the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the government department responsible for domestic law enforcement and social order. Functions of the MPS include countering civil unrest and terrorism. The Ministry of State Security (MSS) is charged with protecting China's national security and securing political and social stability. Major functions of the MSS are intelligence, counterintelligence, and protection against subversion. The third organization, the People's Armed Police, is a paramilitary component

of the armed forces that serves as the primary force responsible for internal security and domestic stability. Finally, the PLA performs a domestic security role in addition to its national defense mission.²¹

Threat Operations

An unclassified 2019 Department of Defense (DOD) report to Congress describes several possible courses of action that China could follow in a confrontation with Taiwan. These include a measured approach that would signal Beijing's readiness to use force or to implement punitive actions against Taiwan. Alternatively, a more comprehensive campaign by the PLA could be carried out with the goal of compelling Taipei to capitulate to unification or at least to enter into unification dialogue. China would take action to deter or delay U.S. intervention and would seek a swift victory in a limited war of short duration.

The PLA might initiate hostilities by implementing an air and maritime blockade, hoping to force Taiwan's capitulation by cutting off vital imports to the island. The blockade could be executed simultaneously with the seizure of Taiwan's offshore islands and large-scale missile strikes aimed at destroying air defense systems and radar sites, rendering airfield runways unusable and destroying other key military targets such as communications facilities and space assets to degrade Taiwan's defenses, isolate or neutralize its leadership, and demoralize its population. Blockade operations might also be accompanied by electronic warfare and information operations. PLA SOF could infiltrate Taiwan to conduct reconnaissance or to attack key infrastructure and command and control targets.²²

Another possibility is that Beijing would initiate cyberattacks against the island at the commencement of hostilities to gain information dominance and slow the mobilization and deployment of adversary forces. Denial-of-service attacks could result in an inability of the Taipei government and media to inform the international community and its own citizens of military aggression against the island. Russia's cyberattack against Estonia in 2007, for example, resulted in a cyber blockade of the Baltic republic, severing the country's international

cyber connectivity—for all practical purposes taking the country offline. In the case of Russia’s aggression against Georgia in 2008, cyberattacks “essentially silenced the government during the first few days of a military invasion and deprived it of normal means of mass communication.”²³ Public services were also affected, including the government-directed halt to all electronic banking services.

Finally, absent any sign of capitulation by the Taipei government, China could conduct a joint invasion of the island commencing with amphibious landings (probably at areas on Taiwan’s western coast) and buildup of a beachhead and breakout for offensive ground and air operations to occupy key areas or the entire island. The DOD report includes a brief assessment of any possible amphibious assault:

Large-scale amphibious invasion is one of the most complicated and difficult military operations. Success depends upon air and maritime superiority, the rapid buildup and sustainment of supplies onshore, and uninterrupted support. An attempt to invade Taiwan would likely strain China’s armed forces and invite international intervention. These stresses, combined with China’s combat force attrition and the complexity of urban warfare and counterinsurgency, even assuming a successful landing and breakout, make an amphibious invasion of Taiwan a significant political and military risk.²⁴

Although China remains vastly superior militarily to Taiwan, the PLA’s ability to execute an amphibious invasion of the island anytime soon is questionable.²⁵ United States Naval War College Professor Andrew Erickson judges that the PLAN is unprepared to support an invasion of Taiwan. Another scholar has assessed that PLA ground forces are equally unready, citing the need for a professional, noncommissioned officer corps and better training for leaders.²⁶ An even more uncharitable view of overall PLA capability comes from a member of the faculty of the United States Army Command and General Staff College:

China has not fought a war in over 40 years (since the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979), and in the 140 years before that, beginning with the first Opium War in 1839, it has won few battles and lost almost every conflict it fought against foreign adversaries. That is hardly the history of an invincible foe—its weaknesses are as important as its strengths.²⁷

Even the 1979 conflict with Vietnam, according to a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report, exposed several shortcomings in PLA performance. Although weaponry issues may have been improved in recent years, operations in 1979 highlighted serious weaknesses in operational planning, tactics, logistics, and C2. This lack of combat experience in the current force, according to Lieutenant General Robert P. Ashley, Jr., former director of the DIA, “has led to a sense of insecurity within the PLA as it seeks to modernize into a great power military.”²⁸ An important shortcoming identified in the DIA report is China’s undemonstrated ability to sustain expeditionary military operations. The PLA’s lack of experience in this area makes assessment of its effectiveness difficult.

Likewise, how effective the PLA might be in a counterinsurgency (COIN) role beyond its borders is unknown. Prior to Xi’s presidency, limited civil resistance played an important role in providing the Chinese people a means of political participation. Although some small-scale protests still occur in mainland China, they are nearly always staged against local governments where citizens believe their rights have been violated or in response to an unpopular policy. Local authorities, rather than the central government, are seen as responsible for addressing such grievances. Local governments use the necessary repressive measures to inhibit escalation and avoid signaling to the central government their inability to maintain social stability. The central government becomes concerned when local governments are unsuccessful in repressing social unrest because further escalation could threaten regime legitimacy and perhaps even its survival.²⁹

Resistance in Taiwan, however, would present a whole new challenge to the PLA—active COIN operations of a kind that are difficult for even the most experienced armies. With regard to nonviolent civil resistance, there is some evidence that the Chinese government studies this form of resistance to aid in developing tactics for disrupting and defeating such movements.³⁰

TAIWAN'S DEFENSE

Taiwan's armed forces have an authorized strength of approximately 215,000 personnel, including 188,000 active-duty personnel. Taiwan's army includes a total ground force of around 140,000, compared to 408,000 in the PLA's Eastern and Southern Theaters. However, it has been estimated that China could allocate as many as 1 to 1.5 million active ground-force troops to an invasion of Taiwan. The total invasion force could number between 1.5 and 2 million troops. Taiwan could be capable of mobilizing at least 3.5 million troops—active duty and reserve—with a ground force of approximately 2.5 million.³¹ According to the DOD, Taiwan's military is committed to developing new concepts and capabilities for asymmetric warfare to offset the disparity in defense expenditures. Emphasis is being placed, for example, on “offensive and defensive information and electronic warfare, high-speed stealth vessels, shore-based mobile missiles, rapid mining and minesweeping, unmanned aerial systems, and critical infrastructure protection.”³²

Since 2010, the U.S., under the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act, has continued to provide security assistance with pledges of more than \$15 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. A sale of \$330 million in military equipment was announced in September 2018,³³ and in June 2019, the Taiwan Ministry of Defense announced a purchase of \$2.25 billion in arms from the United States.³⁴

Potential for Resistance—Terrain

The terrain of Taiwan is favorable for resistance activity, either of the urban or rural variety. Taiwan's population is slightly larger than that of the state of Florida, yet its populace occupies an island roughly 20 percent of the total area of the state the size of

the Florida panhandle. At the close of the 20th century, Taiwan's population density was the second highest in the world—ranking just behind Bangladesh—with 59 percent of the population concentrated in the four metropolitan areas of Taipei, Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Tainan.³⁵ This would suggest that any resistance movement in Taiwan might be predominantly urban based. However, the island's urban population is mostly concentrated along the northern and portions of the eastern coastal areas. The remainder of the western third of the island is composed of fertile plains, terraced flatlands, and rolling foothills, with mud flats along much of the coastline. Vast rice paddies occupy much of the flatland. The eastern two-thirds of the island is rugged, mountainous, densely forested terrain, ideally suited for rural guerrilla warfare. The dominant Chung-yang Shan Mountain Range runs some 170 miles north to south along the length of the island. In fact, 32 percent of Taiwan's land area consists of steep mountainous terrain over 1,000 meters in elevation. Around 240 mountain peaks exceed 3,000 meters. Steep cliffs form most of the eastern coastline.³⁶ See Figure 5.1.

With the combined factors of tidal mud flats obstructing access to flatlands along much of the western coast, mountainous terrain dropping off precipitously to the shoreline along the eastern coast, and the notoriously rough waters of the strait, Taiwan is far from an ideal target for an amphibious invasion. The limited number of potential landing areas can be defended with adequate preparation. This



Figure 5.1. Taiwan's major urban cities. Source: U.S. Department of State, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

could entail the mining of sea approaches, the placement of obstacles, and the preregistration of artillery and air strike targets. Few beach areas could accommodate landing forces of significant size, although at least one area on the east coast could be suitable for significant landings and further expansion of a beachhead.³⁷ Inland, operational maneuver area for mechanized forces would be limited. Rice paddies become muddy quagmires for tanks, and rugged forested areas can limit visibility to only a few meters. Armor operating in rice-growing areas would be mostly confined to roads and farm trails, rendering it particularly vulnerable to anti-armor weapons, especially during the wet summers.

In Taiwan, the greatest challenge facing organized resistance from a terrain perspective is the lack of a secure cross-border external safe haven or sanctuary area. In other parts of the world, such areas—critical for providing a secure politico-military base—have historically been located in neighboring countries or in areas largely inaccessible to adversary forces. Clearly, this presents a dilemma for an island-state. Sanctuaries provide secure areas for rebuilding and reorganizing resistance forces safely away from interference by government or occupation forces and thereby facilitating C2, intelligence, planning, logistical support, and financial resource functions. Arms acquisition, storage, and distribution can be accomplished in such areas. A sanctuary might even provide a limited industrial base for the manufacture of small arms, ammunition, or explosive devices. It can be especially important as a location for training areas, ranges, and related facilities. Because Taiwan is an island, space to accommodate all these functions would need to be located within territory not easily accessible nor capable of being secured—a need that could perhaps be filled by a network of underground shelters and munitions caches.

Most of the rugged and heavily forested island, however, is ideally suited for guerrilla operations aimed at disrupting occupation force transportation and logistical activities, as well as providing protective cover against surprise ground or air attack. See Figures 5.2 and 5.3.



Figure 5.2 Satellite image showing Taiwan's rugged terrain. Source: NASA Earth



Figure 5.3. Nanhu Mountain in Taiwan's Heping District shows the country's mountainous and forested terrain. Source: Adobe Stock

Potential for Resistance—the Population

Probably the most important factor in determining resistance potential is the population itself. Resistance can only be effectively conducted by a population of strong character—one that is resilient in the face of occupation, possessed of a strong spirit of opposition, and willing to accept risk to participate. People who have lived under democracy, who have grown accustomed to the rule of law, respect for human rights, and the exercise of self-determination—such as citizens of Taiwan—have little difficulty in pushing back against tyranny and an authoritarian government that puts great stock in limitations of freedom and in severe population control measures. They know too well that there is an alternative to a life of fear, oppression, and injustice and are more apt to possess the fortitude required of a populace to withstand the ordeals of repression and reprisal. Taiwan has a limited but important historical experience in both armed insurgency and nonviolent civil resistance.

Historical Experience

At the time of the 1949 communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC Nationalist Government and its followers fled to Taiwan,

where the *Kuomintang* (KMT) party ruled under martial law as a one-party authoritarian government from 1949 to 1987. Early insurgent political dissent, called the Taiwan Independence Movement, remained predominantly nonviolent until around 1970. At that time, a violent splinter faction of the movement, known as the World United Formosans for Independence (WUFI), emerged. The WUFI, which considered itself an anti-KMT resistance movement, organized DA teams known as *commando squads* that attacked KMT leaders and interests worldwide, including assassination attempts in the United States. A series of bombings targeted the American presence in Taiwan. The United States Information Service building in Tainan was bombed in 1970, and in February 1971, a bomb exploded at the Bank of America in Taipei, resulting in several casualties. Bombings of the electric infrastructure in January 1976 knocked out power in a large part of southern Taiwan, and several KMT political leaders were targeted with letter bombs. WUFI then began fomenting civil unrest, including the violent “Chungli Riot” in response to alleged election fraud in November 1977. All these actions resulted in a harsh security crackdown that was underway when the U.S. withdrew its recognition of the Taipei government in December 1978. The emboldened resistance then stepped up its activities, culminating in a large riot in Kaohsiung on 10 December 1979, which resulted in many arrests and convictions under the provisions of martial law. WUFI responded by stepping up bombing attacks against KMT leaders and their families in the United States. In July 1980, a Chinese-American professor from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pennsylvania believed to have Taiwan Independence Movement connections was found dead while visiting the National Taiwan University campus. Any form of internal dissent in Taiwan, including any discussion of Taiwan independence, was viewed by the KMT as helpful to the communists and therefore subversive to Taipei.³⁸

In the early 1980s, small-scale protests became the norm over armed insurgency. In any event, large gatherings were illegal until the lifting of martial law. John Foran has explained how the people of Taiwan gained significant democratic reform in the late 1980s as a corollary to

sustained economic growth, thus eliminating any need or motivation for large-scale revolution or further protest.³⁹ In 1990, a student protest movement called the Wild Lily Movement sought political reform and occupied the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Square—since renamed Liberty Square—for a week in March of that year.⁴⁰

Then, beginning around 2000 in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, identity increasingly became a prominent cause in protest campaigns as Taiwanese and Hong Konger identity progressively displaced Chinese identity among the residents. Parallel civil resistance movements in the two areas featured protests against further cultural and political assimilation with mainland China, even though economic integration was becoming an accomplished fact. This trend continues today and is only growing stronger.⁴¹ In the first 10 years of the 21st century, two more student protest movements appeared—the Conserve the Losheng Sanatorium movement in 2004 and the Wild Strawberries Movement (WSM) in 2008. The WSM was the first pro-democracy student movement to challenge Chinese authority and was a precursor to the much more effective Sunflower Movement that would appear six years later.⁴²

Taiwan's most significant civil resistance experience was in response to concerns and anxieties resulting from trade agreements between China and Taiwan. With the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement by China and Taiwan on 29 June 2010, other follow-on agreements opened Taiwan to mainland direct investment, and Chinese firms from the mainland began arriving in Taiwan. While this development boded well for mainland firms seeking new business opportunities and markets, it was met with a mixture of enthusiasm and apprehension by the people of Taiwan. For several reasons, the arrangements presented Taipei with political and security concerns. As mainland firms' investment in the island grew, some feared that these enterprises might acquire Taiwanese companies. State-owned or privately owned Chinese companies could hire many Taiwanese locals, high technology could more easily be shared or otherwise acquired, confidential information could be passed, and extensive ties between mainlanders and Taiwanese politicians and lobbyists could develop.

The political opinions and thinking of Taiwanese citizens might easily be influenced by immigrants from the mainland.⁴³

In 2013, Taiwan's president, Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT, implemented policies aimed at improving and stabilizing relations with China with the goal of furthering economic ties with the mainland and possibly leading eventually to reunification. One initiative, the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, met with severe resistance from student protesters who viewed it as a step toward a Chinese takeover of Taiwan. The intent of the agreement was to open Taiwan's services sector to direct investment from mainland China, but protesters—in what came to be called the Sunflower Movement—criticized the way the agreement was hastily pushed through the Taiwanese legislature. In 2014, student protesters occupied the country's legislative chamber for 24 days and succeeded in bringing about the passage of new legislation that provided greater public awareness in matters involving relations with China. The Sunflower Movement, sometimes referred to as the Sunflower Student Movement (SSM), was formed from several youth groups, such as the Hei Dao Cing (The Black Island Nation Youth Front). Around 75 percent of the SSM's membership was under 30 years of age, the average being 22. And although the movement's student membership was limited, the crowds of supporting protesters often reached 30,000 and never numbered less than 2,000. On 30 March 2014, an estimated crowd of half a million people filled the streets.⁴⁴

At the same time that the Sunflower Movement blocked the legislative function in Taipei, a similar anti-China student protest movement was underway in Hong Kong where the Umbrella (or Occupy) Movement protested the increasing encroachment on all aspects of life and business in Hong Kong by mainland Chinese. Protesters blocked traffic to and from the airport and several other locations, shutting down all traffic on key arteries for over two months. Feeling marginalized in their own territory, some Hong Kongers even spoke out for independence. The importance of Hong Kong's unrest to the people of Taiwan was that it demonstrated the truth of life under China's One Country, Two Systems policy. Taiwan's Sunflower

Movement and Hong Kong's concurrent Umbrella Movement shared many characteristics, including a predominantly student constituency and large-scale participation. Both movements were triggered by pro-Chinese legislation, both were student led, and both revealed an unabashed defiance of Beijing and vastly increased pro-democracy sentiments among the citizenry. They were very much generational and values-based confrontations. "In both places," in the words of one analyst, "a young generation of politicians had come of age, as future leaders of political movements emerged."⁴⁵

Demographics and Disposition

In the years since President Xi took office in Beijing, there has been a notable and revealing decline in the percentage of Taiwan citizens who look favorably on reunification with mainland China. Taiwan Indicators Research conducted a survey in May 2016 that showed 66.4 percent of respondents opposing reunification and only 18.5 percent favoring it. Much more significant, however, is that 81 percent of respondents in the 20–29 age group opposed reunification, and 72 percent of the same group of young people supported independence.⁴⁶ According to one expert assessment, "The CCP leadership does not understand how proud and attached the people of Taiwan are to their democracy and way of life. If they were forced to choose, they could not be expected to accept unification under a Leninist regime. As such, a Chinese attempt to use implied force to require Taiwan to negotiate for unification will almost certainly be rebuffed."⁴⁷

As in Hong Kong, the population of Taiwan is clearly experiencing an identity crisis. Monica Kim, an assistant professor of history at New York University, writes that, "from a social-psychological perspective, nationalist sentiment is thought to stem from two main points: attachment and identity."⁴⁸ National identity is important in uniting and bonding members of a society as citizens of a country, and it plays a pivotal role in enabling the trust, interdependency, and mutual security aspects of resistance. In the words of one scholar, the term describes "a sense of belonging to a specific sovereign territory and a group of people with common life experience."⁴⁹ Francis Fukuyama

wrote in 2018 that national identity “not only enhances physical security, but also inspires good governance; facilitates economic development; fosters trust among citizens; engenders support for strong social safety nets; and ultimately makes possible liberal democracy itself.”⁵⁰ It is therefore interesting to examine how the citizens of Taiwan identify themselves.

In 1992, according to a poll of Taiwan residents conducted by the National Chengchi University in Taipei, 17.6 percent of respondents

In the years since President Xi took office in Beijing, there has been a notable and revealing decline in the percentage of Taiwan citizens who look favorably on reunification with mainland China.

viewed themselves as “Taiwanese only,” while 25.5 percent identified themselves as only Chinese. By 2018, the percentage considering themselves solely as Taiwanese had risen to 55.8 percent; only 3.5 percent of respondents that year saw themselves as only Chinese. As a measure of how strong these sentiments

are, a majority of respondents (63.4 percent) in the same poll also countenanced war if the PRC were to attack Taiwan.⁵¹ More recent Pew Research data reveals that 66 percent of residents now identify as Taiwanese only, while 28 percent consider themselves to be Taiwanese and Chinese. This data also indicated that 68 percent of the population of Taiwan has a favorable view of the U.S. as compared to a 35 percent favorable view of China, and 79 percent of respondents favored closer political ties with the United States.⁵²

Another intriguing finding was revealed in a separate study where the interaction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese tourists had “not led to closer social and cultural integration but instead strengthened the feeling of a separate identity by Taiwanese.”⁵³ According to that same study, the young people of Taiwan increasingly embrace a pro-independence stand and a distinct Taiwanese identity.⁵⁴ Polling in Taiwan since 2008, according to another source, has indicated a consistent trend among citizens in

their 20s to embrace Taiwanese identity as compared to citizens in their 30s and 40s.⁵⁵ Those in their 20s represent 13.10 percent of the population as of 2020; citizens in their 40s and 50s (combined) represent 30.8 of the population.⁵⁶ Writing in 2017, Chinese and Asian comparative politics scholar Lowell Dittmer declared that “Taiwanese do share a sense of collective identity that is widely perceived there as distinct, which they seek to preserve and profess to be willing to fight for.”⁵⁷ Aside from survey results that reveal a growing preference for independence over reunification, however, Dittmer writes that those sentiments “are not strongly held: only a small percentage would still pursue independence in the face of a credible threat of force.”⁵⁸ This last statement, if true, is significant. An important aspect of assessing resistance potential—judging whether the people will fight for what they want—can only be accomplished by humans on the ground.

Recent election results offer an equally interesting trend. President Tsai Ing-wen of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) appears to have been right when, after defeating the KMT candidate in the January 2016 election, she proclaimed “the arrival of an era of new politics in Taiwan.”⁵⁹ President Tsai repeated with a resounding victory in the January 2020 election, viewed by many as a strong rebuke of the CCP. Writing in the *Asia-Pacific Review* in 2017, Andrew T. H. Tan assessed that the January 2016 DPP election victory reflected “growing pro-independence sentiments amongst a younger generation of Taiwanese” and concluded that this has impeded the cause of reunification, setting Taiwan “on a collision course with China, which is increasingly impatient for reunification to occur.”⁶⁰ Another result of the growing anti-China sentiment has been the addition of a new political party, the populist New Power Party, which won five seats in the Taiwan legislature in the 2016 elections.⁶¹

While poll and election results indicate that a growing number of young people in Taiwan favor independence, what is not clear is what percentage of them would be willing to fight for that independence—or at least participate in possibly high-risk nonviolent civil resistance activities. A Reuters article in late 2018 described the challenge facing the Taiwan Army’s recruiters, where few young people were showing

interest in serving despite offers of state-funded college degrees, three and a half months of annual leave, and a savings contribution each year equal to \$10,200. Many students listening to a recruiting pitch, according to the article, expressed scant confidence in Taiwan's ability to defend itself against Chinese aggression and viewed military service as a "waste of time."⁶² DOD officials, meanwhile, have expressed concern that the cost of Taiwan's new all-volunteer force—nearly 47 percent of the island nation's defense budget—diverts badly needed funds from acquisition and readiness needs.⁶³

Mobilization

Given sufficient incitement, though, the population of Taiwan, particularly the younger generation, might be capable of motivating citizens to mobilize in force, at least for the purpose of nonviolent civil resistance. When the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement triggered the student-led Sunflower Movement in 2014, leading to a three-week occupation of Taiwan's legislature, Dittmer noted that the students were "surprisingly successful in mobilizing mass support, especially among the young people ironically most likely to seek jobs on the mainland."⁶⁴

It remains to be seen how effective mobilization efforts would be in the face of an armed threat. More of Taiwan's population, which is 78.9 percent urban, could be encouraged to mobilize for resistance through a concerted information operations campaign aimed at educating the citizenship on what they stand to lose under reunification. Taiwan's current standard of living is much higher than that on the mainland. The people of China live under the most sophisticated population control system ever devised by man, and it continues to be enhanced with increasingly effective big data and AI technologies. In 2015, Freedom House ranked China last among 65 countries around the world in internet freedom, ranking them below Iran, Cuba, and Myanmar. In addition to implementing strict laws aimed at criminalizing political dissent, China has blocked its citizens' access to websites such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter, not to mention American-based news sources such as *Time* magazine and *The New York Times*.⁶⁵

Leadership

Assuming that a resistance force on Taiwan would, at least until a possible fall of the government, be under military control, it stands to reason that senior resistance leaders could be appointed in advance by the military. Senior resistance leaders could come from the army's reserve forces and would likely be involved in planning for the defense of Taiwan. Junior resistance leaders could be found in the reserve force or could even be drawn from discharged citizens who have had some military training during conscription service prior to the country's move to an all-volunteer army. The overall resistance leader would be responsible for all operations and activities of all components of the resistance. Moreover, he or she would be responsible for the training and preparation of personnel in all components.

If occupation forces were withdrawn at some point, resistance leaders would work with shadow government or government-in-exile leaders to reestablish a postwar society. In the meantime, Taiwan's current political leader, President Tsai, does not appear to be intimidated by Beijing. She has been described by one scholar as "a careful but uncompromising advocate of the independence cause."⁶⁶ Following her decisive victory in the January 2020 presidential election—securing a record 8.2 million votes, 1.3 million more than she won in her 2016 victory—Tsai expressed her hope that "Beijing authorities understand that democratic Taiwan, and our democratically elected government, will not concede to threats and intimidation."⁶⁷

POTENTIAL FOR RESISTANCE—VULNERABLE OPPONENT

As noted earlier, Mark Grdovic identified the existence of some vulnerability or weakness of the government or occupying power in its control over the territory or population as one prerequisite for successful resistance. Grdovic refers here to those organizational mechanisms and practices by which a regime or occupying power remains in power, unthreatened by the subjugated population. In the case of the PLA in a COIN role, the lack of any substantial recent

experience in such operations, especially beyond the borders of mainland China, can be viewed as a vulnerability.

Perhaps more important as a vulnerability, however, is China's moral weakness. The wave of anti-communist revolution that swept through Eastern Europe in 1989 did not extend to China. Months before those communist governments fell, students staged large-scale protests in Beijing beginning on 15 April 1989, gathering regularly in the city's Tiananmen Square to demand democratic reforms. While authorities initially viewed the protests as manageable, this changed as workers joined the movement, causing the demonstrations to rapidly expand in Beijing and to spread to other cities. When the government began to see an existential threat to the party and the regime, military forces were committed to ruthlessly crushing the rebellion, culminating in a brutal massacre on 4 June 1989. Although accurate casualty figures remain unknown, estimates of the number of civilians killed have ranged from the hundreds to the thousands.

By comparison, on the same day that protesters were slaughtered at Tiananmen Square, the communists in Poland were decisively defeated in parliamentary elections by Solidarity candidates. A noncommunist government, led by Solidarity, took full power on 24 August 1989. The communist government in Hungary fell on 7 October, and East Germany's communist leader stepped down 11 days later. Freedom came to Bulgaria on 9 November and to Czechoslovakia on 10 December. Romania's communist leader was gone by Christmas Day 1989.

The CCP clearly demonstrated its ability and willingness to spill Chinese blood to protect the regime during the Tiananmen tragedy. If there was a lesson to be learned by the CCP, it was that an extravagant level of violence can be effective in crushing civil disturbance, although at the cost of worldwide censure. Evidence also suggests that a steep price was paid in morale and discipline problems stemming from the refusal of some troops to take part in the killing of civilians.⁶⁸ Some leaders of units in the Beijing area reportedly refused to comply with orders to deploy their troops against the protesters, and the PLA's

image suffered considerable damage both within China and around the world.⁶⁹ Such harsh government suppression of public dissent today would likely result in international outrage, punishing sanctions, and turmoil in domestic and global economies.

More recently, China has entered a new era of repression under President Xi. In the spring of 2013, the CCP issued a decree known simply as “Document No. 9,” in which party officials were warned of several perils facing the party. All were linked to Western-based ideas of democracy and included such “dangerous” concepts as constitutional democracy, human dignity and civil rights, freedom of speech, a free press and Western news views and practices, and total marketization of the economy. Party officials were warned to guard against such “mistaken thinking.”⁷⁰ Measures resulting from directives such as Document No. 9 are becoming well-known.

China’s increasingly Orwellian population control measures at home, including a vast network of AI-enabled cameras and sensors, severe internet restrictions, social credit systems empowered by big data analysis, startling restrictions on free speech and assembly, religious persecution, the mass internment and abuse of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang Province, and several other limitations on freedoms and human rights, already casts the regime in a negative light around the world. Any competent information operations campaign in the event of a PLA occupation of Taiwan would have little difficulty in generating widespread international umbrage.

National Resistance

The concept of a government-sponsored national resistance capability integrated into the overall national defense strategy is not a new one. Nineteenth-century Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz wrote extensively on “arming the people” or “arming the nation” (depending on the translation) as a means of augmenting a standing army with a capable partisan force. He also wrote that an integrated military and civilian defense of the homeland should be carefully planned. “If one does not wish to chase an illusion,” wrote von Clausewitz, “one must conceive of people’s war in combination

with war waged by a standing army and both united through an all-encompassing plan.”⁷¹ Some small European countries facing threats similar to Taiwan’s have already incorporated national resistance and civil preparedness as a central pillar of their national defense program. Taiwan’s current plight, if fact, is similar in many respects to that of the United Kingdom in the early days of the Second World War.

With the fall of France in May and June 1940, British leaders realized that the islands of the United Kingdom would be next in line for an invasion by Nazi Germany. In preparation for such a contingency, intelligence and military organizations collaborated to develop a formal and highly organized stay-behind resistance capability, known as Auxiliary Units, designed to function as an auxiliary to the regular armed forces. It was to be under military control and would operate under the cover of the Home Guard, a volunteer home-defense organization. Some 3,500 volunteers were recruited, trained, and organized into operational patrols. The Royal Engineers built between 400 and 500 concealed operational bases, often equipped with hidden entrances, escape tunnels, and caches of weapons, ammunition, explosives, medical items, and rations. While the trained recruits served as a cadre for further expansion, the government also sanctioned resistance activities by the whole population, issuing a document titled “Official Instructions to Civilians” on 17 June 1940 with widespread publicity. The Auxiliary Units project was hailed as a triumph in improvisation.⁷²

During the Cold War, the government of Switzerland developed a total defense policy in support of its Armed Neutrality strategy, incorporating some of the same features of the Auxiliary Units. Whereas the Auxiliary Units were a limited, selectively recruited force, the Swiss program called for total mobilization—a whole-of-society doctrine. The entire population was eligible for call-up to take part in an integrated defense that entailed both conventional force operations and clandestine resistance. Key elements of the Swiss program were psychological deterrence, self-destruction of transportation and communications infrastructure, clandestine organization, preparation for guerrilla warfare, psychological and information operations, underground and auxiliary activities, and nonviolent resistance. Plans

included the establishment of a government-in-exile in Ireland. In 1962, at a time when Switzerland's population stood at 5.5 million, plans called for a Total Defense force of some 625,000 personnel.⁷³

Today, the Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are taking similar steps to deter aggression from Russia by establishing a Total Defense capability. As the British government did in 1940, the government of Lithuania has issued a guide to its citizens on how they can contribute to resistance when called on to do so. Lithuania's Total Defense concept is implanted in the country's Constitution as well as its National Security Strategy and Military Strategy.⁷⁴

Taiwan's national defense strategy, in fact, already calls for mobilizing the entire population to support operations to counter an invasion attempt. Reportedly, Taipei has the ability to mobilize as many as 2.5 million men and women, including civil defense workers, within a few days—and intelligence indicators of a planned invasion attempt could give them weeks to prepare. The island's emergency mobilization system is tested periodically.⁷⁵ Much of this mobilized national defense force, under military leadership, could possibly transition rapidly into a pure resistance role in the event of occupation.

Role of the Resistance

Resistance forces, under military control, can serve as an auxiliary to main combat forces—a force multiplier capable of aiding in impeding the progress of invading forces and carrying out operations in rugged or nearly inaccessible terrain, thus freeing up conventional forces for duty elsewhere. In certain terrain, they can operate in ways to channel enemy forces into engagement zones for regular air and ground forces. An important function of a government-sponsored resistance force is to serve as a country's vestige sovereign entity in the event of occupation, ideally under the direction of a government-in-exile established in a friendly country. Eventually, however, they will require external support to survive and continue operations.

Specific functions of a clandestine underground could include the establishment and operation of intelligence and COIN networks, propaganda and news preparation and dissemination, operation

of a subversive radio broadcasting system, the establishment and supervision of logistical support networks, the generation and management of funds, the establishment of clandestine medical facilities, the procurement and distribution of arms and munitions, the preparation of false identification documents, and possibly even the operation of an industrial base for the fabrication of weapons and munitions. The underground could also conduct sabotage attacks and penetrate government or occupation power offices for subversive purposes. It would also be responsible for organizing nonviolent civil resistance activities such as mass demonstrations to generate international support and undermine occupation authority. Civil disobedience actions such as boycotts, strikes, and work slowdowns could be organized to cripple economic activity that would benefit the PRC.

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As the overt military component of the resistance, the guerrilla force could engage PLA forces in combat operations. Although operating at a disadvantage in terms of equipment, training, and firepower, guerrillas would have several advantages, such as an intimate knowledge of the terrain and population. A critical advantage for the guerrilla force is initiative—the ability to strike the enemy at a place where he is weakest and at a time when the guerrillas are temporarily advantaged. Special guerrilla teams could be trained in the use of shoulder-fired, anti-aircraft missiles that are in the current inventory of the Taiwanese army. Active and reserve forces could be responsible for operating large anti-aircraft missile systems. An auxiliary component of the resistance would be a force of part-time operatives who could provide a wide array of support to the underground and guerrilla components. This might include intelligence collection and early warning, logistical support, transportation, labor, courier or messenger communications, media distribution, recruitment and vetting, and the operation of safe houses.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

Any measures Taiwan could take to reduce its strategic vulnerabilities would serve to protect its autonomy. Taipei, of course, cannot be expected to match Beijing in defense spending, but it could improve on how it spends its defense dollars—concentrating its spending on technologies that improve its ability to engage the PLA asymmetrically rather than trying to match it in high-cost defense systems. Of critical importance is Taiwan’s ability to strengthen the defense of its C2 infrastructure to survive the initial assault of missile strikes and to maintain a communication link to the outside world. Taiwan could also seek ways to reduce its economic dependence on China, although this will be difficult as long as Taiwan remains politically isolated. China is likely to remain Taiwan’s largest economic partner, and China hopes to use economic trade and investment as powerful tools in pursuing unification.⁷⁷ As Dittmer observes, “Taiwan is in an unusual position in that its number one threat to national security is also its leading trade partner and investment recipient.”⁷⁸ To be sure, Taiwan is the junior member of that trade partnership and has more to lose than does China.

In the final assessment, the truly critical battlespace in the China-Taiwan standoff is in the minds of the people of Taiwan, where defeatism may pose the greatest danger. What is needed is a concerted effort on the part of the Taipei government to educate its citizens on the effective defense that could result from an integrated military-civilian effort, with a strong military (active and reserve) backed by a highly motivated, prepared, and capable resistance force. The odds against Taiwan are likely not nearly as bad as many believe. Any prevailing pessimistic sentiment could be turned around with a professionally developed public information program along the lines of the *Why We Fight* series of films released by the U.S. Government during the early period of World War II.

Such a resilient and flexible integrated military-civilian defense could be the greatest deterrent to an invasion by China. Beijing must be made to realize the high risks and potential costs associated with such aggression. Anything short of swift and total success would be a

national embarrassment and quite possibly a threat to the survival of the Beijing regime.

Moreover, by following an assertive and threatening foreign policy, China undermines its efforts to be a regional and global leader. As Andrew Tan has written, a counterproductive policy of intimidation could backfire, leading to a possible anti-China alliance among other Asian states. Tan points out that a more sophisticated and cooperative foreign policy would go far in helping China secure the respect of its neighbors and its role as a legitimate regional leader. With regard to reunification, Tan recommends Beijing follow a more patient, long-term approach. “True reunification,” he writes, “would only occur if the Taiwanese willingly accepted it.”⁷⁹ For the time being, a continuance of the *status quo* would appear to best serve all parties concerned.

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Chapter 6: China's Counterinsurgency Strategy and Tactics—Using the Distant and Recent Past to Project the Future

Dr. Stephen G. Craft

INTRODUCTION

The current tensions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and anti-PRC and pro-democracy forces in both Hong Kong and the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan raise concerns that the PRC will use force to abolish the One Country, Two Systems formula that allowed communism and democracy to co-exist in Hong Kong. The Basic Law, the constitution for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) that promised that Hong Kong could practice capitalism and democracy for 50 years, is under siege from the PRC's paramilitary response to protests and passage of new security laws.¹ Meanwhile, the so-called "1992 Consensus," reached by PRC and ROC representatives but repudiated by ROC President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, is interpreted by the PRC as meaning "one China and two systems."² Although President Xi has spoken of peaceful reunification, the PRC has not ruled out using force to prevent Taiwanese separatism and independence.³ During the COVID-19 pandemic, tensions increased over China's efforts to block Taiwan from joining the international community in fighting the virus and participating in meetings of the World Health Organization, leading to anger on both sides of the Taiwan Strait including PRC citizens demanding an invasion of Taiwan.⁴ In March and April 2020, the PRC held military exercises near Taiwan, and the PRC announced it intended to carry out a landing exercise in the South China Sea not far from both Hong Kong and Taiwan in August 2020 that would involve two aircraft carriers.⁵

Although there has been debate over whether the ROC's military has established a viable deterrence,⁶ there has been little discussion of how the PRC would engage in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Taiwan and other islands administered by the ROC. The PRC does not just have to contend with minorities within its borders and pro-democracy forces in territory it claims are an "inalienable" part of China. For years, China has promoted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or New Silk Road, which involves building highways, fast railroads, airports, ports, pipelines, power transmission lines, and fiber optic cables throughout Eurasia to promote economic development and ease of resource transportation. These and similar initiatives in other countries require security. What would the PRC do if an insurgency threatened these initiatives? Moreover, does the PRC have a COIN doctrine? And if so, could it be exported to client-states? There are no easy answers to these questions because there has been no publication or leaks of official PRC COIN doctrine and policy whether in general or specific to the ROC.

One way to anticipate how the PRC would respond to an insurgency is to study the recent and distant past. Not only has the PRC dealt with counterrevolutionaries and engaged in "anti-bandit" operations, but it has waged COIN operations against minorities who were described as rebels, insurgents, separatists, and "splittists." Since 9/11, it has tended to refer to minority separatists and, more recently, pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong as terrorists. The PRC utilized various methods, tactics, and policies to fight counterrevolutionaries inside China's borders after 1949, wage COIN in Tibet, engage in counterseparatism and counterterrorism (CT) against Sunni Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang, and quell pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. The common themes that emerge are:

- reliance on conventional military operations and occupation
- a heavy security presence, surveillance, and monitoring using informants and technology
- an emphasis on reform, reeducation, and de-radicalization
- the promotion of economic reform and development to eliminate poverty and dissent

- the use of Han Chinese and Chinese Muslim (*hui*) migration to be a pro-PRC presence
- cultural assimilation in which minorities become sinicized
- the use of propaganda, censorship, and information isolation to control information flowing into and out of the PRC
- the use of diplomacy and treaties with its neighbors to prevent those deemed separatists or terrorists from using their soil to harbor, train, and fund insurgents

Essentially, should the PRC need to launch COIN operations within the ROC, it can choose from a range of non-military and military options that include using limited force or imposing a surveillance and police-state environment with brutal and deadly force. The measures that it currently utilizes to control Tibet and Xinjiang, and is gradually applying to Hong Kong, will most certainly be applied to ROC citizens. Unless PRC and ROC leadership and policies change, the experiences of Tibetans and Uighurs do not offer potential Hong Kong and ROC insurgents much room for maneuver.

COUNTERINSURGENCY AND COUNTERTERRORISM IN TIBET AND XINJIANG

Since 1949, the PRC has worked to assert control over Tibet and a northwest region that Chinese have long referred to as Xinjiang. For hundreds of years, various foreign (e.g., the Mongols and the Manchus) and Chinese dynasties and governments claimed Tibet as sovereign Chinese territory. Likewise, the Chinese argue that Xinjiang and the various minorities within have been influenced by Chinese civilization for thousands of years. The Qing dynasty (1644–1912) made it a province in 1884; after the Revolution of 1912, the Chinese often exerted little authority over Tibet and Xinjiang. There were rebellions in northern and southern Xinjiang that involved Uighurs, and twice an Eastern Turkestan Republic briefly came to power, including in Urumqi from 1944–1949.⁷ In 1953, the PRC announced that 55 minorities would be officially recognized by the state, including Tibetans and Uighurs. In 1955, the PRC established the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, which encompassed 1.6 million kilometers of territory divided into

regions, prefectures, and counties that gave the seven nationalities within varying levels of autonomy.⁸ Over the last 70 years, Beijing has oscillated between pursuing a soft or liberal strategy and a hardline strategy toward both Tibet and Xinjiang to prevent and eliminate revolutionaries, separatists, and terrorists. The policies, tactics, and strategies utilized in both cases were similar and can be broken down into various themes that could form a COIN doctrine.

The Role of Conventional Forces in Occupation and Counterinsurgency

The PLA has played a critical role in pacifying Tibet. It peacefully occupied Tibet in October 1951 after defeating Tibetan forces. Starting in 1956, it fought an insurgency supported by the CIA and, in 1959, crushed a rebellion in Lhasa before launching a Tibetan COIN (*xizang pingpan*) in a campaign called Fight and

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Reform Simultaneously to win over and mobilize the masses. While the Chinese divided Tibet into eight defense zones and systematically cleared each one and implemented reforms, the PLA fought and defeated the insurgency by 1962. Three years later, the PRC created the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).⁹ In 1969, the PLA put down what the CCP later described internally as a “counterrevolutionary killing

incident.”¹⁰ Although the CIA cut funding to the Tibetan insurgents in 1970, the insurgents continued to engage the PLA until 1974.¹¹

A similar process of PRC power extension played out in Xinjiang. In November 1949, 90,000 PLA forces entered the province and spent the next six months engaging in “peaceful liberation.” Yet, it fought what it called “bandits” in southern Xinjiang for the next five years. The PRC proceeded with caution because it confronted the

problem of dealing with a Muslim, non-Chinese majority. The Uighurs made up three-fourths of the 4 million people living in Xinjiang. Like the Qing dynasty, which engaged in military colonization, the PRC established the Xinjiang Production Construction Corps (*Xinjiang shengcan jianshe bingtuan*) in 1954, which settled and employed over 100,000 demobilized soldiers in order to create a permanent Han population and promote economic development.¹² Xinjiang has the longest land border of any Chinese province and adjoined the former Soviet Union. Today, it adjoins eight foreign countries, also more than any other province. In April 1996, demonstrations by 50,000 Uighurs and Kazaks that led to armed battles and demands for Uighur independence were put down after two PLA divisions were moved there by air and rail.¹³ A year later, the PRC launched a Strike Hard (*yanda*) campaign that called for building a “wall of steel” to, in part, control separatists.¹⁴ In 2016, the PRC created a Western Defense Command, which also encompasses Tibet and Xinjiang, with both under direct PLA command. PLA forces are, in part, trained for antiterrorism stability maintenance.¹⁵ All of this suggests that conventional forces will be a major component of any PRC COIN doctrine.

Securitization and Surveillance

To maintain control over both Tibet and Xinjiang, the PRC also relies on the People’s Armed Police (PAP). As of 2018, both the PLA and the PAP are ultimately commanded by Xi Jinping. The PAP is paramilitary in nature, with one group working under the PLA and another under the Ministry of Public Security. After the PAP mismanaged its responses to Tibetan riots in the late 1980s and the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, the PRC expanded the size of the PAP to 1.1 million and enhanced it by adding PLA divisions. In 2009, it consisted of eight corps, with the largest devoted to internal security, including putting down large-scale protests, and another devoted to border defense. In 2002, the PAP added an elite “Snow-Wolf” CT unit, now known as the Snow Leopard Commando Unit.¹⁶ In both Tibet and Xinjiang, the PLA and the PAP enforce the grid-style social

management system (*wanggehua shehuiguanli*) in urban areas and some rural townships, which consists of thousands of street-corner police stations, “red-armband” civilian patrols, and gated communities. The Household Registration system (*hukou*) is used to control mobility. Military checkpoints restrict movement in and out of both cities by Han Chinese, tourists, and the minorities. To prevent Tibetan self-immolations, the police have carried out arbitrary arrests and imprisoned family members and abettors. Cadres collect information on every household and engage in political reeducation campaigns to forestall protests and separatist activities.¹⁷

As part of its strategy of achieving “social stability and enduring peace” in Xinjiang, the PRC has created a layered system of surveillance using countless checkpoints, thousands of closed-circuit cameras, and facial recognition software at checkpoints, hospitals, gas stations, university campuses, and workplaces. The monitoring of Uighurs has included confiscation of passports, use of iris-recognition software, and collection of biometric data. As with Tibet, the human element also involves cadres carrying out house-to-house sweeps in rural areas looking for any evidence of someone wearing a long beard, abstaining from alcohol, or anything either showing a “symptom of extremism” or presenting a threat to stability such as knives or chemicals.¹⁸

Reform and Development

The PRC has long viewed reform, modernization, and development as positive change to win friends and support while giving it a firmer hold over territory. Even though economic and social reforms sparked the Tibetan insurgency of the 1950s¹⁹ and Tibetan riots in the late 1980s,²⁰ as well as protests and riots by Uighurs in the 1990s, the PRC viewed poverty and underdevelopment as a partial root cause of separatism and ultimately terrorism.²¹ The PRC has persisted in its faith that development contributes to ending ethnic conflict and terrorism. In reaction to anti-Chinese riots in Lhasa in 1987 and 1989, the PRC, in addition to imposing martial law, pursued increased marketization and infrastructure construction. In 1994, it created the Aid-Tibet program in which cadres carried out development

projects in Tibetan cities and villages, and the PRC promoted non-Tibetan entrepreneurialism, which it deemed beneficial to Tibetans. In 1993, the PRC considered establishing a “New Silk Road,” a reference to the original Silk Road that linked Europe with Asia. Xinjiang would once again become the hub linking the economies of Central Asia and China and ultimately be central to the BRI. In 2000, the PRC implemented an Open Up the West or Great Western Development (*xibu de kaifa*) campaign in both Tibet and Xinjiang. For Tibet, it meant more urban expansion and development as well as construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway in 2006. For Xinjiang, it meant new roads, bridges, and oil and gas pipelines to make the BRI possible. In both cases, the PRC overtly intended to achieve ethnic assimilation and more control over both regions in what some call Chinese “internal colonialism.” Tibetans and Uighurs who question the benefits of development are viewed as “splittists.”²² Although these projects only enhanced Tibetan and Uighur discontent and led to riots in Lhasa in 2008 and Urumqi in 2009 as well as Uighur terrorist acts, the PRC did not abandon the soft policies of economic reform and development. But since 2014, it has concluded that soft policies must coincide with hardline security policies. This approach became known as the “Two Hands”: a firm hand to fight terrorists and a firm hand to guide and educate the Uighurs.²³

Population Saturation

When Mao wrote *On Guerilla Warfare*, he compared the guerilla to the fish and people to the sea. The guerilla needed people to live. In Xinjiang, the Uighurs represented 75 percent of the entire population and Han Chinese only 6 percent. In Tibet, few Han resided and few Tibetans spoke Chinese.²⁴ If the PRC were to control these regions, it needed to change the sea (i.e., the demographics of these regions) by persuading and compelling more Han to live there. It was an idea borrowed from the Qing as it related to Xinjiang but never carried out to the scale seen in the 20th and 21st centuries.²⁵

In the case of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), the PRC has proven more successful in achieving Han Chinese

and Chinese Muslim migration. Between 1940 and 1982, the Han population in Xinjiang increased 2,500 percent while the Chinese Muslim population increased 520 percent. Although the Han tended to be segregated from indigenous people to reduce ethnic conflict, this migration undercut any Uighur claims to their own non-Han homeland.²⁶ During the Cold War, tensions with the Soviet Union led the PRC to resort to depopulating the border and a strip of territory of non-Han people and replacing them with Han farmers and Xinjiang Production Construction Corps forces, who built numerous state-farms that were defended by militia and other military forces. In the 1970s, the PRC offered various incentives to convince Han Chinese in eastern cities and provinces to migrate to Xinjiang, including helping them find a job, a home, and a wife. Twenty years later, Han Chinese voluntary migrated there to prosper economically. The 2010 PRC census revealed that the number of Han Chinese represented 39 percent of the population whereas the Uighurs numbered 10 million, or 46.4 percent of Xinjiang's total population.²⁷

As for Tibet, the Dalai Lama and Western scholars long claimed that millions of Han Chinese emigrated to Tibet, making Tibetans a minority. In October 1987, the Dalai Lama accused the PRC of engaging in "genocide" and demanded an end to what he called the "population transfer policy."²⁸ The PRC denied engaging in population transfer, but it viewed Han migration as beneficial to Tibet's development. Because of the 1980s riots, the PRC designed its development programs to attract Chinese investors and migrant workers who became a "floating population:" people permitted to travel without needing to transfer their household registration to work and return home months or years later. The Great Western Development campaign and the Qinghai-Tibet Railway increased Han and Hui migration. Between 1994 and 2009, the Aid-Tibet program also brought in over 3,700 cadres from 18 provinces. Han tour guides are paid high salaries and living expenses, even though they know little about Tibet or speak the language. Non-Tibetans have essentially monopolized areas of the Tibetan economy. Although an approximate 3 million Tibetans lived in the TAR in 2010, non-Han

people dominate cities like Lhasa.²⁹ In 2004, Melvyn Goldstein made an observation that remains true today: “The large numbers of non-Tibetans living and working in Tibet inextricably link Tibet closely to the rest of China and provide Beijing with a new and significant pro-China ‘constituency’ that increases its security there.”³⁰

Reeducation, Patriotic Education, and Cultural Assimilation

Another component to achieving control over people has been through reeducation and cultural assimilation. From 1949 on, counterrevolutionaries were sent to reeducation camps where they were forced to make confessions, engage in self-criticisms, undergo denunciations, attend discussion and study sessions where they learned the evils of feudalism, and were forced to engage in manual labor. All of this was part of the “thought reform” and “brain washing” of the 1950s and 1960s.³¹ Eventually, Tibetan Buddhism and Islam in Xinjiang came under attack, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), with Red Guards destroying Tibetan religious objects, temples, and monasteries, while the attack on Uighur culture saw incidences including burning the Qur’an and desecrating Islamic religious sites.³²

In the 1980s, the PRC pursued softer policies toward Tibetans and Uighurs, including promoting modernization; allowing the TAR to revitalize Tibetan language, culture, identity, and religion; allowing Muslims in Xinjiang to build mosques and observe religious holidays; and allowing minorities to write histories of their people.³³ The Tibetan riots and Uighur protests of the late 1980s, however, led the PRC to implement harsher policies as part of the fight against what it called the twin evils: “national splittism” and “illegal religious activities.”³⁴

Naturally, it started with the education system. As James Leibold and Timothy Grose recently observed, “Classrooms in China are the frontline in the CCP’s efforts to surveil, discipline and control its citizenry.”³⁵ In 1994, the PRC opened a patriotic education campaign that focused on instilling patriotism, socialism, and national unity. From kindergarten to university, students are taught about China’s one hundred years of humiliation and victimization by foreign

imperialists, especially the West, and the salvation of China by the CCP.³⁶ Hundreds of demonstrations throughout the 1990s in Tibet and the Tibetan riots of 2008 led to more repression, with Buddhist monks and nuns being forced to undergo “patriotic education” sessions to stamp out separatism and dissidents. Mandarin Chinese became predominant, and Tibetans working for the government were not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies.³⁷

Meanwhile, the fact that 70 percent of all XUAR elementary and middle schools were in rural or pastoral areas where students could be ideologically oriented against the PRC was not lost on local authorities. Uighur riots of the late 1990s led the PRC to target “splittists,” “counterrevolutionaries,” and “religious fundamentalists.”³⁸ In May 1996, the Strike Hard campaign forced both cadres, deemed to have taken a lax attitude toward those “religious forces” and clergy who were blamed for inciting Uighurs, to undergo reeducation.³⁹ By the early 2000s, Uighurs felt that Chinese schools deliberately taught Han history and language at the expense of Uighur history and culture. Those who complained about the all-Han workforce in factories were sent to Beijing for reeducation. The PRC engaged in a “soft” policy of building mosques and allowing Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca while engaging in “Strike Hard” against separatism and terrorism, including burning copies of a book written by an Uighur historian that used archaeology to challenge the PRC’s version of the past. By 2004, 50 percent of Chinese and minority schools had been merged, with plans to merge all such schools by 2011.⁴⁰ After 2010, students in Tibet and Xinjiang were required to devote more time to the study of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought in order to have the “correct” thinking about religion (i.e., religion is to be only of personal interest).⁴¹ Since 1985, 200,000 Tibetans, Uighurs, and other minorities have voluntarily attended Chinese boarding schools in other provinces where they also undergo Chinese civilizing.⁴² Furthermore, the PRC has tried to force cultural assimilation on the Uighurs through cultural and patriotic activities and interethnic marriage.⁴³

De-Radicalization

After 9/11, the PRC stepped up its efforts against Uighur Muslims and declared its own war on terrorism.⁴⁴ PRC officials and spokespersons claimed that Uighur separatists were part of international terrorism, that they had been trained by Osama bin Laden, and that several hundred Uighurs were fighting the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan. The PRC convinced the Bush Administration and the United Nations to place the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement on the international terrorist watch list. Although many doubted that Uighurs had engaged in terrorism, 22 Uighurs were held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.⁴⁵ From 2001, the PRC described all forms of Uighur protests and actions, including non-violent ones, as acts of terror.⁴⁶ Between 2008 and 2013, there were Uighurs who attempted or succeeded in committing suicide attacks against Chinese.⁴⁷ However, in 2014, when Uighurs attacked passengers at a train station in Kunming, killing 29 and wounding 150, followed by Uighurs driving SUVs into a crowded market in Urumqi, Chinese felt they had experienced their own form of 9/11.⁴⁸

In retaliation, Xi ordered an all-out “struggle against terrorism” and to show “absolutely no mercy.”⁴⁹ Uighurs deemed “untrustworthy” were sent to reeducation camps that quickly expanded in number while unsupportive Uighur cadres, called “two-faced people” (*liangmianren*), were fired or imprisoned. Quotas for the number of Uighurs to be detained were established. By 2018, an estimated 800,000–2 million Uighurs and other Muslims were interned in political reeducation camps. Inmates underwent months or years of indoctrination and interrogation aimed at transforming them into secular and loyal supporters of the party. They reportedly were required to renounce their language and religion and pledge loyalty to the PRC. Individuals disappeared merely because they prayed five times a day, possessed a copy of the Qur’an, fasted during Ramadan, or did not support CCP policies. Uighurs were offered incentives to be informants, and PRC authorities interviewed young children to see if any religious activity occurred in the home. Those using Western social media like Facebook or Twitter; who had information on their cellphones or computers that contained “illegal religious content;” or

who studied abroad, criticized the state, or were insufficiently patriotic were also interned. Some were secularized by being force-fed pork or alcohol. They had to engage in self-criticism and were required to show gratitude toward the PRC. Former internees reported undergoing sleep deprivation and torture, both physical and psychological.⁵⁰

China refers to such policies as de-radicalization (*qu jiduanhua*). The PRC had already targeted religious groups like Falun Gong and problem students with “transformation through education.” (*jiaoyu zhuanhua*). In 2013, official documents, according to Adrian Zenz, equated Uighur reeducation to providing “free medical treatment of a dangerous addiction to religious ideology.”⁵¹ One Chinese scholar claims the intent is not to “punish” but rather to “change their mindset” so that they do not become terrorists. In 2016, the communist party secretary for the XUAR declared that the CCP would engage in “squeezing by correct faith,” or awaken Uighurs to drive out extremism; “counteracting by culture,” or use modernization and secularization to fight extremism; “controlling by law” to regulate and guide social expectations; and “popularizing science,” in which science and technology would be used to drive out ignorance.⁵² One official who visited prisons and detention centers in Xinjiang declared that, “[Through] religious guidance, legal education, skills training, psychological interventions, and multiple other methods, the effectiveness of transformation through education must be increased, thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude.”⁵³

Propaganda, Censorship, and Information Control

The PRC tries to maintain a tight grip on the information flowing into and out of Tibet and Xinjiang. After the 2008 Lhasa riots, the CCP expected Tibetans to show loyalty to the party and the PRC. Billboards, government propaganda, and scrolling LED signs outside of police stations called on all to be loyal, even if it meant abandoning Tibetan Buddhist practices. Slogans spoke of the how the CCP, socialism, “reform and opening up,” and the “great motherland” were all good. At the same time, PRC propaganda

reiterated that Tibet remained sovereign Chinese territory and blamed the Dalai Lama and what it called “hostile Western forces” for the unrest.⁵⁴ Chinese propaganda posters in both Tibet and Xinjiang also denigrate traditional local cultures and values and excoriate those who advocate separatism. The right to practice religion will be protected by the state but so will the rights of those who refuse to practice. Posters in Tibet insist that love for a religion should not supersede love for country. In both Tibet and Xinjiang, posters espouse Confucian ideas with such slogans as Strengthening Ethnic Unity [Is the Way] to Build a Harmonious Society.⁵⁵ In Xinjiang, China launched what it called The Beauty Project to build up the women’s fashion, cosmetic, and accessories industries to promote both jobs and women not wearing veils, including using the slogan “Let Your Beautiful Hair Flow and Let Your Pretty Face Appear.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, PRC propaganda has been used to rally Han Chinese and Chinese Muslims in its fight against separatism and terrorism, such as when the state media described Tibetans and Uighurs as “knife wielding savages,” which only created hatred and fear among Chinese outside the two regions and more prejudice against minorities seeking work or an education.⁵⁷

Since the late 1990s, the PRC has contended with the challenge of the internet and Uighurs engaging in cyber-separatism. Even if not all Uighur foundations and groups advocate for independence or violence, nearly all use their websites to report incidents in Xinjiang and to criticize PRC policy. The Great Chinese Firewall tries to prevent people inside China from viewing such sites. In the case of both Tibet and Xinjiang, the PRC has been willing to engage in internet blackouts, cellphone seizures, and blocking the uploading of files and pictures to prevent the outside world from seeing PRC repression.⁵⁸ Police require some Uighurs to install “SpyNet Bodyguard” on their phones to alert for any images, videos, or e-books that are terrorist or religious related, and “Wi-Fi sniffers” collect identifying information of smartphones and computers and even package deliveries.⁵⁹

Security Partners

Because Tibet and Xinjiang border various countries, diplomatic and trade relations have been other components to engaging in COIN and CT. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the PRC engaged in bilateral negotiations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, which all border Xinjiang, to discuss economic cooperation. In 2001, all five created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and part of its mission is to fight terrorism. By 2017, Pakistan and India were full members while Afghanistan and Iran enjoyed observer status. In bilateral agreements with the PRC, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan agreed to oppose separatism and “splittism.” By the early 2000s, both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan broke up Uighur separatist groups and handed some Uighurs over to Beijing. Because Pakistan became a safe haven for Uighurs fleeing Xinjiang, a conduit for explosives used in terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, and possibly a site for the training of Uighurs by Islamic jihad groups, the PRC successfully pressured Pakistan to deport and expel Uighurs and to close down some of the training camps.⁶⁰ Since the 2013 inception of the BRI, the PRC’s economic and political ties to SCO members have only been enhanced by what the PRC media has called a “Chinese Marshall Plan.”⁶¹ The Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa economic consortium has also used forums and conferences to condemn terrorism.⁶²

In 2002, China held its first-ever joint training exercise with a foreign state, in this case a joint terrorism exercise with Kyrgyzstan. Ever since, SCO members have engaged in training exercises that have evolved into “Peace Mission” combined-operations exercises involving the PLA, the PAP, and “Snow-Leopard” special forces to deal with insurgents. Similarly, the PRC and India have engaged in joint CT exercises known as “Hand-in-Hand.” Despite border tensions with India and complications in the relations between Pakistan and India because of past Pakistani terrorist acts against India,⁶³ China has partially tried to secure its borders with India and Pakistan through agreements and economic development with neighbors along the southwestern

border. The PRC, though, has refused to refer to these arrangements as alliances but rather calls them “partnerships.”⁶⁴

COUNTERDEMOCRACY AND COUNTERPROTEST OPERATIONS IN HONG KONG

Historically, Hong Kong differs considerably from Tibet and Xinjiang. Its residents are predominately Han Chinese, and there is no question about PRC sovereignty over the island and nearby territories. Yet, for nearly 20 years, the PRC has been confronted by protests against PRC measures, real or perceived, to reduce Hong Kong’s autonomy, eliminate democracy, change its demographics and identity, and securitize it. PRC tactics in dealing with protests and democratic activism are similar to those implemented against Tibetans and Uighurs.

The first major Hong Kong protest against changes to the Basic Law occurred in 2003 when the PRC wanted the HKSAR to pass a national security bill that outlawed subversion, stealing state secrets, and being connected to organizations proscribed by Beijing and allowed warrantless searches. The protests led to the bill being withdrawn,⁶⁵ but Beijing retaliated in various ways. It delayed promised political reforms, backed legislators loyal to Beijing in elections, and silenced media critics. The Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO), which reports directly to Beijing’s State Council, served as a second government inside Hong Kong.⁶⁶ China expanded its United Front strategy of building relations with loyal Chinese capitalists, even if they were pro-Western or pro-Taiwan, to approaching members of the middle and working classes, youth, women’s, and religious groups as well as neighborhood associations. Through the United Front, the PRC maintains “comprehensive jurisdiction” and mobilizes pro-Beijing elements to get pro-Beijing candidates elected and to support HKSAR policies and interpretations of the Basic Law. Beijing has also tried to win supporters through luring students, intellectuals, and scientists to the mainland while mobilizing and enhancing the status of women in

support of the PRC. Pro-Beijing groups in China have likewise been encouraged to move their headquarters to Hong Kong.⁶⁷

Through the HKSAR, the PRC worked to bring about various changes. In 2012, the HKSAR tried to implement Moral and National Education, or “patriotic education,” in Hong Kong’s education system. Students, parents, and intellectuals responded with an “anti-brainwashing” protest that lasted several weeks.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, calls from pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong for direct elections of both the chief executive (CE) and the legislature were rejected. In August 2014, the HKSAR issued the 31 August Framework, which circumscribed universal suffrage in Hong Kong and declared that candidates would be selected by a committee whose members were predominantly pro-Beijing; only a few candidates would be selected. A sit-in by Hong Kong students in the civic square, surrounded by the central government offices and the legislative council, led to the police firing pepper spray and tear gas. Protestors used umbrellas and goggles to protect themselves during what became known as the Occupy Central Movement, or the Umbrella Movement, that lasted through mid-December before ending peacefully.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the use of force by the police against the protestors set a precedent for the events of 2019.

By 2016, many Hong Kongers were disappointed not only with the slow pace of democratization but the fact that book publishers critical of the PRC were disappearing.⁷⁰ In 2015, a book publisher and several of his employees were abducted in Thailand, presumably in retaliation for publishing books that contained salacious details about PRC leaders. In 2017, a Chinese-Canadian financier who lived in Hong Kong and provided money to mainland leaders was also abducted, supposedly as a threat by Xi to his adversaries that he could accuse them of corruption if they caused trouble.⁷¹ Moreover, since 1997, 1 million mainlanders have settled in Hong Kong, of which, according to a pro-democratic party member, just over 20,000 were CCP members. By 2017, mainland immigrants represented nearly 12 percent of the HKSAR’s population. Critics spoke of a “demographic blood exchange transfusion” (*renkou huanxue*) even though scholars disagree as to

whether this is deliberate.⁷² Mainland tourists to Hong Kong increased from 8 million in 2003 to 47 million in 2014 and shops catering to mainlanders replaced Hong Kong shops. Hong Kongers blamed the tourism for increasing crime, rent, and commodity prices.⁷³

Frustrations led to a violent, 10-hour riot against the police in February 2016. Already, there were Hong Kongers using words like autonomy, self-determination, and independence.⁷⁴ Shocked by the riot, Beijing renewed its United Front campaign to build “a stronger sense of national consciousness” in Hong Kong and Macao, oppose any word or deed viewed as violating the Basic Law, and enhance Hong Kongers’ “historical and interactional linkages” with the mainland. Pro-Beijing media criticized and investigated democratic leaders. According to Hong Kong scholars, the PRC, more than ever before, wanted to win Hong Kongers’ “hearts and minds,” win support for HKSAR policies, and enhance patriotism and Hong Kongers’ identity with the mainland while isolating and defeating political enemies and achieving political dominance.⁷⁵ Freedom of the press waned as the PRC and media owners were increasingly pro-Beijing. The PRC established more pro-Beijing schools in Hong Kong. The teaching of Mandarin Chinese and Chinese history in primary and secondary schools was increased to overcome what Beijing perceived as “lack of attachment to the fatherland.”⁷⁶ In 2018 and 2019, the PRC launched the Greater Bay Area Plan, which seeks to convince Hong Kongers to move to Southern China to achieve socioeconomic integration and a greater identification with the PRC.⁷⁷

At the same time, the PRC sought to increase its policing power over Hong Kong. In 2018, Hong Kong CE Carrie Lam and the majority of pro-Beijing legislators agreed to allow Chinese police to use high-speed rail connecting to Hong Kong in order to enforce PRC law. In February 2019, a Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation Bill, also known as the Extradition Bill, was introduced, which allowed extradition of criminals to the PRC for prosecution. A Hong Kong citizen had murdered his pregnant, Taiwanese girlfriend in Taipei, Taiwan, and fled to Hong Kong. Pro-democracy forces feared that people deemed dissidents or critics of the PRC would also be arrested

and tried under PRC law in violation of the Basic Law. In June 2019, thousands protested peacefully, but the police made arrests. Shouting “Recover Hong Kong, Revolution for Our Time,” protestors demanded the bill’s withdrawal, Lam’s resignation, an investigation of police conduct, release of jailed protestors, removal of the label “rioters,” and universal suffrage for electing the CE and legislators.⁷⁸

For the next five months, Hong Kongers viewed the police response as repressive. They used extraordinary measures to prevent drones, police video cameras, and any personal data from revealing their identities.⁷⁹ The police used batons, tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray on protestors, peaceful or not. They stood by as 100 Triad gang members attacked a group of protestors at a train station using rattans and clubs. During the protests, HKMAO gave its full support to Lam and the police and issued a warning: no harm to national security, no challenge to the central government’s authority and the Basic Law, and no using Hong Kong as a base to undermine China. The HKMAO has direct ties to the local 6,000-man PLA garrison, and videos of the PLA in late July 2019 engaged in anti-terrorism and anti-riot drills sent a signal that the PLA might intervene. In August, the *People’s Daily* called the protestors “terrorists” and spoke of foreign “black hands.” Supported by Xi, Lam rejected protestors’ demands. The CCP propaganda machine accused the protestors of engaging in acts of violence, and the pro-PRC *Global Times* claimed that foreign powers wanted to use Hong Kong to overthrow the PRC’s political system. There were also reports of PAP units being deployed on Hong Kong’s borders. When protestors shut down Hong Kong International Airport, Lam warned protestors against pushing Hong Kong “into an abyss” and sending Hong Kong “down a path of no return,” implying direct PRC intervention.⁸⁰

In an attempt to quell the protests, Lam announced in September a withdrawal of the Extradition Bill, but the concession came too late. Protests intensified when Lam invoked “emergency powers” and banned the use of face masks. Protestors became more militant, especially after the suspicious death of a university student, and ultimately engaged in fierce clashes with police who besieged a

university campus for days. Meanwhile, the PRC announced new Patriotic Education guidelines for all of China, including Hong Kong and Macao, designed to “cultivate students’ patriotic feelings so as to train the next generation to build and inherit socialism.”⁸¹

As social unrest gradually gave way to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PRC tightened its grip on Hong Kong. In March 2020, reportedly 4,000 PAP officers were in Hong Kong to assist local police and the now 12,000-man PLA garrison in dealing with unrest. In April, more than a dozen pro-democracy leaders and former lawmakers were arrested. And in May, China’s Parliament approved a resolution to create a national security bill for Hong Kong that would target secession, subversion of state power, terrorist activities, and foreign interference, a measure seen in Hong Kong and by the international community as a step toward the end of autonomy. In June 2020, Hong Kong passed a law declaring any insult to the PRC national anthem a crime. Later that month, the Hong Kong National Security Law, drafted by the National People’s Congress, went into effect, sparking concern among democratic and human rights activists.⁸²

THE FUTURE OF PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA

In asserting its control over Taiwan, the Pescadores, Jinmen, Mazu, and all other islands governed by the ROC, the PRC’s specific COIN approach will be largely determined by the perceptions of its party and military leaders as well as the attitudes and reactions of the people being invaded and occupied. Unlike Hong Kong, Taiwan will not be simply handed over by formal transfer of power from a foreign nation to China. The spectrum of scenarios by which the PRC could acquire all ROC-governed territory ranges from peaceful reunification and smooth transition of control to all-out war involving one or more countries allying with or aiding the ROC. Assuming that the PRC is victorious in each instance, genuine concern and fear or paranoia could still creep into PRC analysis of the situation on the ground, even in the best-case scenario of being welcomed as liberators.

Whether by light footprint or heavy hand, the PRC will seek to impose its will, policies, ideology, and identity on those absorbed into its sphere, willingly or not. In 2005, the PRC passed an anti-secession law that stated, “The state shall never allow the ‘Taiwan independence’ secessionist forces to make Taiwan secede from China under any name or by any means.” The law reaffirmed, though, “after the country is reunified peacefully, Taiwan may practice systems different from those on the mainland and enjoy a high degree of autonomy.”⁸³ In 2019, Xi guaranteed Taiwanese “private property, religious beliefs, and legitimate rights and interests.”⁸⁴ Yet, history and current events show that the PRC can quickly renege on its assurances. The acquisition of ROC territory would create opportunities to project power in the western Pacific and South China Sea but also new challenges as they relate to internal and external security. One Chinese scholar recently argued, “Beijing needs to manufacture a group of loyal collaborators who might be ideologically or economically motivated... Since Beijing is prevented from outright repression (as of Tibetans and Uighurs) and the use of surveillance and indoctrination (as of PRC citizens) toward Taiwanese and Hong Kongers, a more delicate and less coercive strategy has to be crafted.”⁸⁵ Yet, the PRC’s political treatment of Taiwan during the COVID-19 outbreak and the crackdown on the protests in Hong Kong have altered the situation. Some Hong Kongers have gradually adopted an identity that is antagonistic to the PRC, including attacking and shunning those who only speak Mandarin.⁸⁶ Watching from a short distance, Taiwanese nationalism became enhanced and contributed to President Tsai’s landslide reelection in January 2020 over a Nationalist Party candidate deemed too friendly to Beijing.⁸⁷ If faced with a Taiwan resistance movement and understanding Taiwan’s importance to PRC national security, Beijing is more likely to rule with an iron fist comparable to Tibet and Xinjiang.

The patterns of control established in those two regions will likely be replicated in Taiwan. PRC army, air force, and naval forces would all play a role in militarily occupying former-ROC territory, including military installations, as well as putting down resistance and ensuring

that any potential insurgency received no aid via air or sea. All ROC forces would be disarmed, and weapons and weapons systems secured to prevent any potential insurgents from establishing secret caches throughout the islands. Securitization and surveillance involving the PAP would be installed. The bureaucracy, institutions, and symbols that allowed the ROC to have limited international political recognition, including the offices of president and foreign ministry, would be dismantled. The islands of Jinmen and Mazu would potentially be absorbed into Fujian province, while Taiwan and the Pescadores would adopt the provincial structure that exists in the PRC or even become known as a Taiwan Special Administrative Region, similar to Hong Kong and Macao, with Beijing appointing a trusted provincial governor or chief secretary to carry out policy and ensure that PRC laws, such as any national security law, were enforced.

In the case of peaceful reunification, the PRC might allow One China, Two Systems and possibly even negotiate an arrangement similar to the Basic Law, but any actions it views as separatist or secessionist would result in the weakening or ending of Taiwan's political system. Democracy would be suspended, and the notion of a free press critical of the PRC would certainly be eliminated. Peaceful liberation or not, the Great Chinese Firewall would be extended to former ROC territory, allowing for censorship and surveillance. The same "electronic fence" software used by the ROC during the COVID-19 pandemic to monitor those in quarantine or similar PRC-developed technology would be used to monitor all citizens, especially if curfews were imposed. New databases would be created to register citizens and issue PRC driver's licenses, passports, and IDs. The education system would likely be replaced by Patriotic Education with a de-emphasis of both ROC and Taiwanese history. Students and government officials could be forced to read and write simplified rather than traditional Chinese characters. This would be an effort to break down local identity and ultimately create new generations that would identify with the PRC and the current notion of a "China Dream." The PRC could renew United Front tactics to win over partners and collaborators from various classes and constituencies. It would not have to engage in population saturation,

but there would likely be a greater influx of PRC citizens through securitization and militarization in the sense that Taiwan would become a platform for offensive rather than defensive military operations. Moreover, CCP cadres and mainland migrants, students, and tourists would be more prevalent. Taiwan would not have to be modernized, but its economy and banking system would have to be reconfigured. By virtue of being isolated to islands with little to no hope of being sustained by an outside power, any Taiwanese protest movement or insurgency would face considerable challenges.

CONCLUSION

If the broad themes that emerge from the PRC's 70 years of quelling unrest and dissent were packaged as a COIN doctrine, could it be applicable outside of the PRC in which it waged COIN in territory that it or a client-state wanted to secure or be exportable to other states waging COIN?

Although the PRC's joint exercises of the early 2000s involved fighting separatists, terrorists, and extremists, they were small-scale, compartmentalized, scripted, and valuable in providing training, forging closer ties with its security partners, and portraying Chinese forces in a positive light. For many years, the PLA has trained officers, mostly from Africa.⁸⁸ Between 2003 and 2008, more than 7,000 foreign military cadets from an average of 120 countries studied in a PLA military academy.⁸⁹ The Peoples' Public Security University has taught a course on CT, and a large number of private security training facilities have appeared in Beijing.⁹⁰ Whether the PLA and PAP share tradecraft in detail is unlikely. Providing greater insight into its tactics and technology could lead to the development of countermeasures and workarounds. Detailed discussion of highly sensitive, counterseparatism operations, including lessons learned and mistakes made, could prove embarrassing and not reflect well on the PRC's image when entertaining foreign guests or being a guest. Moreover, admission that it has engaged in COIN operations rather than anti-riot or counterterrorist operations could legitimize the grievances of Tibetans, Uighurs, and pro-Democracy Hong Kongers.⁹¹

Besides training missions, the PRC has dispatched peacekeepers under the auspices of the United Nations. In the early 2000s, the PAP sent internal security personnel to East Timor, Liberia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Haiti, and Afghanistan primarily to train local police, drill wells, and provide healthcare but not engage in combat.⁹² After 2015, the PLA became more active in peacekeeping. By 2018, 2,519 Chinese peacekeepers were in Africa and the Middle East, 95 percent of whom were combat capable. As at home, China views development as leading to security. Although it might provide development assistance to a host country facing civil conflict, China does not support humanitarian intervention as understood by the West, nor does it support peacekeeping operations that interfere with a country's internal affairs or seek regime change.⁹³ There is no evidence that Chinese peacekeepers utilize the same tactics for managing Tibetans, Uighurs, and Hong Kongers in places like Africa, nor is there any evidence that the PRC wants to engage in COIN operations with large numbers of forces. Although the PRC could evolve into becoming a "peace enforcer" and be willing to use a rapid-reaction force,⁹⁴ for the moment, it relies more on the host country's military and private Chinese security, including former PLA and PAP, to protect Chinese nationals and infrastructure connected to the BRI and other Chinese investment projects.⁹⁵

If the PRC tried to export a COIN doctrine with Chinese characteristics, it is likely that any interested client-states would be similarly repressive and non-democratic. Recently leaked Chinese documents reveal that in 2017, terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom led Xinjiang's top security official to blame the British for putting "human rights above security."⁹⁶ Putting security above human rights certainly has been at the core of the PRC's counterseparatism and counterprotest operations.

Should a government find elements of a Chinese COIN doctrine applicable to its situation, it should keep certain caveats in mind. First, in the years that the PRC has dealt with ethnic unrest within its borders, its tactics have had to evolve because, even though it has the upper hand, it has been surprised and confounded on numerous

occasions by outbreaks of protests, riots, and, eventually, terrorist attacks in opposition to CCP policies. Even though there is currently no desire on the part of most Tibetans and Uighurs to seek independence, the PRC still resorts to measures designed to crush an ethnic group's identity to achieve total security that one scholar describes as "state terrorism."⁹⁷ Those measures, including de-radicalization, may backfire. Others, including Chinese scholars, have pointed out that the PRC's COIN measures tend to make potential ethnic partners or collaborators look like traitors, fail to address the socioeconomic gaps that exist between Han Chinese and other ethnics that cause resentment, and essentially sow the seeds for blowback.⁹⁸

Second, any government utilizing similar tactics might face international opprobrium. China is in a unique position of becoming a great power with economic ties to many powers that are not easily broken because of the mutual dependency. When condemned for

All these efforts and expenses to prevent separatism and democratic protests do not make the PRC feel secure or reduce its fear of dissent, embarrassing revelations, and opposition to its policies.

its human rights abuses in Xinjiang, China's political, economic, and diplomatic clout resulted in 37 countries, including Saudi Arabia and Russia, writing a letter that praised China's human rights achievements.⁹⁹ Not every state can wage COIN that puts "security above human

rights" and avoid international ostracism, including sanctions. In fact, such a government might become even more economically dependent upon another power, such as the PRC, which would turn a blind eye to any human rights violations.

Third, the PRC's approach to securitization and surveillance is expensive. Between 2007 and 2016, China's domestic security expenditures increased 411 percent for the XUAR, 404 percent for the TAR, and 316 percent in Qinghai province, which is 25 percent Tibetan. Between 2017 and 2018, spending for Xinjiang increased another 92.8 percent. By 2017, per capita domestic security expenditures for Tibet

and Xinjiang surpassed that of Beijing and possibly even the United States.¹⁰⁰ None of this includes the money spent on development. Regimes dealing with regions of comparable geographic and demographic size might find the expense prohibitive. Since China is one of the top exporters of surveillance technology, including facial recognition software, the purchase costs and technology refreshment could make a country even more financially dependent and open to Chinese spying.¹⁰¹

Fourth, the expense and expansion of military and security forces could increase the security dilemma for neighboring states. In other words, the drive for internal security could make one's neighbors insecure and lead to their own military buildup.

Finally, all these efforts and expenses to prevent separatism and democratic protests do not make the PRC feel secure or reduce its fear of dissent, embarrassing revelations, and opposition to its policies. Its recent mishandling of the COVID-19 outbreak, the repression against medical professionals and citizens engaging in social media whistleblowing, and its refusal to be fully cooperative in allowing outsiders to investigate the origins of COVID-19 reflect this insecurity and potential to lose face.¹⁰² It is as if the PRC is trapped in an internal security dilemma. Although there have not been any terrorist attacks in nearly six years or protests in either Xinjiang or Tibet in over a decade, the PRC feels compelled to ratchet up securitization and surveillance, but the more it ratchets, the less secure it becomes. Meanwhile, Uighurs engage in silent protests via social media, and 156 Tibetans have committed self-immolation since 2009.¹⁰³ Thus, Chinese "authoritarian counterinsurgency"¹⁰⁴ contains inherent contradictions that need to be resolved before implementing Chinese COIN tactics to put down an insurgency.

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Chapter 7: The Chinese Communist Party, Integrated Campaigning, and Special Operations

Dr. David C. Ellis and Dr. Charles N. Black

“Revolutionary outcomes in individual states are unlikely to be secure until they reach a point of systemic irreversibility...The irreversibility of individual revolutionary movements depends on the international environment.”¹

At the end of the introductory chapter to this volume, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was metaphorically depicted as a paper parade dragon marching around the world appearing fierce, but with rips and tears in the *façade* exposing intrinsic vulnerabilities and challenges (see Figure 7.1). Further extending the metaphor, the author asked how SOF might contribute to exacerbating existing rips and tears, introduce new ones, raise obstacles to obstruct the CCP’s march, or generate headwinds that slow its progress and raise the level of effort it must expend to achieve its national interests. The empirical questions arising from the metaphor are, “Why are there tears and weaknesses in the CCP’s strategy?” and “What undertakings can special operations support in the accrual of relative national power?” If, as the epigraph suggests, the system is still aligned to the benefit of the Western Liberal International Order (WLIO), then the headwinds and obstacles already exist. How might they be reinforced—and to what end?

Traditional diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME); political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time (PMESII-PT); and areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events (ASCOPE) analytical processes struggle to answer these questions, and, in fact, are not really designed to do so. Instead, the research and analysis capable of

partner and allied action, reshaping political perceptions of the CCP’s Harmonious World narrative, and promoting targeted relationships in the Global South to increase the diplomatic and economic costs of the CCP’s strategy. SOF cannot be everywhere at all times, but when employed judiciously against opportunities with systems impact, as demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 5, SOF can support a range of joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, and commercial (JIIM-C) assets that improve relative national power in the aggregate. The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (JCIC) idea that the military will often need to support the JIIM-C in most competition activities speaks to this point.² But below the three roles in attacking the CCP’s strategy, what effects are necessary of SOF in the future operating environment?

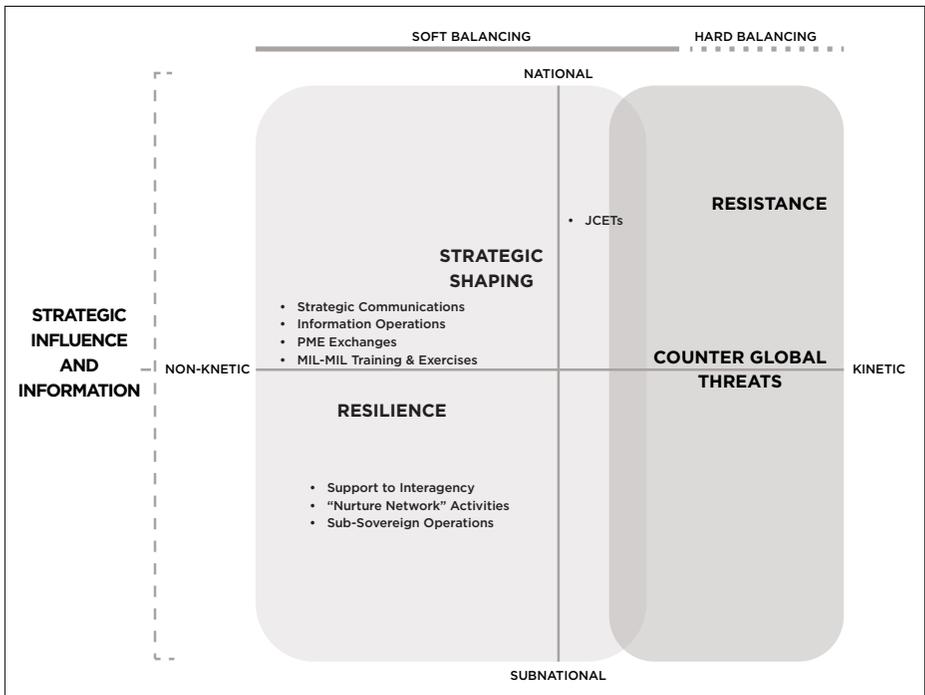


Figure 7.2. Five statecraft effects SOF should contribute to in the future operating environment: strategic shaping, strategic influence and information, resilience, resistance, and counter global threats. Source: Author

Figure 7.2 describes five strategic effects to which special operations should contribute in the future operating environment to advance national interests and accrue relative power. The axes in this figure reflect the general themes in this particular volume of national-to-subnational and kinetic-to-non-kinetic operations, but there are alternative frames that could help conceptualize SOF's contribution to competition below armed conflict such as physical-to-virtual, tangible-to-cognitive, foreign-versus-domestic, and government-to-society axes. The first thing to note at the top of Figure 7.2 is the spectrum of balancing effects from soft balancing to hard balancing. In most cases, special operations' effects will support a soft-balancing approach by the U.S., which, as noted in the Introduction, is a current deficiency in U.S. statecraft. The inherent JIIM-C nature of soft balancing coincides perfectly with integrated campaigning and orients special operations on the internal statecraft aspects of accruing U.S. national power through influencing and supporting partners and allies.

The most important strategic effect special operations should support in competition below armed conflict is *strategic shaping*. Traditional military shaping is intended to achieve conditions necessary to deter and, when required, successfully initiate major combat operations under favorable circumstances. Strategic shaping in this frame, however, involves statecraft effects that change environmental conditions in a specific space to advance U.S. interests, gain temporal advantage over competitors, and/or diminish opportunities for the adversary. The objective of strategic shaping is to avoid conflict altogether by gaining and maintaining a superior position in the system. Special operations integrated with and in support of other government actions shape the strategic landscape by changing local or regional conditions and perceptions favorable to the U.S., allies, and partners while at the same time diminishing those of the competitor. Special operations create asymmetries that increase opportunity costs, exacerbate complexity dynamics, and contribute to policy ambiguity. In the end, the purpose of strategic shaping is to degrade or exhaust the adversary's ability to realize its strategy. In strategic competition, strategic shaping would be most effective with a positive policy vision

of the future, especially for the economic and development strategy of the U.S. with the Global South, rather than just a “counter China” approach to maintain and stabilize the WLIO. If SOF are to be effective in strategic shaping, they must work with integrated and aligned JIIM-C partners to shape the environment through a foundation in the strategic influence and information.

The second effect is *strategic influence and information*. If perception management is the foundation of the CCP’s statecraft, then SOF’s ability to operate in and among populations with aligned JIIM-C actors gives them the right placement for contributing to soft power and soft balancing. Influence is a temporal cognitive effect on leaders at various levels of society, within government and other institutions, and, most importantly, among populations. When combined with their organic information capabilities, SOF can contribute to broader U.S.

endeavors to seize the initiative in both the strategic competition and VEO missions. For example, SOF are well positioned to magnify the narrative to support influence at the sub-state level and among migratory populations in undergoverned areas. Imagine a military information support team specifically partnered with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiatives to foster self-reliance among a specific population group in an area of high U.S. interest. Additionally, this effect intrinsically aligns SOF with the JCIC in that the Joint Staff wants the Joint Force to always contribute to larger strategic communications and influencing efforts to achieve strategic political effects.

If SOF are to be effective in strategic shaping, they must work with integrated and aligned JIIM-C partners to shape the environment through a foundation in the strategic influence and information.

The third effect is *resilience*, and this would likely constitute a majority of SOF’s attention. In the current SOF literature, resilience is conceptualized as a preparatory, population-centric component

of resistance in a larger strategy of total defense against pressure imposed by an external aggressor.³ It is defined as “the will of the people to maintain what they have; the will and ability to withstand external pressures and influences and/or recover from the effects of those pressures or influences.”⁴ Since it stems from the national security frame, resilience in the SOF community tends to adopt a government-centric perspective with an emphasis on national will, national identity, and reducing vulnerabilities that adversaries might

Whereas the enterprise has primarily adopted a “counter” culture during the counter-VEO fight, resilience activities require a nurture-network orientation to provide stressed populations with multiple means of support, not just a tenuous dependency on a national government as the joint publications on counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and counterthreat network currently direct.

exploit.⁵ Both strategic and violent extremist adversaries exploit sociopolitical vulnerabilities and tensions that, over time, erode U.S. strategic advantage. Bolstering a society’s ability to evolve and

transform in the face of targeted adversary actions is one of the most important aspects of competition below armed conflict. Diverting violence-prone social movements toward improved sociopolitical relationships will be increasingly important as complexity in and across societies accelerates in the 21st century.

While an adversary-centric frame is certainly appropriate, it is incomplete for competition below armed conflict and for societies with a weak sense of national identity. Although space prevents a thorough discussion, the idea of resilience has gained significant attention across the social sciences, public policy, and disaster management disciplines since the early 2000s.⁶ Consistent with the Total Defense concept, the basis of the resilience idea was rooted in engineering and disaster management, which emphasized the ability to absorb and survive a shock or some external pressure and return to a precrisis condition.⁷

This notion is similar to the military's use of the term "stability." More recently, the resilience literature in political science, international relations, and public policy has come to interpret resilience as a way for communities to adapt to emergence in complex, dynamic conditions, especially those characterized by weak and failed states.⁸ In other words, it moves beyond the stability frame and acknowledges, like the JCIC and statecraft, that societies and states perpetually evolve. This notion of resilience acknowledges the abject failure of centralized, planned, liberal-internationalist, state-building projects from the 1990s–2020s and instead orients interventions toward empowering local communities to "bounce forward" by using their own agency and knowledge to navigate complexity.⁹

Achieving resilience effects requires an entirely different way of thinking for SOF. Whereas the enterprise has primarily adopted a "counter" culture during the counter-VEO fight, resilience activities require a nurture-network orientation to provide stressed populations with multiple means of support, not just a tenuous dependency on a national government as the joint publications on counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and counter threat network currently direct.¹⁰ Instead, resilience "implies the existence of redundancy, even though in part, in terms of each institution's attributions, supposing an institutional multiplicity...The relations between them must be designed so that when a component is seriously affected, the others may be able to take over its responsibilities and the system would continue to work."¹¹ Network theory scholars reinforce this perspective, noting that centrally controlled, hub-and-spoke systems can operate efficiently and appear stable but are not resilient to shocks due to a central hub "cut point" that can control information or, when eliminated, bring the entire system down. In contrast, scale-free systems, featuring a number of large and mutually connected hubs, are resilient to change because information flows quickly across networks, and hubs can adapt and reroute around cut points even when a few major hubs are eliminated.¹² Consistent with the recent scholarship on resilience, a nurture-network orientation proactively seeks to build redundancies and relationships in order to allow local

community agency to adapt to emergent conditions rather than through central planning. Accordingly, a nurture-network approach would have to be a transdisciplinary, JIIM-C undertaking due to the range of local challenges and interests.¹³ In this way, resilience for strategic shaping has a logic beyond the resistance frame.

The fourth effect, *resistance*, is designed to prepare societies to withstand foreign occupation and/or liberate populations from oppressive regimes. Activities in resistance range from politically organized civil disobedience to violent insurgency.¹⁴ Although typically associated with unconventional warfare (UW) in the special operations enterprise, resistance has broader relevance in the context of strategic competition due to developments in the potential for social control through geo-economic and, more importantly, cyber-espionage capabilities stemming from control over cyber infrastructure. Resistance can have its own strategic communications effect considering it contributes to the cost-benefit or risk-reward calculations of adversaries with the intent of adding to an overall deterrence effect,¹⁵ but it must be purposefully incorporated as such for the strategic communications value. The necessity for resistance emerges from a failure to effectively shape, influence, and attain resilience. Enabling resistance is much more than a military role reserved solely for modern Jedburghs; rather, it is a whole-of-society endeavor that uniquely manifests depending on the local context. Will Irwin describes resistance as a bridge between the “hazy gap between soft and hard power” that generally supports near-term rather than long-term interests.¹⁶ The necessity for resistance usually emerges from unfavorable conditions requiring a rapid policy response wherein the competitor or adversary has gained an advantage. Like with resilience, SOF offer unique capabilities to support resistance by strengthening popular mechanisms to disrupt malign interventions, use the circumstance as a larger coercion tool, and, in rare instances, to effect regime change.

The fifth effect is *countering global threats*, which includes the high-end, DA missions that relate to SOF elite capabilities. Importantly, this effect does not include the current concept of SOF in the counter-VEO fight, which is more of an advanced conventional

approach rather than a more appropriate, reserved employment of an exquisite capability. Instead, the emphasis here is on hostage rescue and recovery, countering weapons of mass destruction activities, highly sensitive DA operations, and other sensitive activities.

Together, these five effects provide SOF a framework for designing tailored approaches to achieve strategic political effects when integrated and aligned with JIIM-C capabilities. They also indicate that, like the JCIC instructs, the majority of the effort will be in the non-kinetic side of the spectrum with an emphasis on strategic shaping. If this framing is accurate, what might SOF operations consist of in the context of the CCP?

THE FUNDAMENTAL PARADOX IN CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY GRAND STRATEGY (SOFT BALANCE)

By emphasizing the internal statecraft perspective, this volume attempts to highlight the fundamental paradox of the CCP's grand strategy: its entire political existence is premised on the ability to control complex adaptive social systems, but its economic growth and political strategies both rely on sending vast numbers of its citizens and companies beyond its direct, physical reach. Moreover, it expects to do so through AI-driven analytics of the two most powerful drivers of complexity dynamics: the market and internet-based social interaction.¹⁷ One only needs to read George Orwell's classic book *1984* to intuit the dystopian possibilities of a CCP-dominated technology and communications-oriented infrastructure,¹⁸ but, to contextualize its probability of success, one needs only to remember that even the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and the Khmer Rouge were unable to suppress religion and ethnicity despite terrible totalitarian measures. As Chapters 4 and 6 demonstrate, the fact that the CCP still worries about these "crabs in the bucket" after 70 years in power, and still must apply tremendous effort against them, indicates that control through government bureaucracy and security services has its limits, especially the further the distance its citizens and businesses are from the political center.

While space prevents a full review here,¹⁹ complexity theory in the social sciences is increasingly clear about the illusion of control over social systems. In short, complexity forces a government, or any organization, to sacrifice either control or efficiency; it cannot maintain both at the same time.²⁰ For instance, increased economic engagement leads to two kinds of complexity for managers: technical complexity, which relates to the level of knowledge and specialization needed to interpret and appropriately respond to changing situations, and volume complexity, which relates to the sheer amount of challenges presented by the increase in new relationships and interdependencies. Efficiently responding to market dynamics, opportunities, and threats requires sensitivity to local conditions and devolving authority to levels closest to the problems.²¹ Control through an organizational bureaucracy increases the time it takes to make decisions because executives seldom have the technical knowledge or situational context to make decisions on their own or the bandwidth to deal with the volume of issues confronting them. Response time consequently slows down the more decision-making centralizes at higher levels of leadership, and, therefore, the flexibility of the organization suffers.²²

Why does complexity undermine the CCP's control efforts? Social systems are inherently open systems, meaning it is impossible to completely cut off societies from others though geography, distance, and repression might make it costly and difficult. As open systems, there are too many variables in the operating environment to discern, sense, and measure. Additionally, the relationships between these innumerable variables can generate "emergence"—new social patterns and realities beyond the units comprising them—which in turn causes the social system to behave differently.²³ This is the essence of the "wicked problem" phenomenon.²⁴ While strong social structures like a state government can cause positive feedback loops in a social system and make patterns of interaction appear permanent, social structures perpetually adjust to an environment whose only constant is change. Emergence is dependent on initial, local conditions, and the further people are from the center of control, the more opportunity there is

for experimentation and innovation.²⁵ The desire to control emergence, especially for authoritarian regimes like the CCP, can maintain the patterns for a period but at a cost. As Hilton Root explains,

*bolstering system stability by strengthening centralized control mechanisms may undermine system resilience, reproducing the very weaknesses its designers seek to avoid and causing a massive disruption in the future (Dobson et al. 2007). The cycles of repression could escalate, and censorship become so extensive that the regime ceases to be trusted, and no one feels safe. Small doses of disorder may be the best way to reduce pressures that can lead to massive disruption, but Chinese officials have few such valves to release the buildup of such pressure.*²⁶

A social structure that seeks to impose control will eventually clamp down on the drivers of innovation that make it resilient to environmental change and precipitate more, increasingly costly challenges.²⁷

Complexity Is Poised to Undermine the Chinese Communist Party's Strategy over Time

Of the complexity dynamics above, emergence is the single most important concept because it is the source of uncontrollable, unpredictable, nonlinear dynamics in social systems. Emergence occurs when new relationships are formed between nodes in networks, and positive feedback loops induce the relationships to continue and grow. The paradox inherent to the CCP's economic growth strategy is that it continues to rely on export-led growth to the industrialized West and commodities imports from the Global South. With geo-economics at the core of its strategy to reshape the international system, the CCP must rely on a range of corporations over which it has varying degrees of influence, wealthy business people whose interests might diverge from the party, expatriates living and working abroad, and a diaspora whose identities become more complex and less grounded in the home country as the generations pass.²⁸ Furthermore, each of these groups must operate in countries whose governments' interests can change in a few short years; whose perceptions of threat

can be influenced; whose industries might suffer from predatory CCP behavior like Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing; and whose populations might begin to find CCP policy and behavior objectionable. In short, emergence in open systems lies all around the CCP's strategy, and it cannot control most of it.

Emergence often requires a catalyst to bring networks together,²⁹ and SOF serving as a catalyst to promote emergence could be one of the USG's most potent assets for seizing the initiative in strategic competition. As John Urry explains, "In particular, the emergence of patterning within any given system stems from 'attractors'...What are important here are *positive* feedbacks occurring over time that may take the system away from any point of equilibrium."³⁰ Emergence becomes entrenched when positive feedback loops keep the relationships strong, but initially, this might require external resourcing such as through JIIM-C capabilities. Looking again at the five strategic effects presented in Figure 7.2, support to strategic shaping, strategic influence and information, and resilience all contribute in different but complementary ways to emergence. From the complexity theory perspective, the medium- to long-term challenge for the CCP is that emergence forms through minute changes at the margins of existing social structures but, through positive feedback loops, steadily displaces existing patterns and relationships.³¹ Complexity theorists assert that social structures have a regularity but at the "edge of chaos," which means emergence can, over time, disrupt the equilibrium or stability of social structures and control mechanisms by pushing them to far-from-equilibrium states where change is more likely.³² Moreover, people can choose to behave differently based on new information, opportunities, and interests if they perceive the environment differently—a process called morphogenesis.³³ In the SOF context, morphogenesis occurs through influence and information operations, resulting in strategic shaping, resilience, and resistance effects. All of these effects lie at the heart of the JCIC.

Viewed from the complexity perspective, the entire BRI seeks to create new, path-dependent relationships on the CCP by using state-owned enterprises, state bank-backed private businesses, and

the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as the funding sources for emergent trade patterns leading to China instead of the West. The trade-off for the CCP is that its system is increasingly in contact with a larger number of “edges of chaos” that could send shocks back through its system in numerous, unpredictable ways. Some might be ideas-based shocks through influencing populations outside its sphere of punishment. Other shocks might be economic, such as with financial contagion due to changing international investment choices and structural debt problems. Still, others might be diplomatic as states become more confident in their ability to soft balance aggressive CCP policies through better coordinated international regimes underwritten by the U.S. and other secondary anchor powers. As the CCP confronts these new sources of emergence, it will have to decide to devolve power from the center—and cede control—or try to compel order in the complexity so that the center can manage it—at least for a while.³⁴ Both options undermine the CCP as it currently is and have important implications for the future. If the JCIC instructs the Joint Force to exhaust and overwhelm the adversary, then technical and volume complexity are key to its implementation.

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The Paradox, Economic Growth, and Stress on the Chinese Communist Party’s Legitimacy

As noted in the introduction, the CCP’s economic growth trajectory appears to be approaching a permanent slow down to approximately 5 percent due to structural debt, a slower-growing international market, the natural inefficiencies of a centralized political system, corruption, limited transparency, and an aging population.³⁵ Many are probably asking at this point why SOF, or the DOD more broadly, should engage in competition on the basis of economic growth and complexity. First, most USG departments and agencies are not designed to think about

national security and foreign threats in the same way as the DOD. Their organizational cultures often concentrate on processing claims on the system, and many even promote foreign engagement as part of the place of the U.S. in a global market. They have neither the personnel, resources, processes, nor time to connect the dots of potential national security threats from a statecraft perspective. It therefore falls to the DOD and other domestic security departments and agencies to educate and inform the rest of the bureaucracy about security threats. Second, it should be remembered that the Soviet Union was not defeated by U.S. and allied military power. Complexity dynamics overwhelmed its government, and its own internal stresses resulted in Gorbachev's *Glasnost* (opening) and *Perestroika* (reform) initiatives. Both were designed to make the political system more responsive to a rapidly changing world, and the centralized Soviet party structure simply could not keep pace. This is not to say that the CCP would collapse in the same way, or that such a circumstance would even necessarily be desirable. Rather, it is simply to note that complexity dynamics would force the regime to adapt and behave differently than it does now due to internal stressors. Strategically outflanking the adversary is the objective, and attacking its strategy requires an emphasis on geo-economics.

Revisiting the Solow model presented in the Introduction, it is possible to visually demonstrate how complexity dynamics could impact the CCP's policy options. Figure 7.3 demonstrates that per-worker wealth—the basis of the CCP's legitimacy—is not just a matter of total investment but also a factor of how much of that investment is consumed. Actual per-worker wealth depends on total investment minus the costs of production (e.g., commodity inputs, transportation costs, labor, energy); consumer spending; and the costs associated with taxes, corruption, and debt servicing. The more consumption there is in the system, the model shows, the less growth there is in per-worker wealth. A country that is on the initial upward trajectory on the model can absorb corruption and inefficiency while still achieving accelerated growth rates. But, as the country hits a plateau and productivity returns start to decline, efficiency becomes

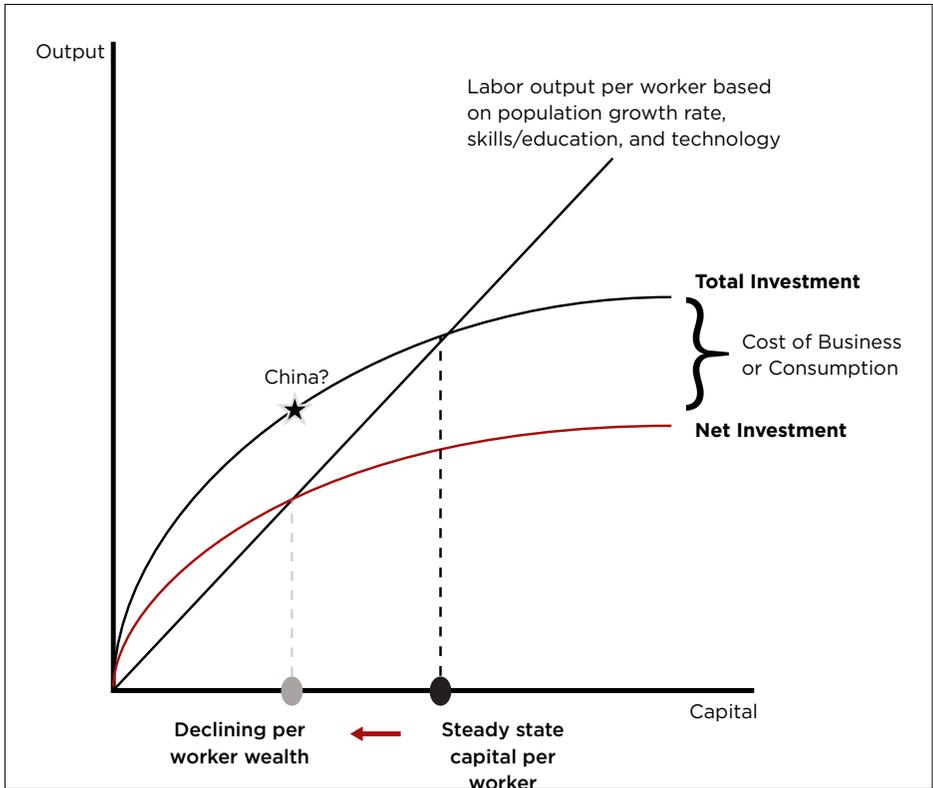


Figure 7.3. Solow Model of Economic Growth illustrating the impact on per-worker wealth when consumption (due to the costs of business, corruption, inefficiency, and debt servicing) is subtracted from total investment. Source: Author

essential for lowering consumption and keeping net investment—and, therefore, per-worker wealth—rising. If the CCP is now trending on lower growth rates as Figure 7.3 notionally suggests, then increasing efficiency becomes critical to maintaining domestic satisfaction. Otherwise, it will be faced with the guns-versus-butter dilemma.³⁶

In what ways, then, do complexity dynamics and emergence affect net investment and growth rates? In a normal, market-based system, businesses efficiently respond to market trends to maximize profit independent of the interests of political parties, and indeed, much of China's initial economic rise was due to the CCP permitting experimentation by businesses without extensive management from

Beijing.³⁷ The more a party or bureaucracy tries to make decisions on technical complexity or address volume complexity through normal processes, the less efficient the system becomes due to the time it takes to coordinate proper responses.³⁸ Additionally, party control invites corruption to grease the skids of business, but this further adds to consumption and inhibits predictability with investment capital.³⁹ The combined effects are typically lower growth rates.⁴⁰

The only real antidote for the time-efficiency problem in complexity is to devolve control to those who understand technical complexity and have the awareness of local conditions to respond appropriately to them. Doing so introduces to the CCP a separate challenge—the principal-agent (P-A) dilemma. As mentioned in the Introduction, the P-A dilemma occurs when the principal must delegate authority and decision-making to an agent, which means the principal loses control over how its interests are pursued. In fact, it is often the case that the agent prioritizes its interests over those of the principal, which leads to the phenomenon of “agency slack.”⁴¹ Indeed, a major current in Chinese politics is Xi’s attempt to reign in Chinese billionaires’ influence over the economic and political arenas.⁴² If, as economic statecraft asserts, corporations comprise the implementation arm of the CCP’s geo-economics strategy, then the P-A dilemma becomes a critical factor in its ability to achieve strategic objectives because the last thing it wants is agency from a wealthy class whose interests diverge from the party’s. Chinese emperors always feared the rise of an independently wealthy, and therefore politically influential, non-Mandarin class, and Xi is likely aware that this very kind of internal competition briefly occurred in the 19th century as new industrialists challenged the imperial system.⁴³ Increasing complexity and emergence will necessarily lead to either the CCP devolving control, resulting in the P-A dilemma, or the CCP centralizing control, causing it to fall prey to the tyranny of time and inefficient adaptation. Xi’s predecessor, Hu Jintao, confronted this paradox and was forced to create a sub-decision-making body as complexity increased for the CCP’s leadership.⁴⁴ Under Xi, however, the state appears to be re-centralizing control

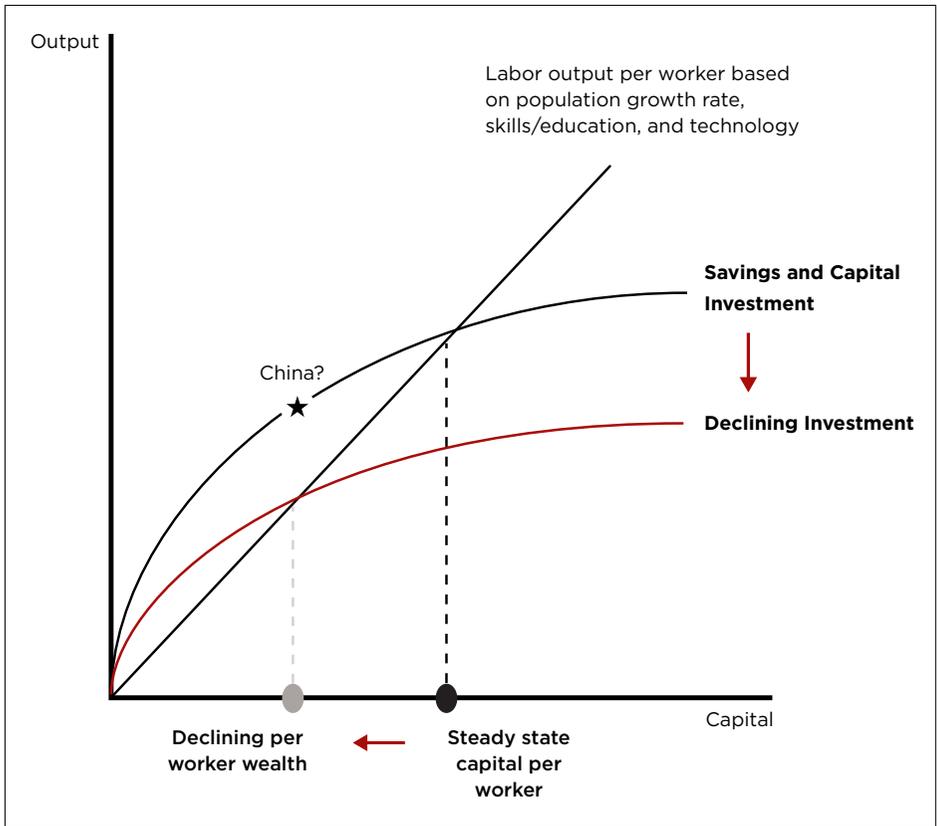


Figure 7.4. Solow Model of Economic Growth illustrating the impact of an overall reduction in total investment on per-worker wealth. Source: Author

through a series of CCP “corruption” purges, the recent incarceration of well-known billionaires, interventions in the market, and the dissemination and enforcement of “Xi Jinping Thought.”⁴⁵

There is another alternative through morphogenesis that could affect the CCP’s overall strategy. Figure 7.4 illustrates the impact of declining total investment on a country’s economic growth trajectory. Lowering investment causes a reduction in the growth trajectory, resulting in a flattened growth rate below what would otherwise be possible. This particular dynamic is important to recognize because the CCP financed its remarkable growth for over a decade by overleveraging its domestic debt, and it is now looking to Western

capital markets to fund its next stage of development, especially in the technology sector.⁴⁶ Key industries and firms contributing to the accrual of national power for the CCP should be highlighted and denied investment from Western sources, critical inputs, and access to markets as much as possible.⁴⁷ SOF would clearly be in support of such initiatives, but their intelligence, influence, interagency, and planning competencies, along with the global SOF network, would be powerful contributors to them.

Clear and important examples of how this might manifest are rare earth metals and medical supplies. Current Western supply chains rely heavily on China for both, but diversifying investment capital to other countries due to supply chain or political risk would naturally decrease investment in the Chinese market. Similarly, SOF's placement and access could reinforce a larger statecraft initiative to generate stronger primary commodity regimes in Africa or Southeast Asia and thereby increase the costs of production. Instead of relying on China as the

Limiting the CCP's ability to send its students to Western universities to study science, technology, math, and design-related disciplines would hamper its overall productivity gains while at the same time enabling the West to improve its relative national power position.

“world's workshop,” the West could form new trade and investment patterns, possibly resulting in new security partnerships over time.⁴⁸ In both cases, the CCP would face new complex systems dynamics

as growth rates invert over time and the relative balance of power changes. This is essentially the strategy the CCP implemented from the early 1990s to the present, and it is fully feasible that diverting investment for strategic purpose could reverse the trends in the relative balance of power over the next 5 to 10 years with a coherent U.S., partner and allied geo-economic statecraft approach.

There is a third possible way to think about the Solow Model, which is represented in Figure 7.5. Per-worker output is dependent on population growth, the level of technology and innovation, and the skills and

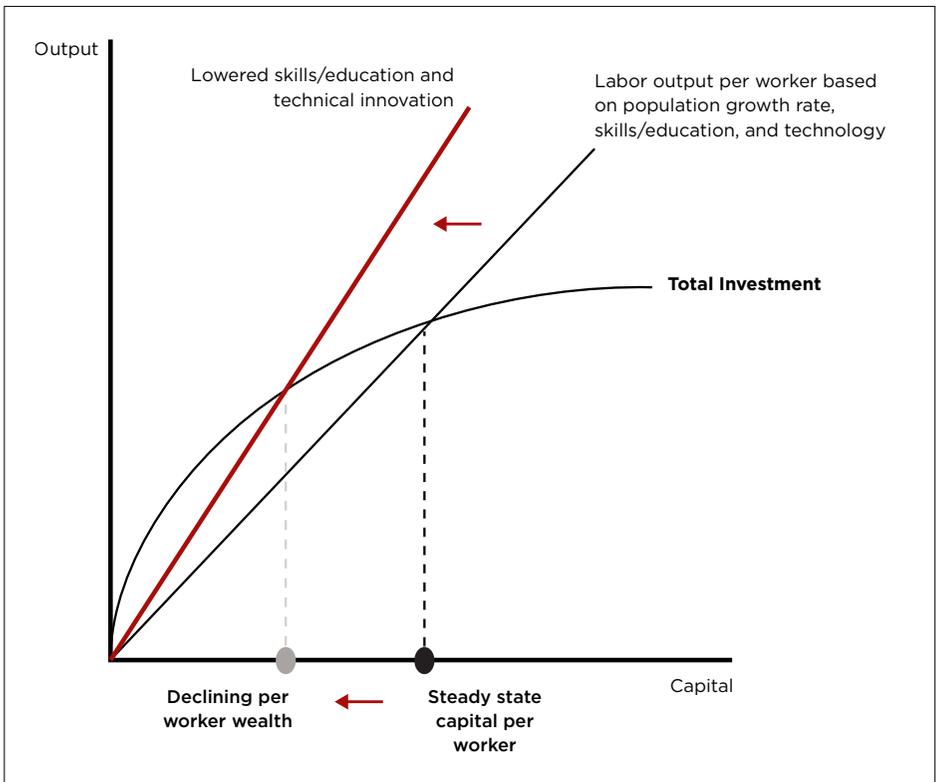


Figure 7.5. Solow Model of Economic Growth illustrating the impact of lowered skills and technical innovation on per-worker wealth. Source: Author

education the population achieves.⁴⁹ Although China has been recently noted for its technological advances, especially in AI, green energy, and bioengineering, it still relies heavily on Western university and graduate programs to feed its rapid development. Elucidating that education and technology are root factors in CCP economic statecraft is now a national security priority that could have important effects on its accrual of relative national power.⁵⁰ Limiting the CCP's ability to send its students to Western universities to study science, technology, math, and design-related disciplines would hamper its overall productivity gains while at the same time enabling the West to improve its relative national power position. Although education and skills training are typically viewed as "low politics," in the medium- to long-term geo-economic competition

for advantage, they are central elements of campaigning and must be analyzed and engaged as such.

While these economic competition and complexity effects are highly possible, they will not likely happen on their own. Interrupting the new path dependencies the CCP is cultivating requires strategically oriented shaping operations with catalysts for building and reinforcing relationships and interactions that instead accrue national power to the U.S. and its partners and allies. Achieving these effects requires integrated and aligned activities across the JIIM-C to produce strategic political effects. In turn, statecraft through integrated campaigning relies on interests to align shared perceptions of new opportunities, confidence in the strength of numbers, and decisions by stakeholders to see the world differently and then use their agency to design a new reality.⁵¹ All of these strategic shaping effects in competition below armed conflict are rooted in strategic communications and influence.

PERCEPTION OF PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT

Emphasizing the intersection of complexity and economic growth for SOF is important only because the CCP itself has long recognized that its increase in relative national power depends on preventing the perception of a Chinese threat. Its growth strategy recognized the necessity of attracting foreign technology, attracting Western investment, and educating its population to become more productive. In other words, the CCP's strategy expanded both capital investment and worker productivity at the same time, resulting in amazing growth rates and increased worker wealth and satisfaction despite limited personal freedoms. At the same time, it relied on securing cheap commodity imports from distressed countries on long-term contracts to keep production costs and net consumption low. Morphogenesis—the propensity of humans to change their minds and behave differently—is the single most important, unpredictable threat to the CCP's growth strategy. The purpose of soft balancing through strategic-shaping operations is to promote morphogenesis and cause the system to behave differently. Illuminating the CCP's

hypocrisy across a multitude of issues and cohering individual threat narratives in local areas of the Global South into larger, aggregated, transregional threat narratives could cause investors, consumers, and politicians to change their current behaviors. The CCP's ability to make China the "world's workshop" is neither inevitable nor permanent; indeed, there are already indications that market preferences are changing.⁵² In concert with regulatory changes on investment reporting, the combined impact on the CCP could generate results in the near-to-medium term.⁵³

Whereas the CCP appeared poised to secure infrastructure and technology contracts across Europe and the Global South even as late as early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the regime's repression of Hong Kong's democratic institutions and free press, its human rights violations, its environmental destruction domestically and abroad, and its infringement on neighbors' sovereign exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea changed the situation by early 2021. The CCP's military expansion and aggressive economic statecraft policies caused real concern about its intentions despite the continuation of its Harmonious World and Community of Common Destiny rhetoric,⁵⁴ and it has created the conditions for soft balancing in a way that was not possible a year ago.⁵⁵ As an example of the overall approach described here, Australia's recent balancing behavior prompted the CCP to transfer its iron purchases from high-quality Australian stocks to lower-quality Brazilian stocks—only to have heavy rains

force a transition to lower-quality West African stock, which required infrastructure investment.⁵⁶ The

The purpose of soft balancing through strategic-shaping operations is to promote morphogenesis and cause the system to behave differently.

costs of production will increase for the CCP as a result of this move, and it now exposes itself to less secure political and logistics lines. As an isolated event, such a move might not amount to much, but when faced with such decisions across multiple sectors, the volume complexity could overwhelm its ability to respond. Concerns have

already been raised by scholars in recent years regarding the CCP's expanding international interests without a proven ability to address corresponding security requirements.⁵⁷

Moreover, there is opportunity to employ Confucian symbolism to challenge the CCP's narrative. Jeanne L. Wilson assesses that the promotion of Confucian identity externally is as much as a function of its own internal statecraft. With Marxist-Leninism failing under Mao, the recapturing of Confucian traditions of order and harmony became a necessary device for developing a national identity and justification for the maintenance of the regime.⁵⁸ Although the CCP appears confident in its cultural heritage externally, Wilson asserts that internally it feels threatened by Western conceptions of universal rights, and its internal journals stress Western cultural influences as threatening to the CCP's survival.⁵⁹ She writes,

The CCP has been explicit that the cultural sphere is a competitive battleground between China and the West. As Hu Jintao (2012b) noted in an article in Quishi: 'who occupies the commanding heights of cultural development...is able to gain the initiative in the fierce international competition.' This theme has been reaffirmed by the Xi Jinping leadership, which has described this struggle between Chinese cultural values and the so-called universal values posited by the West as increasing in frequency and velocity.⁶⁰

The problem for the CCP is threefold. First, the CCP's cultural statecraft is restricted to an appreciation of Chinese culture since Confucianism places Chinese culture above others. Foreign audiences can never personally benefit from engagement with China beyond immediate material and aesthetic satisfaction.⁶¹ Western conceptions of universal rights, on the other hand, have the potential to be socially transformative and change how audiences personally experience and shape their environments. Second, the propagation of Confucian standards invites the evaluation of the CCP's behavior against its own narrative. The potential for demonstrating its hypocrisy is high given its behavior domestically and abroad. Third, the Confucian identity is still

being defined and propagated across China's population, which means there is opportunity for competing frames to enter the imagination. The culture competition, as Wilson notes above, is one of the most important elements of strategic competition.

SOF's role in a nurture-network approach to strategic competition should be more apparent. Shaping operations should amplify positive U.S. value to vulnerable foreign populations and susceptible governments and offer new strategic options to them. Through soft power and a statecraft approach, characteristic of support-to-resilience effects, the U.S. could expand its own influence and national power while diluting the CCP's. Soft balancing would necessarily raise the diplomatic and economic costs to the CCP's strategy. At a minimum, its time horizons would be stretched out through more extensive negotiations, its costs of production would increase—thereby decreasing net investment and growth rates—and/or it would be forced to bully or buy off foreign leaders, resulting in reputational harm as the behavior becomes exposed. China's use of financial statecraft within a larger geo-economics strategy has been a noteworthy feature of its foreign policy,⁶²

with BRI constituting the most coherent manifestation of the approach.⁶³ Delaying the CCP's strategic rise and diminishing its reputation would have the net effect of supporting the WLIO as more states come to see it as more legitimate on balance and, therefore, unfavorable to alter.

Through soft power and a statecraft approach, characteristic of support-to-resilience effects, the U.S. could expand its own influence and national power while diluting the CCP's. Soft balancing would necessarily raise the diplomatic and economic costs to the CCP's strategy.

Furthermore, a nurture-network approach could dilute the CCP's influence among Global South countries by working by, through, and with other traditional Global South leaders, such as India, Brazil, and Indonesia. All have long-standing membership in the Non-Aligned

Movement, all have long pedigrees with international peacekeeping operations, and all are emerging industrial and technological centers. Moreover, they have functioning democracies and economic interests that diverge from the CCP's. India, for example, has for decades used diplomatic and military capabilities to lightly balance China in Southeast and Central Asia,⁶⁴ and it has diaspora communities across Africa and the Caribbean. Perhaps these countries could, as credible Global South leaders, quietly generate support for international regimes that interfere with CCP gray-zone activities, such as codifying when swarmed, physically linked maritime militia fleets constitute a military incursion. Such activities only exist in the gray zone because they remain undefined as formal or informal norms. Even if a formal regime is not achieved, the diplomatic, information, and influence effects of such an initiative would cause the CCP significant credibility problems and further undermine its Peaceful Development and Harmonious World narratives, not to mention inhibit the formation

Strategic shaping and nurturing networks through support to resilience are, as integrated campaigning directs, about seizing the initiative and accruing relative national power. Soft balancing is the result achieved with these effects.

of the “we” identity inherent to the Community of Common Destiny narrative.⁶⁵

Given that ideological factions do exist within the CCP regarding how to achieve its long-term objective of becoming a dominant power, it is feasible that promoting complexity and presenting diplomatic and economic obstacles to Xi's foreign policy would exacerbate tensions among CCP's foreign policy elite.⁶⁶ Members of its elite billionaire club have already done so and paid the price.⁶⁷ Indeed, agency slack within the bureaucracy could actually grow as the tensions become

more acute across diplomatic and economic spheres. The possible result would be a change in the behavior of the CCP in the foreign policy arena. Just as it feigned a peaceful rise in the 1990s–2000s,⁶⁸

it could demonstrate a similar transition depending on how the party deals with Xi's lifetime appointment as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP and President of the PRC.

ASYMMETRIC DEFENSE INSTITUTION BUILDING/ FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE (HARD POWER)

Strategic shaping and nurturing networks through support to resilience are, as integrated campaigning directs, about seizing the initiative and accruing relative national power. Soft balancing is the result achieved with these effects. However, SOF can also contribute to hard balancing through support to resistance, supporting asymmetric FID capabilities, and assisting with defense institution building (DIB) efforts. All contribute to the CCP's overall risk calculation by improving partners' and allies' relative balance of military power, thereby adding to potential U.S. relative national power when viewed from the statecraft perspective. In combination with U.S. conventional forces capabilities, SOF can add to a deterrence effect through a net improvement in the correlation of forces and the potential costs imposed by support to resistance operations.

Asymmetric FID could be one of the most important SOF contributions on the hard balancing side of the spectrum. SOF experimenting with, helping to develop, and innovating on indigenously sustainable capabilities could be among the most valuable contributions to U.S. military power and collective deterrence. Successfully fielding low-cost, asymmetric capabilities could disproportionately frustrate Chinese tactics, techniques, and procedures and tie down forces. SOF, as a catalyst among countries and an innovation hub, could identify and share low-cost, asymmetric capabilities and tactics, leading to an aggregated military risk to the CCP. Additionally, SOF could feasibly play a role in the DIB mission to support such asymmetric or special operations capabilities.⁶⁹ Moreover, SOF could contribute to coordinated diplomatic and military swarming effects to relieve pressure on any single partner or ally. This combination of capabilities would increase foreign policy complexity for the CCP while offering strategic communications

opportunities to bolster U.S., partner, and allied national will to protect their sovereign rights and prerogatives.

Another benefit SOF could provide on the hard-balancing side is providing tailored atmospherics and intelligence based on its global reach and regular interaction with partnered forces. Determining which kinds of partner security forces to emphasize (i.e., coast guard, border police, conventional navy, special operations) should depend on the nature of the asymmetric vulnerability of the CCP to the partnered force. It might be based on achieving an economic effect instead of a military one, but the additional SOF joint combined exchange training engagement could be an important contribution to a greater security effect. In short, the local context and strategic positioning relative to CCP vulnerabilities should drive the decision on which forces to engage instead of creating partner SOF in the image of U.S. SOF. Additionally, combined professional military education and exercises could further the nurture network orientation of SOF as a catalyst, enable rapid and timely sharing of ideas and asymmetric capabilities, and, therefore, increase the complexity facing the CCP in military operations. Throughout these opportunities, SOF have the ability to serve as a forward-deployed sensor for military and interagency initiatives and for determining opportunities for sharing military resources and funding where operational-to-strategic interests overlap.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO STATECRAFT

Special operations, by design, can be integrated with others to bolster national and international will to compete to accrue relative national power at times and places desired by political leaders. SOF should increase the conduct of enabling activities that strengthen alliances and foster new coalitions around specific interests that inoculate populations to CCP influence. USSOCOM and SOF's willingness to integrate with and adopt a supporting role to others in competition below armed conflict will take U.S. statecraft to a new level of maturity and effectiveness. The national security structure designed to wage a Cold War against a single opponent, as well as the special operations global CT enterprise created as a consequence

of 9/11, must evolve to the changing character and unique demands of the 21st century. Although statute and rigid policy delimits the role, authority, and appropriations of executive agencies, organizational boundaries can be made permeable through enhanced cooperation, trust, and ultimately voluntary integration that ensures unity of effort. Seldom will one government entity have the placement, authority, and capability to achieve a desired effect itself. SOF have existing relationships with many non-DOD entities that can be adapted to improve integration and increase strategic effect. This is not to say coordination today in Washington or integration at the U.S. Missions is absent; rather, it is a recognition that the USG must strive toward broader horizontal integration below the country team level on the ground in places the U.S. seeks advantage and at the operational level in between the policy and tactical levels. Table 7.1 highlights that the degree of integration required for statecraft aims is high, and that SOF have a contributing role to each.

The JCIC logically describes a new perspective for the how the U.S. military can and must contribute to statecraft to enable the advancement of U.S. national interests without war. The DOD is a huge enterprise that extends its reach across the globe and that, traditionally, has been focused on preparing for and conducting open warfare against U.S. enemies. SOF are the best entity to serve as a

Table 7.1. The Special Operations Forces Role in Integration of Statecraft Aims

Statecraft Aims	Special Operations Role	Degree of JIIM-C Integration
Strategic shaping	Supporting	Medium
Influence & information	Supporting	High
Resilience	Supporting	High
Resistance	Supporting	Medium
Counter global threats	Supported	Low

JIIM-C = Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational, and Commercial

catalyst in a JIIM-C system that fosters cooperative action among a community of common interests without hierarchy. As Hilton Root explains about catalysts, “Modern network science shows U.S. that information diffusion in complex social organization is realized by small-world mechanisms of communication that reduce the path lengths between the system’s nodes via the placement of a few highly connected bridge nodes.”⁷⁰ SOF as catalysts would be additive to and bridge organizational bureaucracies to enhance speed of information exchange and enable the creation of contextually relevant, scale-free network hubs. SOF would not seek or become the central figure; rather, they would be an accelerator for the creation of resilient networks that respond to complexity and emergent competition opportunities. More simply, SOF, with their expansive internal networks, are well positioned to be a broker of relationships to help the system behave differently and more efficiently. Unlike the CCP, which seeks control in complexity, these nurture networks are not controlled by any one entity but unified through shared awareness, purpose, values, and interests. The networks respond and structurally adapt organically to changes in membership connectivity and interests.

SOF are uniquely capable of operating with the right partners in fractured and politically ambiguous areas of high U.S. interest, whether in close geographic proximity to adversaries and competitors or on the periphery of the competition space in the Global South. SOF’s versatility and agility qualifies them to play a key role in fusing old with new JIIM-C relationships that can manifest as nurtured networks that span the globe. These “different networks possess different abilities to bring home to certain nodes distant events, places or people, to overcome the friction of space within appropriate periods of time,”⁷¹ enhancing overall strategic awareness at a time scale that gives the U.S. advantage over others. The network, rather than any singular node or organization, reveals both opportunity and threats emerging from the strategic landscape and informs integrated statecraft interventions or solutions. SOF can play a significant role in nurturing dynamic JIIM-C partnerships in the

perpetual cycle of probe, sense, and respond, which is the constant driver of integrated statecraft.⁷²

Special operations, like many of the intergovernmental partners such as the USDA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and USAID, are small and with insufficient authority, capability, and awareness to singularly achieve political aims of statecraft. However, SOF remain a critical ingredient in the statecraft admixture necessary for sustained success. For context, the U.S. Department of State and USAID submitted a combined budget of \$41 billion for fiscal year 2021 to perform their essential activities, whereas the DOD budget was \$740 billion. A closer look reveals that U.S. annual expenditures for diplomatic engagement is nearly the same as the SOF enterprise.⁷³ What

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does this comparison indicate about the value the U.S. system places on diplomatic versus military power? If the stated U.S. intent, as the JCIC asserts, is to secure and advance U.S. interests without fighting, then national-level resourcing is misaligned with strategy. Until a future time when budgeting may be more balanced, SOF must find creative ways to bring to bear the DOD's enormous resourcing to support JIIM-C partners to achieve durable political effects. To that end, USSOCOM, in comparison to the uniformed service, has the organizational agility, irregular mindset, and range of capabilities to quickly adopt a support-to-statecraft approach and become the primary DOD representative in the infinite competition game.

This approach expands the competition space globally and elevates the infinite game to a higher level with an emphasis on geo-economics

beyond siloed focus on single countries or subregions. This is an alternative global narrative that advances common interests while also diminishing the CCP's desire to propagate its Harmonious World narrative. Unlike the CCP's approach to state engagement, SOF and their many JIIM-C partnerships are additive to state diplomacy by providing mechanisms for a positive message and capacity for self-reliance at the substate level and across borders that foster resiliency.

Most importantly, though, is the underlying mindset of how the SOF enterprise contributes to strategic competition with the CCP. This new role will require a disruption of the status quo mindset engrained in over two decades of CT operations often measured by the number of terrorists killed and networks dismantled. CT is not a simple task, yet support to integrated statecraft will pose even greater strategic risk and new operating challenges. SOF will need to reinterpret their value from providing a military effect to contributing to strategic political effects through the integration of military means with others. Most importantly, SOF must recognize that beyond countering global threats, support to strategic shaping, influence, resilience, and resistance is predominately achieved in the cognitive

Most importantly, SOF must recognize that beyond countering global threats, support to strategic shaping, influence, resilience, and resistance is predominately achieved in the cognitive domain and, thus, the strategic political aim and narrative supported by military action is the unifying goal upon which all the JIIM-C actors orient.

domain and, thus, the strategic political aim and narrative supported by military action is the unifying goal upon which all the JIIM-C actors orient. SOF are the single most versatile, organizationally agile, and capable actor within the DOD to not just realize the concepts in the JCIC but also

to scale those ideas and support integrated statecraft. Successful confrontation of the CCP across the globe demands a new approach to statecraft with SOF as a critical enabler. ♠

Notes

- ¹ Hilton L. Root, *Network Origins of the Global Economy: East vs. West in a Complex Systems Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 18–19.
- ² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (2018), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257.
- ³ Otto C. Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept* (Tampa: JSOU Press, 2020), 1–3.
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Acronyms

ASCOPE	areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, events
AI	artificial intelligence
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
C2	command and control
CAS	complex adaptive system
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCPA	Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association
CE	chief executive
COIN	counterinsurgency
CPR	common pool resources
CT	counterterrorism
DA	direct action
DAM	directly administered municipality
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DIB	defense institution building
DIME	diplomatic, information, military, and economic
DIMEFIL	diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intellectual, and law enforcement
DOD	Department of Defense
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
FID	foreign internal defense
FLG	<i>Falungong</i>
FONOPS	freedom of navigation operations
HKMAO	Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office

HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
IGIVO	issues, goals, influence, vulnerabilities, and opportunities
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IUUF	illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing
JCIC	<i>Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning</i>
JCOIE	<i>Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment</i>
JIIM-C	joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, and commercial
KMT	<i>Kuomintang</i>
MISO	military information support operation
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
MSS	Ministry of State Security
NDS	National Defense Strategy
PAP	People's Armed Police
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAA	People's Liberation Army-Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army-Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army-Navy
PLARF	People's Liberation Army-Rocket Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
PMESII-PT	political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time
P-A	principal agent
RMFO	Regional Fisheries Management Organization
RAB	Religious Affairs Bureau
ROC	Republic of China
SARA	State Administration for Religious Affairs
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SOF	Special Operations Forces

ACRONYMS

SSM	Sunflower Student Movement
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
UFWD	United Front Work Department
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USG	U.S. Government
UW	unconventional warfare
VEO	violent extremist organization
WLIO	Western Liberal International Order
WSM	Wild Strawberries Movement
WUFI	World United Formosans for Independence
XUAR	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region



This edited volume highlights key challenges the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) faces in its rise and contextualizes the potential contributions of special operations to compete for advantage based on the CCP's interests and vulnerabilities. Competing for advantage means accruing power and influence in such a way that the adversary's plans cannot be realized. This volume focuses primarily on appreciating the CCP's worldview, interests, and political culture while promoting a strategic vision for the future—a future where SOF will need to reinterpret their value from providing a military effect to providing a political effect through military means.

United States Special Operations Command

ATTN: JSOU Press

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ISBN 978-1-941715-67-3